

# IMAGININGS



A third collection of stories, poems and descriptive writings, produced by the Countesthorpe U3A Creative Writing Group



# CONTENTS

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Page</b>
Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow	Shirley Wilding	2
A Gathering of 'Ghosts'	Anne Tester	3
The Olympic Torch Relay	Patsy Paterson	4
Dissolution	Jacqueline Barker	5
Green	Ruth Westley	6
Healing Lights	Patsy Paterson	7
Minnie	Dorothy Wells	8
Haiku – Light 1, 2 and 3	Shirley Wilding	8,13,17
Transformation	Mikki Wilde	9
Yesterday	Richard King	10
Buttons and Bows	Margaret Woolley	11
Homophones I, II	Richard King	11, 24
Summer Musing	Betty Morley	13
Light Thrown on the Dark Ages	Christine Claricoates	14
What is it About Marble?	Mikki Wilde	15
The Killing Place	June Hawkins	16
Journey Into Space	Dorothy Elgar	18
Manoeuvring	June Hawkins	19
Walking to School	Dorothy Wells	20
Light	Betty Morley	21
Highcross	Anne Tester	22
“O Sweet and Lovely Wall”	Christine Claricoates	23
Candle Flame/Shadow	Ruth Westley	24
Keep it Short	Patricia Brown	25
Guilt	Graham Surman	26
Reaction to the News	Graham Surman	27
Just Four Smooth Walls	Patricia Brown	27
Ten U3A Writers	Jacqueline Barker	28

## YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

**Yesterday** I made a list  
Of things I want to do  
A letter to a friend I've missed  
And plant a bulb or two

There's a skirt that needs repairing  
And a button off my blouse  
A dessert requires preparing  
Before I tidy up the house

I thought I'd better start my chores  
But stamps were non-existent  
The bulbs will have to stay indoors  
The rain was too persistent

I have no thread to match the skirt  
And the button - I have lost it  
It was fruit and cheese but no dessert  
I'd forgotten to defrost it

**Today** I made another list  
Of things I need to buy  
I went to every stockist  
And the morning seemed to fly

This afternoon a friend called in  
We put the world to right  
A pot of tea and the biscuit tin  
And now it's looking bright

**Tomorrow** I'll get up at dawn  
No gossiping with chums  
I'll persevere from early morn  
But - tomorrow never comes!

## **A GATHERING OF 'GHOSTS'**

I don't really believe in ghosts, but last Monday I went along to a gathering of staff and ex-pupils at my old school and I experienced a few odd moments during the evening. We were ushered into the new school hall and invited to sit at one of the many tables laid out with refreshments. We nibbled our way through the crisps and nuts provided and listened to the many reminiscences from the platform from as far back as 1937 and heard of the activities of the present pupils and the trials and triumphs encountered during the production of the commemorative book.

All over the hall similar tales were being told, passing between friends and strangers, of lives so long and so varied, their memories of school days shared with such delight as they discovered the identity of a familiar face or recalled some escapade or dramatic occasion, remembered the teachers and their special characters and enthused over their lessons. It began to seem somewhat unreal to me.

Two delightful, silver-haired veterans who first met when they joined the Girls' school in 1938 and stayed as friends to this day recalled the antics and habits of their 'sewing' teacher who frequently used her ruler to maintain order; one of them proudly displaying her damaged finger! "A wonderful teacher - I learnt so much!", she added fondly. Her friend nodded in agreement.

She remembered those in her class and one by one she named them all. How did she do it, I marvelled?

My few memories were all so distant, so ghostly in their remoteness, clouded by the mists of time and long lost days. Did I really spend five years at this school and have so little to recall? How was it that all these good people could remember so much, could glide so easily from one distant era to another, could move effortlessly from childhood to the present and joyously share their happy school days? For me, with my bare fragment of memory, left only with sensations, vague and dreamlike, unconnected with time or actions, they and their stories were as 'ghosts' from the past!

I bought my copy of the commemorative book to which so many had contributed with their memories and their photographs. The building of the school, the personalities that helped to develop its special contribution to the world of

education and the accounts from so many that have passed through its doors filled the pages, complemented with photographs of netball and football teams, the end-of-year classes, retiring teachers and newly appointed heads, successful ex-pupils and uniformed heroes from the war. Oh, so many 'ghosts'!

Towards the end of the evening I stepped outside the newly built hall to view the older building with its high windows and its twin verandas facing each other across what is now a pleasant seating area but was once the dividing line between the Boys' school and the Girls' school. It was then that a minute piece of my past came flooding back.

With a shudder I was there, as an 11 year old in that bewildering building with its stone staircases, long corridors, severe teachers and the complexities of school life. I wondered, were my school days really 'the happiest days of my life'? Is this why my memory has failed me – nature's protective arm?

I left behind the chattering of many happy voices and the 'ghosts' came away with me, safely tucked away in the commemorative book!

© Anne Tester



## THE OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY

**T**ORCH procession touring the country

**O**LYMPIC symbol bringing out the crowds

**R**ELAY of runners carefully chosen

**C**CHEERS from children lining the streets

**H**EROES performing in the Olympic Games.



© Patsy Paterson

## DISSOLUTION

**BUILT** to the glory of God,  
By peasants' brawn and masons' skill,  
Strong walls of white Caen stone,  
Raised an abbey on the hill.

**USED** for sheltering within,  
Those giving service to others,  
Teaching the ignorant poor,  
While worshipping as brothers.

**FILLED** by the music of choirs,  
Quiet prayers and plainsong chants,  
Soft sounds of sandalled feet  
Performing the Mass's dance.

**RAPED** by a green-eyed royal,  
Jealous of power, wealth and land,  
Its outcast souls left walls  
Devoid of a caring hand.

**RUINED** by strong howling winds,  
Crumbled by frost, humbled by rain,  
Stones dragged to farm and barn,  
Their loss was peasants' gain.

**NOW** a few fragments remain  
Of tracery, column and wall,  
Casting history's shadow,  
To tell of an abbey's fall.

## GREEN

It takes eight and a half minutes for the rays of the sun to reach our planet. The continuous nuclear reaction within our star brightens our lives, giving us warmth and light. Without it there would be no life. There is a miracle that occurs here on earth that no man can replicate. It happens inside every green leaf, every green plant whether on land or in water. This miracle is called photosynthesis. Scientists have analysed the process and produced a formula that all students studying biology will learn but what needs to be understood simply, is that green leaves use the energy from the sun to make sugars and starch. All life depends on this for food. Vegetarians eat the plants. Carnivores eat the animals that ate the plants. Omnivores gobble up some of both. There is nothing, no other food. Everything has its base in the carbohydrate that comes from the amazing process of photosynthesis.

The light from the sun shines on the green leaves of all plants and man takes advantage by growing, on a grand scale, plants that can feed populations, plants that delight populations with exciting flavours and plants that can feed animals that populations will eat.

Economies thrive on growth we are told. Buy more cars, computers and clothes. Build more houses, roads and runways. Make more plastic. Use more of the world's resources, dig them up, mine them, extract them to keep the economy growing and people warm, happy, healthy and prosperous.

There is an important by-product to photosynthesis. It is oxygen. Plants absorb some carbon dioxide and give out oxygen. Most scientists believe that the large scale burning of oil, coal and gas produces more carbon dioxide than can be counterbalanced by the green plants' production of oxygen. Coal, oil and gas had their beginnings in life: coal from the carboniferous forests, oil and gas from the small creatures that lived and died in the seas countless millions of years ago. This store of life held captured carbon, burning releases carbon dioxide. Overloading the earth's atmosphere with carbon dioxide will not only slow the plants' production of carbohydrates (our food) but more drastically, will allow the earth to warm up quite a lot. This is often referred to as 'the greenhouse effect'. Suddenly, the light from the sun, no longer entirely beneficial to life, becomes threatening.

Still we chop down the trees that produce the oxygen, burn fossil fuels and increase the population. Fifty to one hundred years ago there was equilibrium but now we are using our natural resources faster than nature can neutralise.

Logically, there are too many people on the earth. Too much food is needed, too much energy for heat, power and engineering. The demands we humans are making cannot be sustained without awful results. Temperatures are rising the world over. The rate of the rise is increasing. We are getting near the point of no return. We may have already passed that point. Unless a drastic turnaround occurs of how we live our lives, it is possible that our green planet will become more like Venus, a hot dead world.

I give it sixty to eighty years before life as we know it ends.  
I wish I could stop it.  
I don't know how.  
Grandchildren, I am so very sorry.

© *Ruth Westley*



## **HEALING LIGHTS**

Round the ring road, ambulance light blazing,  
Emergency doctor's light examining,  
Diagnosis made with consultant's warning.

Admission procedure with night lights glowing.  
Hospital life peppered with monitor lights blinking.  
Time awaiting action with TV lights twinkling.

Operating theatre with bright lights shining,  
Delicate work, with x-ray lights monitoring.  
Returned to new ward, then quietly resting.

Once discharged, dark skies seemed threatening.  
Reaching our village, we were met by lightning!  
Living now with the pacemaker checking -  
Thank you, Hospital Specialists.

© *Patsy Paterson*

## MINNIE

The young woman sitting on the sea wall smiling at the camera looks every inch a chic lady of the exciting post war era. She is wearing a smart coat with a large astrakhan collar and matching large cuffs. The cloche hat that sits low on her brow, is no dowdy plant pot, but beautifully crafted with plenty of style.



She is sitting on this sea wall in Bournemouth, her legs crossed elegantly showing off the smart patent leather shoes with the natty little heel and narrow bar across the foot. Her name is Minnie. She is about 20 years old, and she is my mother.

While in Bournemouth, on holiday with friends, Minnie had had her long hair cut short into a fashionable bob, all the rage at the time. She had done this knowing she would be in serious trouble when she returned home. This act of defiance, which epitomises for me my mother's character, was a revolt against the domination she suffered being the youngest and most put-upon of eight children.

Here in this photograph we see the person she wants to be, outside the censorship of her family. She is not just a spinner in a Lancashire cotton mill, whose education finished when she was twelve years old, but a vibrant young woman looking forward to a better future with the man who adored her; her posture saying "Look out world, I'm coming!"

© *Dorothy Wells*



### HAIKU – LIGHT 1

Luminous moonlight  
Radiates silvery beams  
On a darkened world

© *Shirley Wilding*

# TRANSFORMATION

I watch as day struggles to  
Free itself from the fetters of inky night;  
Mist conceals future experience.  
My dawn was long ago;  
My day extends still.

Streaked now, a leaden sky enjoys a  
Brief, blushing evanescence.  
With sunrise, deceptive warmth steals over a land  
Aching for fresh, spring rains.

A screen of slender poplars probes  
The firmament with curious fingers.  
Calmness, stillness, amidst  
Morning's music.

\* \* \*

Sunset's fire-glow haloes  
Smoky-pink haze of western strata;  
Prelude to twilight.

Nightfall offers obscurity;  
Eliminates squalor;  
Obliterates ugliness;  
Incubates loneliness.

At midnight, sleep eludes:  
Then images disturb anew,  
Stumbling blocks of life.

Awakened by moonlight,  
Silver slivers sneaking through blind,  
I await the coming dawn,  
Privileged.



## YESTERDAY

He was seven years old in 1952. His birthday was two days after the announcement that King George VI had passed peacefully away in his sleep at Sandringham. He asked his Mum, "What does 'passed peacefully away' mean? Where's he gone?" His Mum simply said, "The King is dead. Get on with your tea!" That was another question on his mind; 'what does dead mean?' As the days went by, pictures from the newsreel brought other confusion. A lady and her husband flew home from Africa. She had been a Princess but was now a Queen. How did all this happen and what does accession mean anyway? At the local Infant School his teacher told the class some of the history of what had taken place. Another word of confusion - abdication!

As the New Year began the lad became eight. In the mining village where he lived the date of 2<sup>nd</sup> June became very important. On this day, this lady who had flown home from Africa would have her Coronation. She would be crowned Queen Elizabeth II in Westminster Abbey in the capital city, London. June seemed a long way off in the dreary months of January and February. There were lots of other things to occupy his mind at home and school. On the television there was Muffin the Mule with his sidekick Annette Mills and the adventures of Bill and Ben. Newsreels with smartly dressed people like McDonald Hopley and Sylvia Peters.

The Coronation became the centre of both local and national life as June got ever closer. Exciting events were going to be held in the village and the lad could take part. There was going to be a village party. The children of the village were invited to take part in a "Cavalcade of English History". There would be floats depicting how this small village fitted into English history. The lad got excited about the float that would show the people of other lands as well as the Commonwealth. At school, banners were made and a competition to find who could make the best Golden Coronation Coach. All children in the village were presented with a Coronation Mug and a New Testament. This really was a special event.

2<sup>nd</sup> June dawned in the lad's village. It seemed like any other day, so far away from London. He was going to be a Japanese Man on the People of other Lands float. It was a day off from school so he lay in his bed till Mum called that breakfast was ready. He had to be on the float at about 11 am. He took his time eating breakfast. He could feel the excitement in the house as Mum and Dad got

ready for neighbours and friends who were coming to watch the Coronation on their television. It wasn't long before people starting arriving to celebrate the events of this special day.

Mum switched on the television. Dad had said, "It takes a long time to warm up!" There was a hush of expectation. After a lot of cracks and noise, a small dark picture emerged from the centre of the 12 inch television with its large wooden frame and doors. The voice of Richard Dimbleby welcomed people to London. It was pouring down with rain. There were scenes outside the new Queen's house, Buckingham Palace, and from Westminster Abbey. Through the eyes of a child it all looked so large and faraway and really what did it all mean? Processions, horses, bands, music and choirs. The huge Abbey, crowds and royal paraphernalia. A carriage carrying a huge Lady with a lovely smile, passed by. This was the Queen of Tonga. "So that's what a Queen looks like, is it?" the lad shouted to the gathered group. "It's time for you to get ready to go lad." said his Mum.

As the lad set off from the house the service of Coronation had begun. It was fun being a Man from Japan; he had his face made up with yellow greasepaint. Around his eyes, black had been painted to make him look oriental. Above his top lip had been stuck a moustache with drooping whiskers. This kept coming unstuck. It made him feel all lop-sided. He had on a golden cap with a long tassel at the back called a que. He wore black trousers, all baggy and edged with gold. On his feet he wore black pumps. His main costume was a long coat of gold material with black buttons and a stiff collar up round his neck. On his float were children dressed up as Canadian Mounties, Red Indians, Russian Cossacks and Chinamen. They had a great afternoon being slowly drawn through the Village waving and being waved at. After what seemed a long time, all six floats came to a field beside the Church. The children from the floats and villagers took part in a Village party. There was lots of food and ice cream.

When the lad got home, still in his fancy dress, the Service was still going on and that Dimbleby fellow was still talking. How long should a Coronation last? The lad thought. His Mum encouraged him to sit and watch the television but after a while he drifted outside with his sister. They played hide and seek until bedtime. It had been a long day and as he lay down for the night, his eye caught sight of his Coronation mug on the table. He whispered goodnight to the new Queen.

## BUTTONS AND BOWS

Darling Katie, bright and beautiful,  
Found her Prince Charming in Jay.  
The venue was chosen, oh, so suitable  
And arrangements were made for their day.



A date in April was decided,  
Spring colours the theme to abound,  
Cakes of all shapes were provided  
And music could be heard all around.



Her dress – now, that was exclusive  
For her special style and her grace.  
It didn't have to be expensive,  
Just had to have a degree of old lace.

So on paper she drew her design,  
Collected ancient buttons, ribbons and bows.  
Found fabric that she thought was fine,  
To embellish from her head to her toes.



A seamstress interpreted to perfection;  
The dress within weeks was made.  
No other would compete in reflection,  
Shown by the compliments paid.

© Margaret Woolley



## HOMOPHONES I

He was given bail for stealing the bale of straw.  
She gave birth in the berth on board the ship.  
His face turned blue as he blew out the candle.

© Richard King

## SUMMER MUSING

“Let’s all go on a Summer Holiday!” Mary was humming away as she carried on with the Spring cleaning. All her life she had been a fan of Cliff Richard, and still hoped that she would one day hop onto a double decker bus to take her on a life-changing adventure.



Perhaps she would go to New Zealand to celebrate Christmas in Summer sunshine, or travel across continents to experience all the different changes of culture and climate. It would be exciting and different, but would it be life-changing?

On the other hand, she could go north and enjoy the crisp, fresh air of the Arctic Circle; the clear light a photographer’s dream. Was this to be her Utopia?

“Stop this, Mary!” she scolded herself, “Remember, you have Spring to enjoy and our unpredictable Summer to come, and Cliff Richard WILL NOT BE THERE! I’ll make a coffee.”

© *Betty Morley*



### HAIKU – LIGHT 2

Caressing fire light  
Beckoning fingers of flame  
Promising comfort

Trembling candle light  
Flickering between lovers  
Eternally one

Celestial light  
Stars safeguarding the secrets  
Of the universe

© *Shirley Wilding*

## LIGHT THROWN ON THE DARK AGES

It's a good thirty-five minutes' drive from Countesthorpe to the Iron-Age fort of Burrough Hill, but there is a striking difference in the contours of the land and the scenery. I do not think that there can be a better place than Burrough Hill to view the Leicestershire countryside. One can see for miles all round. In fact during the recent terrific thunderstorms, the archaeologists stood and watched bolts of lightning flashing repeatedly over Leicester through the inky thunderclouds and, looking towards Melton, saw that hailstorms were battering that region. Feeling like wizards of the storm they observed, Prospero-like, an amazing display from this wonderful vantage point.

As you walk towards Burrough Hill you are faced with a break between two ramparts. This was the way into the fort. The ramparts would have been faced with rock and dry stone walls would have been built on top. Across the gap would have been massive gates. Any invaders who managed to break through these gates would have found themselves between two stone-clad "killing" walls from which rocks would have rained down on them from the defenders. (This is, of course, until the Romans broke through with their shields held aloft in a tortoise formation.)

The dig itself has taken in one or two patches of ground this year. Several pits have been dug which have uncovered the posts for the erection of a round house (please do not call these large and elegant thatched buildings huts). Also discovered, just at the moment that the archaeologists were going to give up on this particular pit, was a horse's head and the skeleton of a young man of about twenty with his knees raised and one arm flung out. They don't know at the moment what this was about and probably never will.

It is believed that a succession of dominant warlords would have lived in the fort during the pre-Roman period and that people subject to him would have farmed the fields below and sent up grain to be stored. These farmers would probably have also helped to keep the walls and other fortifications in order. In return, they would have been given food in times of poor harvest and protection from invaders. However, this is still speculation.

As for burials, they are practically non-existent. As Peter Liddle said humorously, "Either they didn't die in that era or were cremated and their ashes strewn."

All in all it was a great trip and so on our doorstep. Get out your wellies or walking boots and see probably one of the greatest views in the Midlands.

© *Christine Claricoates*

## WHAT IS IT ABOUT MARBLE?

Alena Matejka's

*Wall of Wind* struck me most; somehow

Glowing

On that dull October morning.

Upright, lattice worked, rectangular,

Seemingly

Woven from white, blue-veined Carrara marble.

Walls of crystalline stone in Tuscan hills,

Beloved of sculptors,

Especially

Michelangelo.

I am no wealthy patron

Commissioning beauty and status

But an observer of her consummate skill

With pneumatic hammer.

A child, I peeped through

The apertures, changing perspectives from

Sleek, rear surface.

Sides rough, wrenched off, like some

Classical amputee.

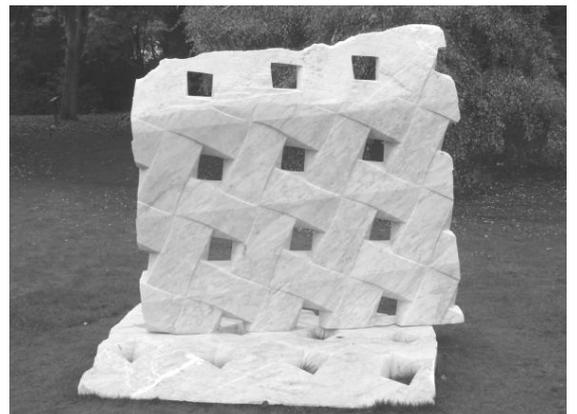
Top edge jagged as

Torn paper.

What is it about marble?

But it must be white.

© *Mikki Wilde*



## THE KILLING PLACE

Zog roughly shook his son, Brun, to rouse him from his sleep. The darkness of the night sky was just beginning to give way to the first hesitant light of dawn. Brun, jolted from his deep sleep, stirred and then the reality hit him. Today was the day – there was no escape from the long-dreaded terror. This very day he was to come of age by joining his father and the other hunters on his first bison hunt. He was scared – very scared – having seen the dreadful wounds inflicted on some of the hunters in the killing place by the cornered animals.

Zog called again, and reluctantly Brun picked up his flint-tipped spear and followed his father into the chill of the new day to meet with their fellow hunters. To hide his terror he pulled back his shoulders, threw up his head and swaggered fearlessly towards the group.

The bison would soon come to the little river to drink before the day dawned fully. The men would move noiselessly into position. One animal would be selected for the kill, and be skilfully manoeuvred towards the mouth of the cave where it would rush inside in a panic, seeking to escape from the spears and shouts of the surrounding hunters.

Once inside, there would be *no* escape – but the bison would not know that. The cave stretches back and back, to where no light penetrates. But the walls narrow from each side, and the roof lowers.

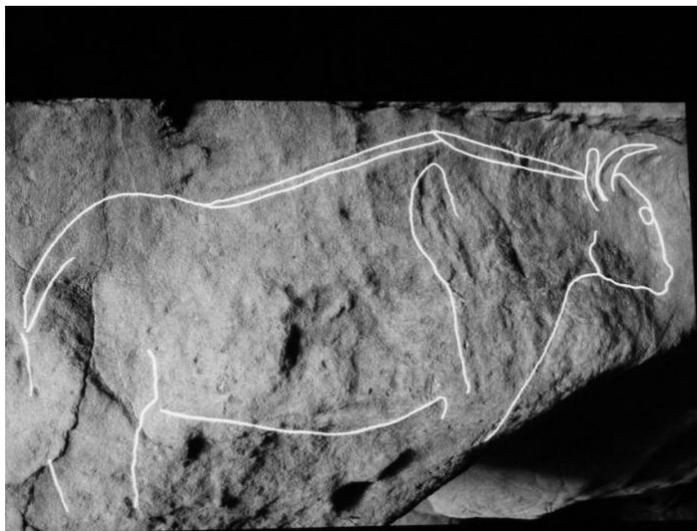
Once inside there would be *no* escape – but the bison would not know that. Only when it could run no further would it discover the trap. Then it would be too late to turn – there would be nowhere to run! The petrified animal would snort and try to turn to make its escape, legs kicking out with their sharp hooves at its pursuers, horns waving angrily. In its struggles, it would become wedged further into the deepest recesses of the cave.

Once inside there would be *no* escape from the hunters' spears and clubs. Only the bloody turmoil as men and beast fought for supremacy. In the noise and confusion, bodies would be gored, blood would be spilt, but in the end, man would triumph over beast and the clan's larder would be replenished for a few more weeks, and also they would have gut, hide and bone for life's essential.

Some time after the hunt, shocked but mercifully unscathed, Brun returned to the killing place to contemplate on what had happened. He could still smell the conflict and re-lived the fear – his and the bison’s - but he was now a man and felt proud of his contribution to the clan’s wellbeing. He took his flint hand axe and began to carve into the soft limestone the outline of the bison facing towards the back of the cave. It would take him several visits to complete his handiwork, but it would serve as a reminder of the day he became a man.

Some considerable time later, in fact thirteen thousand years later, the little river had been dammed by a local landowner and a small lake had been formed. Trees and shrubs softened the towering limestone crags, and the bison were replaced by peacefully swimming ducks and swans. The caves were still in evidence, and the guide took young Brian and his father, Zac, with the small group of visitors into Church Hole to look at the rock art. The guide explained how early people had lived in this narrow valley and how they had left outlines of the animals they killed to support their way of life.

Using a laser pen, he traced the outline of Brun’s bison, still visible in the crumbly limestone of the cave wall, and Brian began to imagine those scenes of long ago, and heard echoes of past bloody deeds in that quiet place – no longer a killing place, but a learning place – thanks to Brun’s rock art which spanned the millennia.



© June Hawkins, following a visit to Cresswell Crags



### HAIKU – LIGHT 3

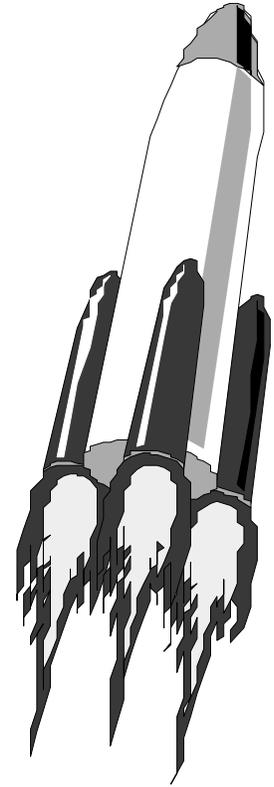
Daylight comes creeping  
Over the far horizon  
Like a painted snail

© Shirley Wilding

## JOURNEY INTO SPACE

Space travel has always fascinated me, from reading 'The Time Machine' to the Apollo Missions. I longed to be the first woman on the Moon or Mars!

Now here I was, being helped into a space suit and a mask placed over my face. There was a brilliant white light over my head. I was strapped to the bed and wheeled into the space ship. A disembodied voice said "Count down!" I started counting from ten and by five I had a feeling of weightlessness as if I was floating in the air. I was vaguely aware of slight movement but could not see or hear anything. It was quite pleasant and I thought it must be lift off. I am on my way! I think I dozed off, because it seemed only a short time until there was a bang and a judder and we had stopped. The others undid their straps, so I did the same. Someone opened the hatch. I looked out and saw a very rocky terrain. Everything was bathed in a golden misty light. I still had my mask on and breathed easily. From the conversation, I gathered that we had crash landed on a planet but nobody knew where we were. Shivering with excitement I followed one of the others outside.



Some of the rocks were like mountains and others very flat. I saw some movement near a smaller rock. It was a huge spider-like creature and I screamed. Someone told me to be quiet and I would be all right. We had only walked a short distance when there was a whistling sound and a big shadow passed overhead. It was an odd looking space ship and it landed on one of the flat rocks. It had a kind of green mist round it and flashing lights. We turned and ran back to our craft locking the hatch. Looking out of the window we saw strange figures dressed in black with gold masks on their heads. They seemed to glide above the rocks and were carrying what looked like weapons. I clutched the hands of the person nearest to me. My mouth was dry and my heart was racing. I have never felt so frightened. A very bright light was shining in my eyes and I was blinded by it. Someone stroked my face and said "Come on, dear! It's all over now. The operation went very well. We are taking you back to the ward now. Your husband is there waiting for you."

## MANOEUVRING

**M**yrriad birds wheeling in black clouds over the eternal city

**A**s dusk gathers over ancient ruins and modern metropolis alike,

**N**ever colliding in this spontaneous aerial display.

**O**ver the Colosseum they swirl; back over the traffic-snarled streets in

**E**ver-changing billows filled with swooshing wings, displaying

**U**nbelievable speed and dexterity as they churn overhead; a

**V**irtual cloak of seething individuals moving as one.

**R**ound and again they whirl in feverish formation

**I**nviting mere humans to wonder at their leaderless agility.

**N**ow the sky darkens as night falls. The birds? Suddenly, they are

**G**one.



## WALKING TO SCHOOL - THE PATH FROM CHILDHOOD

There is a strange time between the innocence of childhood and the knowledge that something is going on that cannot be understood. Looking back, this time for me happened in the early summer of 1953.

I lived in an unadopted road known locally as Bromilow Pads. It was a cinder road that narrowed down to a footpath which ran between fields, past a slag heap from an old open cast mine that we called the Stuff Ruck, then through Mr Hunt's farm yard and out onto Liverpool Road. My school, the Methodist school, was a hundred yards along this road and one hundred and fifty yards further on was St Richard's Roman Catholic School. I went to the Methodist school as it was the nearest to my house and it had nothing to do with our religious affiliations, which if anything leant towards the Church of England.

I walked to school every day with my four friends, Ellen my best friend, Ann who was a year younger and the O'Connor girls, Geraldine and Valerie. We would all meet at my house as I was last on the route. We walked past the fields that we went pea picking in in summer and potato picking in October, past the slag heap, which we would run over if we had time, then through the farmyard, stopping to check if there were any piglets, and out onto the main road. When we reached the top road Geraldine, Valerie and Ann would cross over to the left hand side of the road and Ellen and me would stay on the right side and we would all pretend we didn't know each other. This was because the Catholics walked on the left and the Protestants walked on the right

This dividing into two groups was just the way it was. Shouts of "Red Necks' and "Prudy Proxies" were banded backwards and forwards across the road by the older boys but it all went completely over my head until this particular Friday in late June.

Ellen, Ann, the O'Connor girls and I set off as usual; the weather was hot and had been for ages. Everything smelled dusty as we walked between the fields. We were early, so we climbed the Stuff Ruck and saw there were lots of coltsfoots out and we decided that we would pick some on the way home. Skylarks were singing all around us, it was a perfect summer day.

As we approached the top road we could hear a commotion and, emerging from the footpath, we were overwhelmed by the noise. The world seemed to have gone mad; boys were fighting, girls shouting, stones and other stuff flying through the air. We were terrified and instinctively ran into the little sweet shop owned by Mrs Watkins. She sheltered us under the counter with four other kids. We had just got down as a brick came through the window. Mrs Watkins had called the

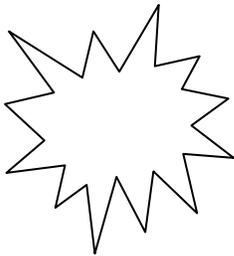
police, but it seemed ages before they came, and even longer before Bobby Riseborough came into the shop and took us home in a police car.

For the rest of that term, at school time, Bobby Riseborough and Sergeant O'Connor, Geraldine and Valerie's dad, patrolled the road and kept the two factions apart. I changed schools that year so never knew if things improved.

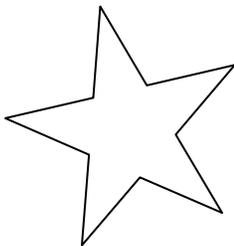
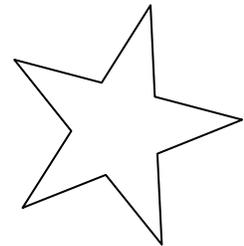
As I look back on it now, I am not sure if I was involved with true sectarian violence or just teenage boys egged on to violence by the girls. Boys in each generation seem to have to belong to a gang and look for something to hate and vent their feelings on. That morning it was hot, a fight broke out and mayhem ensued, perhaps that's all it was.

© Dorothy Wells

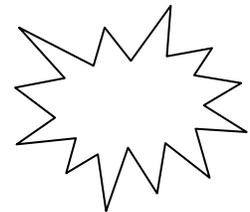
## LIGHT



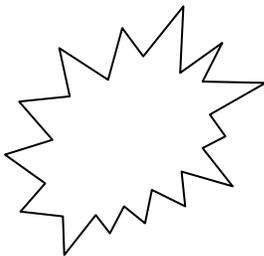
Waking.  
Slowly glance  
Towards the shaft of  
Morning light at  
Curtain's edge.



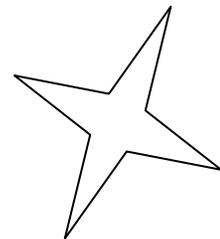
Dull, grey.  
Turn over;  
Not ready to  
Face the day.



Sharp, bright  
Reflecting on  
Green, glass globe  
And shining brass.



Brave new day!  
Curtains drawn  
And then there  
Was light to  
Face the day.



© Betty Morley

## HIGHCROSS

Silver, glass and chrome,  
Space and light,  
This ancient Roman site  
Is now the home of shops and walkways  
Stairs and signs,  
A 'shopper's only' zone,  
A palace of shopping.

No need to think of weather,  
Cold or rain,  
Perpetual summer for the year.  
Warmth and light  
Choice, delight,  
There's such a welcome here  
In this palace of shopping.

No sign of cars  
Or vagrants stopping.  
Not a place for children's play.  
Youths and dogs  
And ugly litter  
All carefully tidied away  
In this palace of shopping.

The planners thought of everything.  
Spared nothing for success.  
In true 'Roman' fashion  
With knowledge  
And passion,  
They introduced all that was best  
In this palace of shopping.

I think it would have met with approval  
From those builders of Roman times.  
They would have admired  
Been excited  
And inspired  
For their work was equally 'in line'  
With the plans for this palace of shopping.

## "O SWEET AND LOVELY WALL" (MND)

*"There is Jackson with his Virginians, standing like a stone wall."  
Barnard Elliot Bee (at the Battle of Bull Run).*

Walls are rather magical things. If you give them some thought you realise how often they appear in fact and fiction. Sometimes they even take centre stage as The Walls of Jericho did when they came tumbling down.

The first wall we probably heard about was the one which Humpty Dumpty fell from. What wall was it, one wonders? Later we heard of those wonderful city walls in the stories where the gates only opened briefly to let out the beautiful princess, who was to be sacrificed to the dragon, only to be rescued by a hero such as Saint George.

What about the French walls that the English were so fond of attacking? Think of the impregnable walls of Calais to which Edward III lay siege for months and out of which came the brave burghers. Remember the walls which the English charged with Henry V's words ringing in their ears:

*"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;  
Or close the wall up with our English dead!"*

I love the knowledge that once upon a time many English towns were surrounded by walls. Sometimes all that is left to remind us is the road names East Gate, West Gate, Northgate, Southgate. Sometimes a romantic remnant will remain of these walls such as can be seen in Great Yarmouth, whilst in other places like York the walls retain much of their original grandeur.

Occasionally a fragment of wall will speak of an even earlier period, as the Jewry Wall will attest. How lucky we are to have this strange survival in Leicester. Its rugged strength reveals to our eyes, if we look with sensitivity and imagination, the Romans. We see their dark formidable power, their engineering brilliance, their insensitive pragmatism. It tells us of the force which dominated Britain for four centuries. This wall can speak.

Mud walls are a different delight and enhance rural rides when one can be spotted. They have a quiet beauty and many have stood useful and unremarked for hundreds of years, unlike the celebrated and much visited walls such as "Hadrian's Wall" or "The Great Wall of China."

But perhaps the most iconic walls of all are the (probably) mythical walls of Troy, which were able to withstand the attentions of a Greek army for twenty years. From the top of these walls the Trojans watched battle after battle on the plain below. From here they saw Hector leave the gates in order to face Achilles in combat. They saw the great Achilles race towards his foe, his helmet gleaming

in the sun. They watched Hector flee as the realisation of imminent death came to him and they watched his body dragged around the walls in a final humiliation.

Walls are more than the sum of their parts. They remind us physically who we are, what we find important, what we once found important, how we have changed. They give us security, they fire our imagination; although it's a myth that they can be seen from outer space. Long may they stand.

© *Christine Claricoates*



## **HOMOPHONES II**

He waved her goodbye as she went off to buy the present.

Here is the weather forecast whether you like it or not.

He was allowed to shout aloud.

She opened the window and in flew influenza.

It was the darkest night when the Knight rode off on his horse.

“Can you see? It’s there, on the horizon - the sea.”

It was a long wait for her weight to be assessed.

© *Richard King*



## **CANDLE FLAME/SHADOW**

Faceless, grey, threatening,  
Subhuman.

Always moving, changing, intangible.

Extinguish.

Quick, click, electric

© *Ruth Westley*

## KEEP IT SHORT

I relayed my news (see above) regarding my writing club's assignment to my husband.

"I can waffle on about anything, so long as it's short." I pondered momentarily on what I'd just said, "I'll re-phrase that; I can succinctly write a short piece on a topic of my choice!"

"I think you got it right the first time", he muttered. "Pardon?" I said, tersely.

"Well, you do tend to go on . . . I mean, you write the way you talk . . . I mean, lovely and chatty . . . I mean . . . can you do 'succinct' . . . even the dentist . . .", he wisely stopped there.

We had visited our gentle, quick, uncommunicative dentist together last week; me for a replacement filling, Mike for a check-up. Me first, Mike second. At home he repeated the dentist's so called 'amusing' comment. To quote "It's your wife the one who talks in your house, isn't it?" To add insult to injury, the dental nurse had added, "She even managed to chat during treatment!"

"I know what he said . . . I was nervous", I defended myself, "You know I waffle when I'm nervous."

"You must be the jumpiest person I know. Crikey, even your father warned me you could give an aspirin a headache!" Mike was clearly pushing his luck.

"That's it!", I snarled "I'm not talking or 'waffling' to you any more at all today." I flounced off in a huff but, on catching his little smirk out of the corner of my eye, soon came to a standstill. Thinking about it, why would I give him a potential treat?

So, rewind the walk . . . "Michael", I began and carried on . . . and on . . .

I drew breath the next day and wrote succinctly . . .

WHY IS THERE A SETTING THAT BURNS YOUR TOAST?\* (*9 succinct words*)

\* of course, I could have written 'WAFFLE'!

© Patricia Brown

# GUILT

Where does guilt come from?  
Is it your parents, your old mum and Dad  
When coping with life, or demeaning a fad.  
Is it your teacher, your preacher you say  
That starts it all off at the end of the day.

Where does guilt come from?  
Is it that girl you first touched on the breast?  
Was it you that cheated when taking your test?  
Boys will be boys and cheating is fun  
Best run in the fields and sit in the sun

Where does guilt come from?  
Does it come from a CV that nearly was true  
And got you that career that just grew and grew?  
You told her you loved her, her beauty entrances  
When less pure thoughts were pushing your chances

Where does guilt come from?  
Describing that car as carefully used  
When really you knew that it was abused  
Telling your toddlers that when the music emits  
The ice cream van man has no goods to remit

Where does guilt come from?  
Does it come from the warmth and safety of home  
When we see on the telly those who have none  
A plateful of food, a fridge full of wine  
Knowing that others will not know when they'll dine

Where does guilt come from?  
When you are up to your eyes in the whirlwind of life  
And you forget to remember the love of your wife  
Your mother needs helping, the garden, her health  
And you're too busy; busy enhancing your wealth

Where does guilt come from?  
It comes from the heart, the depth of the soul  
It can cripple, inspire, have impacts untold.  
It's how that we use it that's much more to the point  
It actions not feelings that we should anoint!

## REACTION TO THE NEWS

*This poem was written in response to seeing a fleeting image of a terrified woman who had experienced a tsunami warning in Ache, Indonesia.*

As hedges turn to green from brown  
I languish in my happy town.  
Enjoying spring's eternal birth  
I see a fleeting image on TV.  
A terrified young woman  
Grasping friends, she stands – riveted,  
unable to move, imagining the holocaust,  
contemplating drowning, choking or worse.  
Having to console others while  
cleaning up the ruins and starting  
the rebuilding, rebirth, the spring.  
Outside the hedgerows strain at the leaf  
and blossom in the spring, unthreatened.

© *Graham Surman*

## JUST FOUR SMOOTH WALLS

They caught him napping.

Before he was fully awake, he was held tightly, constrained, violently torn from his beloved home. Given no time to object, to fight back, to gather his confused thoughts as he was swiftly incarcerated in the small, enclosed, gloomy place. Featureless, with no windows, just four smooth walls, no door that he could see.

Suddenly, no light at all. Fearful, disorientated, he tried to feel around, but he couldn't move far in the confined space. Just him and some coarse straw for bedding. At least it was dry.

Nothing to do but wait . . .

Months later – freedom! Hibernation over.

© *Patricia Brown*

## TEN U3A WRITERS

**Ten** U3A Writers tried to pen a rhyme,  
One tripped on her couplets, and then there were nine.

**Nine** U3A Writers scribbled about “fate”,  
One sadly met hers, and then there were eight.

**Eight** U3A Writers took the title “Heaven”,  
One had a flight of fancy, and then there were seven.

**Seven** U3A Writers tried to learn new tricks,  
One mixed her metaphors, and then there were six.

**Six** U3A Writers reminisced on “Jive”,  
One split her infinitives, and then there were five.

**Five** U3A Writers on a literary tour,  
One completely lost the plot, and then there were four.

**Four** U3A Writers researching history,  
One used a double negative, and then there were three.

**Three** U3A Writers explored ‘a point of view’,  
One didn’t see it, and then there were two.

**Two** U3A Writers tried Haiku for fun,  
One had far too many syllables in her verse, and then there was one.

**One** U3A Writer became a millionaire,  
Publishing her e-book on a passionate affair.

© *Jacqueline Barker*



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perhaps you might like to join us?

We meet on  
the third Monday of each month  
from 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm  
at Brook Court, Countesthorpe.



Visit our website for more details and  
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Presented with renewal of annual Countesthorpe U3A  
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