

POT POURRI



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

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NOTE:

Each month we write to a theme, which may be a single word or a short phrase. One of the things that we find constantly surprising within our group is the huge variety of writing that results from a single subject. With this in mind, we have tried to share a little of this with you, and thus you will find that some pieces in the booklet are written around a single theme. Others stand alone as examples selected as some of our other favourites.

We hope that you will enjoy reading our efforts as much as we have enjoyed producing them. If so, why not come and join us?

We meet on the third Monday of the month between 2 and 4 pm in the residents' lounge at Brook Court, Countesthorpe.

ESTUARY IN AUTUMN

Solitude,
Vastness of reeded, grey estuary beyond.
Dusk, yet to descend
Clothing autumn
With beguiling light.

Invaders' access to troubled tribes,
Ancestors long buried,
Long forgotten as I one day
With transition of time.

Reddening sky, harbinger of delight
Of old, for those with
Such elemental knowledge.

Wandering as Wordsworth's cloud -
An awareness, increased sound, a chattering
In this silent desolation,
A darkness even.

Then suddenly -
Synchronised, sky-borne thespians
Swooping, multiplying, wheeling, arcing, twisting, turning
Over rusting pier,
Cirque des etourneaux.
Aerial acrobats,
Swirling, whirling, fluid
Curves of action.
Singular orchestration
Or collective choreography?

Mesmerising, balletic murmuration.

A spiral.

Then gone.

© *Mikki Wilde*

PADDLE

Come down to the beach with me.

Sense the tingle of excitement as we arrive and you look out towards the vast sea, stretching out into the distance to meet up with the sky. Wonder at the stories this landscape could tell; what mysteries are to be found in those vast depths beneath that crinkly surface that reflects the colours from above and around.

Come . . . let's move closer. Take off your shoes and socks and step out across the warm, dry sand. Feel it shift beneath your feet as you go forward.

Tuck your trousers above your knees and feel the change in sensation as we reach the tide line where the sand becomes firmer, cooler, rippled and bumpy in places; patterned and moulded by the advance and retreat of the tide. Negotiate the small channels of water that cross the sand, and be careful not to tread on debris, shells and rocks that the sea has left behind.

Brace yourself as we reach the water's edge and step in. It may feel cold as it laps and folds around your feet and ankles. Be ready for the rhythmically unrhythmic movement of the waves, which could catch you out, reaching higher up your legs and wetting your trousers. Enjoy the sensation as your feet sink further into the sand.

Stand for a while and take in the big water and the huge sky. Breathe in the fresh, warm, salty air. Hear the seagulls call and watch them swoop and dive.

Feel the joy!

© *Josephine Rainer*

SUDDENLY

George Boyle never did anything suddenly; no action was ever spontaneous. Spontaneity was not a word in his vocabulary. Neither was honesty. For George was a career criminal. At least, that's how he saw himself. A mastermind of immense proportion, of sly cunning and attention to the smallest detail. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

George was the pettiest of petty crooks and had spent only ten of his fifty-two years at liberty. The remainder of his life had been lived in one institution or another. His criminal career began at the age of nine, stealing packets of Woodbines from Mrs Mendleson's corner shop. This, whilst his 'Super Accomplice', Eric Crosthwaite, acted as lookout. Not a good choice, as Eric was slower-witted than George and he soon confessed everything to Mrs Mendleson under interrogation.

After this George decided to go it alone. Several unsuccessful 'major' crimes followed. Notably the lone raid on the local Halifax Building Society with a banana in a carrier bag. The cashier gave him a hundred pounds, but he was picked up on the CCTV from the week earlier when he was casing the joint. Unfortunately he had on the same flat cap that he wore over his balaclava on 'the raid'.

Another of his masterplans consisted of a ram raid on the newsagent's on the corner of the High Street. A Reliant Robin, however, is not really a suitable vehicle in which to perpetrate such a crime. Especially as the car disintegrated as it hit the window of the shop.

Each of George's attempts at 'the perfect job' only landed him in jail. Ever-lengthening sentences had left George low. His wife had threatened to leave him, not before time. She had a cleaning job at

the White House public house and persuaded Jim, the landlord, to give George a job as a potman.

Everything went swimmingly for a few weeks. George quite liked the 'cash in hand' at the end of the week. However, he found out that all the other staff had received a little extra in the Christmas wage packets. He, of course, tackled Jim, but was told that he hadn't been working there long enough to qualify. George's resentment began to fester over Christmas and by New Year's Eve it had reached a crescendo in his head. At three o'clock on the first of January, he squeezed his weasel-like body through the ladies' toilet window of the public house. It was open, fortunately.

He tripped and stumbled his way into the lounge bar. In the half light from the streetlight outside he could just make out the till and below it, the safe. He couldn't believe his luck! The door was open and inside was a large cloth bag full of money. George grabbed it and retraced his steps to the toilet window. Dropping the money bag out of the window, he put it into his wife's shopping bag on wheels.



The vital flaw in George's plan became evident as the police traced the tracks of his wife's shopper on wheels through the snow. They found him in the living room surrounded by threepenny bits. He told the constable that it was the change from his wife's shopping. It transpired that the landlord had taken the rest of the takings and had hidden them under his bed as the safe's lock was faulty. He decided that he wouldn't press charges as George was such a pathetic individual and his wife had suffered enough over the years.

After some considerations, George concluded that his life of crime must come to an end. As if it had ever started!

SEVENS

Countesthorpe
Leicestershire village
Growing larger quickly
New estates surrounding us
Two schools bursting at the seams
Small range of shops, three churches
Seven thousand folk enjoying the fresh air
New country park is proving popular
Clubs and various groups thriving
Herald newspaper going well
Library future secure
Community united
Countesthorpe

© Patsy Paterson



REVIEWING THE SITUATION

(with a nod to Lionel Bart!)

I'm reviewing the situation.
Can we rid ourselves of plastic starting now?
All the bottles, bags and wrappings,
All the boxes, trays and strappings,
We'll replace them, save the ocean, but quite how?
Glass bottles they will weigh much more,
Big lorries need to carry more,
More petrol used will cost much more,
Cause more pollution that's for sure.
Is a swap to paper bags the cure?
But in the rain they won't endure!
I think I'd better think it out again . . .

I'm reviewing the situation
Can we cut the CO₂ that we emit?
We could walk and bike, ignore the rain,
Arthritis aches and other pain
And all use public transport for our trips.
But the bus is late, the trains don't run,
The shopping's heavy; it's not fun.
The routes we can use number one
And there's not room for everyone,
To holiday we seek the sun
But planes use fuel by the ton.
I think I'd better think it out again . . .

I'm reviewing the situation
Can we not rely so much on fossil fuels?
All those gadgets, tools and fryers
Fridges, freezers and washer/driers
To make us do without them would be cruel.
So how to power them is the cry,
With nuclear we all might fry,
While coal's a no-no, just don't try,
And fracking all will terrify,
But windfarms only work part-time
And solar needs the sun to shine,
I think I'd better think it out again . . .

I'm reviewing the situation,
Can we keep world population in control?
It is heading for eight billions,
And increasing by the millions,
On earth's resources it will take a toll.
We feed the starving and the poor,
But one year on there's even more,
Which leads to hunger, civil war,
Disease and death will follow, sure.
Enter the horsemen, numbering four.
Apocalypse knocks at the door.
I think I'd better think it out again . . .

© *Jacqueline Barker*

TWELFTH NIGHT

Nora held the glass bauble in her arthritic fingers. It was at least ninety years old. The rounded, shiny, green back supported an indented front, the facets of which reflected red, gold, silver and blue, catching the light as she looked at it. She remembered it on the tree in her childhood home. Tiny pieces of the green were coming away, leaving dots of clear glass, like the glass at the top, where the springy wire loop entered. Here, even the glass was turning slightly yellow with age.



She thought of how there used to be a beautiful spruce tree in her parents' bay window, lighting up the big Christmas parties when she was a child and the happy family gatherings she organised when she was a mother and younger grandmother.

Nora placed the bauble carefully into an old cardboard box. The box had cardboard divisions where only her best and oldest baubles were stored. All the newer plastic ones she dropped into a carrier bag but there were not so many now that she had downsized most things, including her tree.

Nora fitted the rather tatty lid over her ancient, flaking, glass decorations. Christmas in her eight-fifth year had felt a bit faded, jaded; it had come around so quickly, there seemed to be too many of them. They were losing their novelty.

She supposed she would get the little artificial tree and the ancient baubles, down from the loft again, next year . . . probably . . .

LOSS

She felt utterly bereft. Such overwhelming sadness. A powerful sense of loss, a void. Could a heart turn to stone?

She was remembering Matthew. The passion they'd shared, the anticipation, the excitement of their clandestine assignations. The secret knowledge she'd kept concealed from everyone in the firm, even from Steph, the office gossip, who fielded all his wife's calls when she couldn't find him. She'd been his 'overnight stop' in Manchester, Glasgow, Newcastle, York – you name it. Until he was killed. Motorway crash.

She had nothing; nothing at all to remember him by. His wife had the gifts, the house, the lifestyle and the kids. They were the reason he wouldn't leave her. He was clear on that, honest about his past, his alleged reputation.

Had she been naïve, manipulated, groomed?

She'd been so young. Seventeen. It was her first job, her first home (well, bedsit). And he'd been her first, her only love. Still was.

She could remember his office, his clothes, those colourful ties, the decisive way he walked, how he fiddled with his pen, that small lock of hair that curled upwards at the back of his head. She could recall that passion, her love, his insatiable desire. Surely not just lust on his part? No, she couldn't, *wouldn't* believe that.

He'd touched her very soul. No-one else had ever done that, not even her husband – yes, he loved her; she was fond of him. She heard him come into the kitchen.

“Why the long face?” he smiled

That was the problem – the face. She could no longer remember Matthew's face.

RIPPLES

Cottage carefully chosen
In she moved.

Isolation essential,
Setting, one of calm.

Spring, with early promise
Had come and gone.

Gentle warmth of June morning
Seeped through windows

Sparkling from
Yesterday's attention.

Hall mirror reflected
Bright yellow blooms.

Hall mirror,
Her only companion.

Hall mirror she approached,
Quite composed.

Hall mirror,
She struck.

Jagged pieces
To pierce arm.

Through open door
She went.

Mirror stillness disturbed,
Only ripples remained.

ROOTS

I am the product of my roots

I live within my roots

I am a product of the north

I walk like the north

I talk like the north

Although I no longer live there

My roots drag me back there

Back to the terraced houses

The old bombed spaces

The pieces of waste ground

Full of toxic danger

Fields now covered with estates

Of bland houses and factories

Clambering down sand hills

And climbing up Everest

Dreams that inhabit me

In moments of melancholy

I live in my mind for an instant

In odd times I return to the

Scenes of my childhood

And spend a few moments

Contemplating my roots

© Chad Barnsley

MESSAGE FOR THE FUTURE

Here's a message for the future, from the place you call the past.
We're sorry for our mindless waste, though resources would not last.
We're sorry if it's hot down there and the water's rising still,
And if you had to move your homes to gather on the hills.
And all that stuff we buried, safely underground,
Immune, we thought, from danger but not so, you have found.
When we plundered all the minerals and fished 'til stocks were gone,
Then filled your air with CO₂, our legacy was done.
The half-life of uranium means half a life for you
And while it's true we're dead and gone, we killed your future too.
We're sorry for the animals you'll never see again
And sorry for the rainforests, cut down for human gain.
To hold the world in trust for you when our forebears passed it on
But we gorged upon its riches, 'til its fruits were almost gone.

Here's a message FROM the future, though you'll never hear it said.
For all your selfish plundering, we are glad that you are dead.
With your pollution in our rivers, on our land and in our seas,
Your poison hanging in our air that we cannot see.
You left us your indifference, passed on without a care,
And sorry is an empty word to answer our nightmare.
So now we live in misery, denied the life you had,
Made much worse by witnessing how you turned this good world bad.

© *Adrian Dobey*

EVER DECREASING CIRCLES

MONDAY. “First day of the week – time for a disciplined start to really getting things done”, thought Anna as she stepped into the shower. Anna was a normal, well-intentioned woman who nevertheless found it difficult to keep focused on a single task, with the result that her days became ever more chaotic. Each day ended with a myriad of jobs half-completed, and a resultant feeling of non-achievement which beset her each night as she lay in bed waiting for sleep. Her long-suffering husband, Bob, felt that he lived in a somewhat frenzied household, with a wife who was always stressed and complaining about how much there was to do, although she worked only part-time and they had just one 12-year old daughter and no pets.

Anna thought about her neighbour, Susan, who was one of those super-organised types who always seemed to have everything under control – even her husband, John, three children and two dogs. “How does she manage it?” wondered Anna as she dressed. “I know, I’ll invite her round for coffee and then ask her for some tips, because I’m *determined* to turn my life around and start getting things done without getting in a flap.”

WEDNESDAY. A couple of days later Anna and Susan were sitting enjoying coffee in Anna’s hastily-tidied conservatory, when Anna admitted that she was struggling to find a way to improve her chaotic lifestyle and asked Susan for advice on how to tackle the problem. “It’s not that I don’t work hard – I do, but I just seem to get side-tracked, and end up with loads of things half done, and then I get depressed, eat too much, feel harassed and then I can’t be bothered to finish off all the things I’ve started,” wailed Anna. “I just seem to go round in ever-decreasing circles! And Bob is always criticising me for getting things in such a state and never having any spare time for him and our daughter.”

Susan nodded sympathetically. “Men, eh!” she said, then went on, “Lists are the answer. Just make a list, and stick to it *no matter what*. That’s what works for me. Note down all the things you need to do, then give each a priority – 1, 2 or 3 – and work through them in priority order. Don’t add anything in, and don’t do anything that isn’t on your list. Don’t do

anything with a lower priority until you've done those that are more important. Never digress – just keep ploughing on. Simple!" said Susan with a smug smile. "It *does* sound simple when you put it like that," murmured Anna, wondering if she'd have the self-discipline to do it. But she vowed to give it a try, starting the very next day.

THURSDAY – SATURDAY. Anna made a supreme effort over the next three days, getting up a little earlier than usual to make her list for the day and diligently prioritising each item. She fought courageously against her usual urges to get side-tracked and managed to keep to her purpose, conscientiously striking off each job as it was completed. She flatly refused to do any job not on the list, or even out of its order – to Bob's intense annoyance when he wanted her help on Saturday afternoon to do some of the little jobs which had been waiting for attention. He couldn't understand this at all, as usually Anna was always ready to drop what she was doing and help. When he pointed this out, Anna snapped back at him, "That isn't on the list and therefore there is NO WAY I'm going to do it!" "Why so intransigent all of a sudden?" asked Bob in surprise.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON. Bob and John were walking back home after watching the local amateur football team win their match, and chatting away about life in general. Bob had noticed the recent change in Anna, and confided in John that he was feeling a little worried and wondering what was behind it all. "I know I've always moaned about the chaos, and I suppose I've wished for a more orderly life, but this is beyond a joke!"

John snorted with laughter and told Bob about the chat their wives had had over coffee earlier in the week. "Oh, Susan gave her the benefit of her superior wisdom", he said sardonically, "It looks as if *your* life will be ruled by bloody lists as well as mine from now on! I've always envied you your easy-going life-style. Be careful what you wish for, I'd say!"



© June Hawkins

CONGLOMERATION

It starts as a speck
An iota of dust, high above the earth
In super-saturated water vapour
Below freezing
Ice crystals nucleate around the speck
In thin plates and dendrils
Colder still
Hollow needles and prisms form
In perfect hexagonal symmetry
Heavier now
The flake begins to fall, slowly
Attracting super-cooled cloud water
Ten quintillion
Molecules in a single flake
Diffuse reflection of the spectrum
Makes crystal clarity appear white
Rising temperature
Causes fusion between flakes
Perfection for snowmen

© *Jacqueline Barker*



WILLIAM AND THE TEAROOM

At the tender age of 15, members of class Upper V Science, of whom I was one, had thrust upon them the study sheets for the 'O' level exams due the following year. One of these was for English Literature. This listed Richard II by William Shakespeare, The Cloister and the Hearth by Charles Reade and, oh joy, oh rapture, the endless verses of William Wordsworth. The first two were non-stop agony but having read, quoted, examined and dissected him we finally came to an uneasy truce with WW.

Some 40-odd years later, my husband and I were planning a summer break and he (*sorry, misprint*) we eventually plumped for the Lake District. Whilst we worked out routes and various proposed activities, deep stirrings started in the primeval murk of memory and gradually into the light of day crept WW surrounded by snippets of half-remembered verses from my youth.

It was a lovely day when we headed north and we made good time despite the spontaneous detours – what is it with men and maps – and arrived at our comfy base. Next day we 'wandered' around Ambleside and then took the inevitable boat trip down the length of Lake Windermere and back. Now, my innards usually baulk at the combination of boats and water, but that day my stomach and breakfast called a truce; the water was calm and the scenery so beautiful that it turned out to be a very pleasant time. Before returning to base, we decided on a planned detour to Grasmere and, as everyone knows, Grasmere and WW are inextricably linked.

We strolled through more stunning countryside, breathing almost unrecognisable air, listening to the sounds of nature you never hear in the city, with no particular venue and no time restrictions. Sheer bliss.

Late afternoon, in typical fashion, having done the souvenir shops, Dove Cottage, the museum et al, we felt the need of a cuppa and so sought and found the charming Dove Cottage Tearooms which were all you'd expect them to be – so typically English. Sitting by the window with tea in

china cups, and toasted teacakes, we watched the passers-by, very relaxed, totally happy, and blissfully unaware of the bombshell to come. Then they brought the bill. It was extortionate and we could not believe it. I'm sure my hand trembled as I passed over a small fortune and we made our way out in a daze with plastic smiles and muttering "thank you" and "it was nice" through numb lips. We found a bench and sank onto it to gain some self-resuscitation and sometime later we did actually laugh about it. From the on "Dove Cottage prices" became part of the family vocabulary whenever any of experienced a rip-off.



I wondered later how WW would have felt, to know that his connections to the area were being so shamelessly exploited. Not too chuffed, I would have thought. On the other hand he could have counter-exploited this by writing yet another poem:

*Beside the lake, beneath the trees
They sell the most expensive teas*

(As a footnote, for those of you still awake, I did gain a pass at 'O' level in English Literature.)

© Josephine Orchison

CAFÉ AFFAIRS

The cups and mugs clatter
There's overheard chatter
The windows and ceiling are streaming,
There's red ginghamed tables
Hearing trivial fables
That seldom have any meaning.

There's lovers and leavers,
Agnostics, believers
And lonely old folks here on loan.
There's vicars and tarts
With love in their hearts
And someone who's just on the phone

There's sandwiches toasted
With not a thing that is roasted
And sausages made into a roll.
Buns, scones and slices.
Biscuits, choc ices
And cream that comes in a bowl

There's chocolate galore
And mud on the floor
And lattes plain and flavoured.
Cappuccinos with cinnamon
And tea with a lemon on
Though with milk with just one is most favoured

It's just like a pub,
A free, open club
That's open to all who need succour.
The exchange of news
And expression of views
Make cafés the best invention since sliced bread!

© *Graham Surman*

UNPREDICTABLE, OR EVEN PREDICTABLE

Monday it rained
And continued all day

Tuesday it rained
New plants washed away

Wednesday it rained
Lightning and thunder

Thursday it rained
We're gonna go under

Friday it rained
I'm feeling like Noah

Saturday rain
Good job I'm a rower

Sunday – no rain
The sun was so hot

Monday – no sun
Can you guess what?

© *Josephine Orchison*

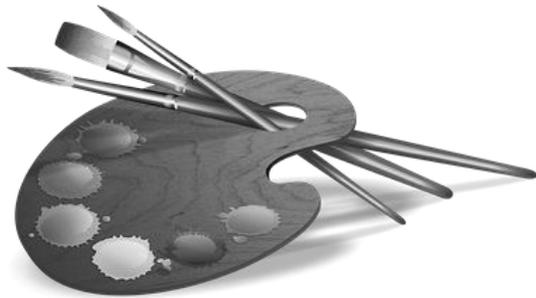


COLOUR

For the past forty-eight years, I've been Mrs Brown. Never liked the colour brown; never, ever, worn the colour brown, not even brown shoes, sheepskin mittens or wooden jewellery.

Then again, wouldn't want to be Mrs White. Don't wear white either; makes me look sallow. Mrs Black? Now, I wear a lot of black. Hopefully it makes me look thinner, but it's not a colour, as such, is it? Neither is white, anyway, so neither I suppose, is grey.

Green? I wore green for six years as my summer 'house dress' as a 'gel' at grammar school. Now I use it a lot, and I mean a lot, in my botanical painting. Bit fed up with green; so, no Mrs Green then.



What *would* I like? Mrs . . . Purple . . .
Mauve . . . Maroon? All a bit dull.
Mrs Cherry Red . . . now you're
talking! Or Mrs Crimson Lake . . .
Yellow Ochre . . . Ultramarine . . .
Raw Sienna . . . Burnt Umber? No,
we're getting back to brown again.
Mrs Cerulean Blue . . . Cadmium
Yellow . . . Rose Madder . . . Hooker's
Green. Yes, well, perhaps not.

Good grief, it's been staring me in the face all this time! Rainbow!

Mrs Rainbow – my great grandma's name! Sorted!

Must tell Mike – change of name, change of image. After all, he's been Michael Brown for seventy-one years. Actually, that's no longer true. According to his new U3A membership card, he's now known as Malcolm!

Bit bored with Patricia . . .

© Mrs ? Rainbow (aka Brown)

THE DARKNESS

*Hello Darkness, my old friend.
I've come to talk to you again.*

Paul Simon – the Sound of Silence

Frightened? No, I have never been frightened of the dark. Even as a child, the darkness held no hidden ghosts or monsters for me. In fact, I would go as far as to say that the darkness has sometimes been my friend. The place I go when I need to think or relax.

I close my eyes and let the darkness surround and envelop me. I float on a dark sea that washes away the clutter in my mind.

Clarity seeps in, and my body relaxes. I become aware that I am thinking clearly. Problems are sorted.

© *Teresa Morgan*



WIND - HAIKU

Litter, careless and
Carefree, liberated by
Uprooting nature.

Tireless sandpaper
Storm scours beach, whirlpools bereft
Tide pockets, long left.

© *Mikki Wilde*

AT HOME, OR

Arrangements

Nativity

Travelling

Illuminations

Colourfulness

Invitations

Presents

Activities

Treats

Involvement

Outings

Nightclubs

TOO MANY OTHER PLACES

Anguish

Nightmares

Terror

Incendiaries

Chaos

Impotence

Poverty

Anxiety

Torment

Inactivity

Oppression

Nothingness

© Patsy Paterson



WIND - HAIKU

Grinning southwest wind
Mischievously tugs frilly
Garments from taut line.

© Mikki Wilde

ROOM WITH A VIEW

Gazing from the window of the residential home
The book slipped slowly from her hand.
Alice drifted back in time,
She was running in the sand.
Seventy summers come and gone
Since she was seventeen;
Her mind did all the running now,
Leisurely, serene.

There was a time when Alice ran
On cinder tracks of old.
She proudly held the Union flag
And led her team to gold.
She swapped her spikes for sturdy boots
To conquer alpine climbs
And there she met the man she loved;
They were the best of times.

She answered the call to do her bit
And flew the Spitfire planes,
From the factories to the fields,
Where above, boys died in flames.
She would have fought with those heroes
But times were different then,
Though in the clouds she knew that she
Could fly like the Brylcreem men.

When children passed, Alice would wave
And remember when she taught,
With chalk upon the blackboard
And no online support.
The brainy ones flew high, like her
But they were far and few
While others cleaned the windows
That Alice was looking through.

ROOTED

There was a white horse grazing in the field at the time of my rooting, my grounding. I remember that he was curious as he ambled up each day to see who the interloper was in amongst the small yellow flowers.

Buttercups, I have since learned. They reappear each year you know, clothing the hillside with gold.

I stand proud. I stand tall. Visually beautiful, some assert. Not everyone's view. I will be older than some of you, my readers, though not all. I soar into the sky like the birds. How I wish they would be my friends and perch on me as they do on the trees and the hedges.

My power is undisputed; this is my strength. Sunny days are the best. I can gaze out over the landscape and see my fellow companions, about a quarter of a mile away. As a group we are majestic. I look across hills and valleys to the industrial lands, cranes and power stations. I'm very lucky to be where I am, rather than in an urban landscape; I realise this. I used to glitter more but not so much these days. However, the precision of my latticed body can still draw favourable comments and appreciation I understand. Perhaps you belong to this organisation. I'm like an iron person they say.

I like to think that I am joined to others by long strands of potent liquorice. I learned that from some walkers who stood near me a few weeks ago. I like to hear such conversations; it breaks the regularity and monotony of being unable to move from this spot. Occasionally children play in our field. They egg each other on to climb me. Thank goodness nobody has. They would sizzle and drop.

On misty, foggy days strange things happen to me sometimes. I hear a crackling noise. Moisture condenses on my insulators. It causes a high resistance path so that some of the electricity passes down to earth. The voltage causes the air to ionise and, when ionised, those ions will discharge and cause this crackling sound. It is quite a sensation I can tell you.

In the wind there will be a whistling sound as the air rushes over, round and through me. I like to hear these sounds, because although I have my fellows it is a rather lonely existence I lead. In storms the animals shelter, but never near me. I always enjoy receiving visitors from time to time to

ensure my efficiency and to maintain the integrity of my insulators. This is most important.

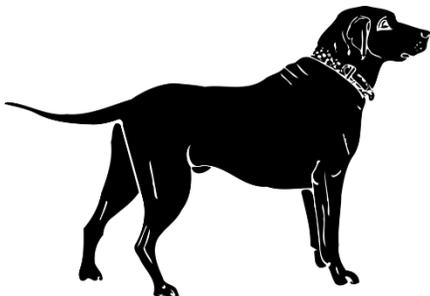
What of my future? Our future, my companion TTs and I, some of whom have been around for nearly ninety years. My kind is under threat. I've heard whispers that although I won't be obsolete I will be superseded by a younger more attractive but shorter model. With dangly earrings if you can believe that. It's all to do with being environmentally friendly so we have heard. And these earring supports will be painted! I wish that I was a lovely bright blue colour, with red liquorice. Ah well. Progress I suppose. Also liquorice underground in the future. How the fields and hills will change. More space, then, for white horses to roam. The farmers will still get paid though, I'm sure.

What's that I can see far, far away in the distance in the water? Lots of tall windmill like structures. I wonder what the sea creatures think of them. If only I could stride over there.

© Mikki Wilde

TEMPERATURE

The vet likes Polly, and our Polly likes the vet
He says that she's the fittest dog that he has ever met.
She's loved every check-up
From when she was a pup,
Even for injections, she gently gives her paw.
But pick up a thermometer – her bottom hits the floor!



© Patricia Brown

OUT OF THE BLUE

At the end of the war in 1945 two young girls were gathering wild flowers in a meadow by the side of Winchester Road as it dips down towards Blaby. It was a warm, cloudless, sunny day; quiet and peaceful with only the occasional rumble of a car or the infrequent bus passing by. At this slightly elevated level there was a clear view of the edge of Blaby over fields that now contain large housing estates.

This peaceful scene was broken by a loud engine roar coming from the nearby village of Whetstone. The girls assumed that it was the usual sound that the huge factory in that village known locally as "Power Jets" regularly blasted the area with to exercise the jet-powered engines that were being developed there.

The noise was replaced by the sound of an engine that was drawing nearer to their field. The girls stopped their flower gathering and looked in that direction. Then "out of the blue" there appeared a plane. It was almost overhead and the girls watched as it started to roll over to its left. To their amazement it completed the circle and levelled out again. It flew on beyond the trees and out of sight

The sound of its engine could still be heard and it was obvious that the plane was returning. Again, directly above the meadow where the girls were standing it rolled to its left and onto its back. As it moved forward it failed to return to its normal position. Its nose dipped as it dropped towards the village of Blaby and plunged into the ground. The girls stood frozen to the spot and gazed at the huge cloud of black, swirling smoke climbing up through the clear sky. The thudding sound that followed was frightening. They rushed to the field gate and along the road to their homes.

It was some time before more details of what happened reached the ears of their parents as there were few telephones and no local radio news in those days. Word was passed round at the local shops and by neighbours and eventually the story appeared in the Leicester newspapers.

The aerial display was meant to be the main event at a sports day for employees at "Power Jets" and the villagers of Whetstone to compensate for the continuous upheaval caused by the noise from the testing of the jet engines. The pilot was the chief test pilot.

In 2015 a seat and commemorative plaque in honour of the pilot were placed at the site of the crash which is now an extension to the Blaby cemetery. The ceremony was attended by his wife, daughter and grandchildren and was followed by a civic reception in Blaby.

© Anne Tester



LISTS

Tent
Water
Food
Portable cooker
Cooking utensils
Clothing
First Aid kit
Torch
Bedding



List of items for a happy summer camping holiday.



Tent
Water
Food
Portable cooker
Cooking utensils
Clothing
First Aid kit
Torch
Bedding

List of life-saving essentials for emergency disaster relief.

© Josephine Rainer

A CHANCE MEETING?

He was standing on the corner at the end of the road, waiting. He was hoping that she would come along soon. She often came this way. She lived in the house with the large wooden gates just within eyesight of where he was. He knew her place well because whenever he could, he would wander along, passing her house. He took particular notice of times and if he were lucky, before long she would be walking towards him. Sometimes she came with an elderly man whose feet shuffled rather and sometimes she was with a woman leaning on a stick, for support. She was rarely with both of them and occasionally she was alone. He really hoped today she would be on her own. He thought she was pretty, moved with dainty steps, and had such a jaunty air and bright alert eyes, always looking this way and that.

The evening was still, quiet, very few cars passed by. The trees were beginning to lose their leaves and the pavement was littered with a colour that rustled when disturbed. It was not yet dark but that time when light begins to fade just a little, a suggestion that dusk is on its way. He was watching more intently now, surely it could not be much longer.

With no discernible click from her gate, she peeped out and glanced up and down the road. Then she was coming towards him. There was no one with her - good. Had she noticed that he was there? He didn't want to alarm her and looked nonchalantly away, listening for her footsteps as she got nearer. He knew her name was Tess, but he wasn't going to make any sound, not yet. As she got closer he thought she slowed a little and he made a move to walk in front.

She was obviously not being coy or shy as she continued to walk along, easily catching up with him. They glanced at each other knowingly and scampered off into the bushes at the edge of the recreation ground across the way; two excited fox terriers, purposeful, briefly free spirited and happy.

© *Ruth Westley*

ANTICIPATION

Why do I anticipate?

I anticipate because I want to see your face light up,
To see the creases in your face and the light in your eyes.
It gives me a warm feeling inside, like drinking mulled
Wine on a cold winter's morning or eating a hot sausage roll.

Where is anticipation?

It's inside you as the policeman approaches after you sped home late,
After that work party, or because you haven't seen your children today.
It's in your stomach, tightly wrapped and parcelled as you cross
The threshold of bosses' gilded palace of hostility,
Decorated with threats and failed ambition.
It's in there, inside you waiting to be stirred;
It slumbers and only dies with you

What is anticipation?

Anticipation is what you hope for, what you long for, not what you expect.
It's that sense of dread and wonder, mixed in with expectation and
Resignation. Not dread or fear, not unconfined joy or excessive frivolity,
Just the tension that comes with an event or occurrence.
Remember, you can't anticipate a surprise!

When will anticipation occur?

Birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries of various sorts, it can even occur
Unexpectedly. Women and proposals of marriage mingle here.
These are the ordered occasions.
Try a disciplinary, dealing with a dispute with an unfriendly neighbour.
Not all anticipation is located in the pleasure zone
But on all occasions it's accompanied by some tension.

Anticipation

The Rockies may crumble and Gibraltar may tumble
But we need anticipation as much as we need fear and love.
To keep us alive and make being alive worthwhile.
It's the essence of growing; Christmas and birthdays when we are young
And making and building relationships.
Even when we get older we need anticipation - to fire the sense of
Wonder and to help raise our expectations.
I now anticipate a round of applause.
Merry Christmas!

© *Graham Surman*



AN ACROSTIC - UNPREDICTABLE

To all the writers in the U3A
Will your work be *able* today?

Unpredictable	-	occasionally
Notable	-	generally
Pleasurable	-	infinitely
Remarkable	-	frequently
Enviably	-	sometimes
Despicable	-	never
Improbable	-	perhaps
Capable	-	obviously
Treasonably	-	unlikely
Agreeable	-	certainly
Believable	-	possibly
Laudable	-	definitely
Enjoyable	-	always

© *Shirley Wilding*

RELIEF

I should have gone before I left Gina's. My old Nana used to say, "Always go before you leave the house." Such wise advice, especially for the young, and normally advice I follow, especially as I get older. So what made me think, that after three cups of tea, that I could ignore it on this occasion?

Perhaps that I was only a fifteen-minute drive away from home? Big mistake! I am now ten minutes from home, and trying to take my mind off the fact that I really need to go. It was good to see Gina, but her news about Martin and Sylvia splitting up after fifty years of marriage, really shocked me. They always seemed so happy together – the perfect couple. Why, after fifty years together? Apparently, Sylvia had met someone new and gone to live with him, but that is a helluva decision to make after fifty years of marriage. Maybe the grass will turn out not to be so green . . .

Oh! Traffic lights coming up – please stay on green; please, please – yes! Thank you, God.

At last house in sight – pull into the drive – dash to the door – why won't the key turn – wrong key. I'm in and drop bag, keys in the hall, dash up the stairs – pants down – bum on seat . . .

A-a-a-a-a-a-r-h! Heaven!

© *Teresa Morgan*

WIND - HAIKU

Fog encased, she floats,
Windless in mid Atlantic.
Helpless ghost, she waits.

© *Mikki Wilde*

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Oak
Tree seed
Grows penetrating root
Green unfurling upright shoots
Sapling, branching twigs, green leaves.
Sturdy trunk, ridged protecting bark, woody
Central power. Mature majestic canopy, fertile strength
Creating welcome shade for browsing cows,
Holes for hungry fledgling owls.
High winds bring stresses,
Old wood groans
Acorns fall,
Anew



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Up
Veins pump
High blood pressure
Swallow little white pills.
One problem solved, another looms
Swollen ankles, fluid retention, doctor again.
Stop medication, buy monitor, record what happens
Up again. Prescribed differently coloured pills
What results happen with these?
Peruse long scary leaflet.
Watched for signs
No problem
Down

© Ruth Westley

FOCUS

We've just moved house my friend, Sal, and I. We only got together fairly recently. Sal previously lived in a small cramped flat with only street parking for her little old car. Then, when she met me, she made the decision to move to something with a bit more room and now we live in a little semi with a garage. It is in a nice quiet tree-lined road and we both settled in very quickly. We get on very well, Sal and I; she calls me her best pal.

Sal is always up early and we set off for work together before the traffic builds up. She likes to get a good parking space near to the office where she works, so that is where she drops me off. Sal usually manages to get away early at the end of the day then picks me up and we head for home before the main rush hour. She is talking about installing one of those fancy up and over garage doors with remote control – anything to make life easier for both of us.

At the weekends we like to go for a spin in the country. Sal enjoys driving and as for me, I'm game for anything that keeps her happy. Sometimes we go out together in the evening and sometimes she is picked up by one of her friends and they go off together. I don't mind that, as it gives me a chance to relax and contemplate my good fortune in meeting someone like Sal who looks after me so well. At other times we stay in and occasionally have friends round. I am always introduced as Sal's best pal. Sal likes to watch television when we are on our own, but I just like to chill out.

We are very lucky in that we have good neighbours. They often stop to speak to us and have made us feel very welcome, offering advice on the best local amenities, shops, garages etc. Only yesterday when we arrived home from work, a chap from down the road stopped to chat.

"I see you've got a new car", he said. "How do you like it?" Without waiting for an answer he continued, "Love your number plate, PAL 4 SAL. I fancy a Focus myself; can I have a sit in it?"

© Shirley Wilding

IT FELL FROM A GREAT HEIGHT

It fell from a great height just after the storm had subsided. It came tumbling and bouncing down the cliff-face until it came finally to rest on top of all the other pieces of rock that the weather had brought down. Over the millennia it had happened. First a little water had seeped into a tiny crack; then came a series of freezing days and nights. The crack had widened imperceptibly, and a little more water had entered. Over and over and over. Then a tiny plant found a home in the crack, and yet more water had collected, and more freezing took place – expanding the water as it turned to ice until finally, the chunk of rock could no longer cling to its place. The open wound would soon begin to weather – but what of the fallen chunk?

It had a weathered side, of course, and an unweathered one where it had clung heroically to the cliff-face until the inevitable finally happened and it had fallen from that great height to the shingle below. The sea was calmer now, but the incoming tide caressed the rock with its salty kisses before leaving it abandoned like a fickle lover. It lay in the darkness wondering what the future would hold. The lover returned, with yet more gentle caresses before leaving once more as the sun brought in the new day, and with it the people.

They walked along the sands and up into the shingle; the little ones busily collecting shells and pretty pebbles, while the older ones looked for the ideal spot at which to set up their 'day camp'. Yet others walked slowly with their heads down, stopping occasionally to look more closely at a pebble, shell or piece of driftwood. Some, braver than the rest, strayed closer to the cliff-face and peered intently at the debris brought down by the storm.

One lady spied our newly fallen rock, sank to her knees and, grasping the heavy chunk, turned it over with not a little difficulty. She looked up to try and locate its previous home and noticed the fresh scar above, which she studied intently for a while. She looked back at the rock, turned it again, and seemed to be filled with an intense excitement. She gazed upwards yet again, then back at the fallen rock. Next, taking a nearby piece of

driftwood, she pushed it down as hard as she could so that it stood almost upright next to the fallen rock. She looked around slowly and carefully, observing her precise location, before walking hurriedly back the way she had come.

She returned shortly with companions and led them directly to the rock whose location was marked with the driftwood. Excited conversations followed, with much glancing up at the cliff-face and back to the fallen rock. They moved off before the returning tide could catch them out.

The next day, ropes dangled off the cliff-top. A working platform made from a plank suspended between ropes was rigged up, and men with various tools began chipping delicately at the scar. For days they worked, gently nibbling away at the scar.

And so it was that the almost complete backbone of an ichthyosaurus was discovered in the cliff-face. And all because a fragment of rock fell from a great height, and a keenly observant lady, named Mary Anning, realised its significance.

© June Hawkins

(With a nod to 'Remarkable Creatures' by Tracy Chevalier)



WIND - HAIKU

Whiplash wind with waves
Chisel soft white cliffs – create
Secret, hidden caves.

Keening wind threatens
Squat, white, one storey dwellings -
Rarely tempest-torn.

© Mikki Wilde

OUT OF THE BLUE

Out of the blue the flood waters came,
A natural disaster no-one to blame,
Threatening roads, fields, gardens and crops,
Houses, businesses, pubs and shops
Out of utter confusion, there's much to reclaim.

Out of the blue the tsunami came,
A natural disaster no-one to blame,
Bringing chaos, destruction, turmoil and death,
Long before anyone stopped to draw breath,
Where is normality - an impossible aim?

Out of the blue the earthquake came,
A natural disaster no-one to blame,
Causing misery, slaughter, major upheaval,
So hard to move on from this terrible evil,
It's a difficult menace to tame.

Out of the blue assistance came,
Not for money, reward, honour or fame,
Friends, neighbours, strangers,
Ignored all the dangers,
To bring help without any acclaim.

Out of the blue humanity came.
Age, colour and creed all being the same,
When help is needed,
All threats go unheeded,
A spark is turned into a flame.

© Shirley Wilding



REUNION

He'd finally found his long-lost sister. They'd been parted when young. Now a top model, she was flying into Birmingham for a fashion show. She'd meet him at his local train station after her fittings and lunch with the designer.

He finished his morning shift and drove to his local chippy. Impatiently queueing, he became aware of their telly, updating the earlier news of a plane crash-landing. He focused . . . 'Birmingham' . . . 'an early flight from New York' . . . 'casualties' . . . 'injured'. His blood ran cold. He frantically tried ringing the number shown on the screen. Engaged. Every time – engaged. Exasperated, he reached his van, his fingers fumbling as he dialled Naomi's mobile. Nothing. No, not Naomi, not after all this.

He started the van. Where first? Check their meeting place. Shortcut to the level crossing. Barrier down. He could see a train already in. Leaving the van he began to run across the lines.

"Hell's teeth!" Where did *that* train come from?" He speeded up. Nearly across when he caught a glancing blow. Picking himself up, he ran on. Up onto the platform. There she was – looking pale, wan, shocked. He waved and shouted. Reaching Naomi, she appeared indistinct, seemed to float straight through him. What happened to her?

Puzzled, he turned, and saw his own body lying on the track.

© *Patricia Brown*

MEETINGS – HAIKU

Glowing coral clouds
Herald the coming quiet
As day meets the night

Lines of speeding lights
Converge and meld into one
As motorways meet

© *June Hawkins*

A DIAMOND IN THE SKY



Sunrise

Roseate sky

Shimmering golden sphere

Ascending higher and higher

Gliding gracefully across the heavens

Caressing the earth with fickle rays

Hear the silence of the noonday sun

Drifting drowsily through space and time

Descending on its lonely path

Sinking lower and lower

The horizon beckons

Nature's beauty

Sunset



© Shirley Wilding

NOISE OR JUST SOUNDS?

I am watching a lone goldfinch gorge itself on niger seed from a feeder just three metres from where I am sitting in my summerhouse. Every third peck it looks round, acutely aware of any movement or sound. If I was to move or make a noise it would be off! What is amazing is that it is totally unconcerned by the horrible racket that, up to a few moments ago, has been issuing forth from the bottom of my garden. I wish I was!

There has been a continuous rumbling of heavy machinery, piercing the air with its intermittent warning 'beeps'. These are punctuated by almighty crashes from what sounded like a multitude of rocks being dropped from a great height. I imagine the driver in his little cab. Maybe he is re-living his childhood days when he sat on the carpet with his toy digger and happily demolished his newly-built brick tower!

However this was for real. In between these crashes there was the noise of saw on concrete, drill on brick and hammer on wood. Most irritating of all were the voices that were shouting above the persistent music of Radio One! This was the noise of construction and does not engender tolerance! Five large houses are being built on a wild old garden where once the only sounds from there were of birds pronouncing their right to their territory and angry squirrels 'clacking' at their rivals. Thankfully work ceased at four o'clock!

Not only can I hear the busy goldfinch now, its beak tapping on the plastic feeder, but I have become aware of many other noises. Someone starts up a lawnmower, hammers in a post, 'rumbles' a waste bin back into its place. The joyous voices of children free from the restraints of school are carried over the air. A homeward bound helicopter and a light bi-plane pass slowly overhead, each with their distinctive engine noises. High in the clouds is the droning of a long-flight plane making its way northwest with passengers briefly sharing my patch of sky. Amidst the rustling of the dry leaves of the rowan I hear the far-off traffic as everyone makes their way home. I listen to the strident call of the robin claiming his ownership of this particular plot, the distant mewing of buzzards and the splashing of blackbird feathers in the birdbath.

These are background noises, non-challenging and non-intrusive. These are the 'sounds' of a bustling community which I feel part of as I sit in my sheltered garden. I take comfort from the fact that the construction is short-lived. I only hope that those who eventually occupy the new houses will appreciate the difference between 'noise' and 'sounds'.

Meanwhile the goldfinch feeds on. I can still hear the tapping of his beak!

© *Anne Tester*



DEEP

Deep, deep they burrow,
Serpentine, they coil and creep
Thickness variable
Patterning the earth
As branches pattern the sky.
Revealing through transparency
Other lives.

Natural abstract forms in relief,
Tentacles to trip, trap, entwine.
Textured to beguile the walker to
Recall
Fairy tales and lost enchantment,
Rackhamesque.

© *Mikki Wilde*

If you have enjoyed our booklet,
perhaps you might like to join us?

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



Visit our website for more details and
examples of our group's activities:
www.countesthorpeu3a.co.uk

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