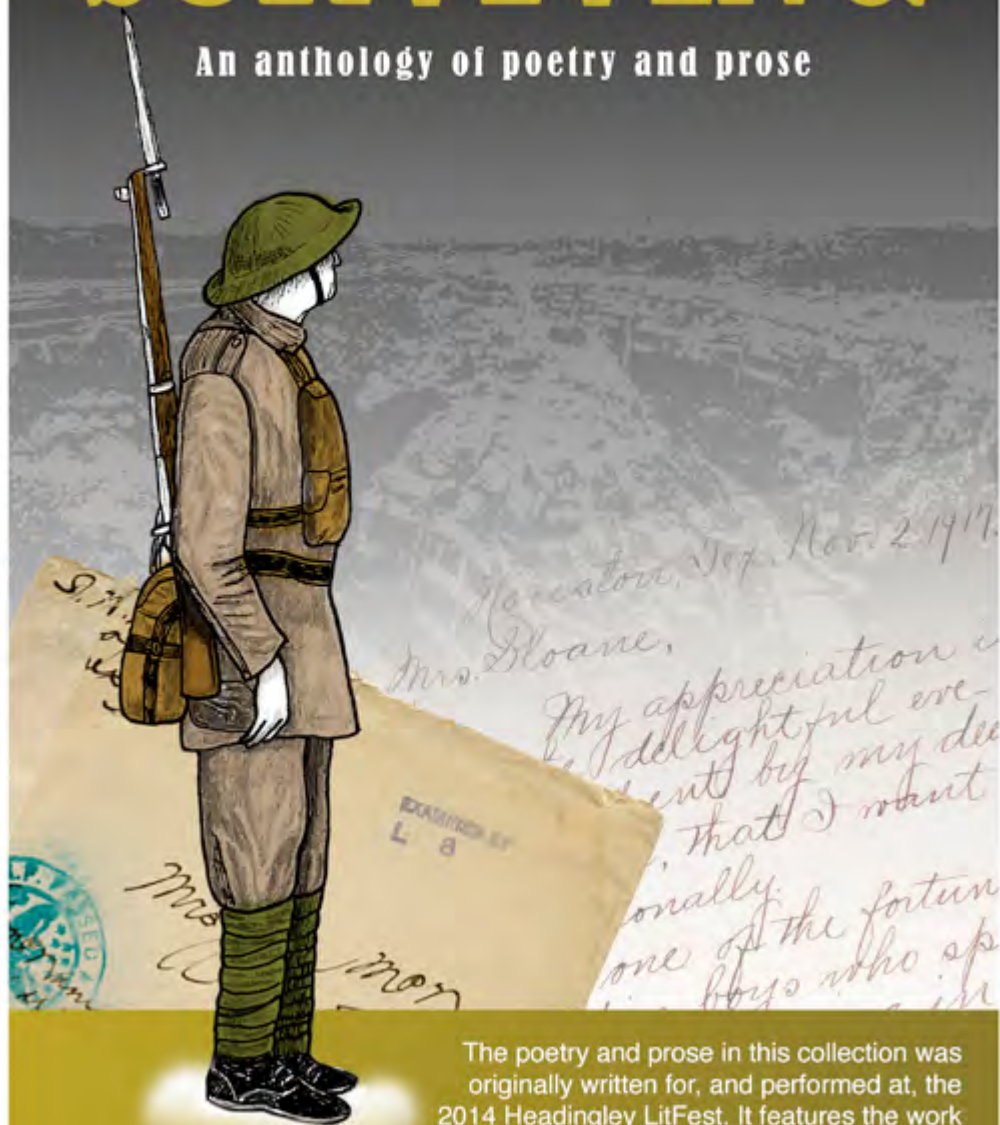


SURVIVING

An anthology of poetry and prose



The poetry and prose in this collection was originally written for, and performed at, the 2014 Headingley LitFest. It features the work of two creative writing classes, both run by the Workers' Educational Association.

SURVIVING – AN INTRODUCTION

by *Alison Taft*

The poetry and prose in this collection was originally written for, and performed at, the 2014 Headingley LitFest. It features the work of two creative writing classes, both run by the **Workers' Educational Association**.

The Headingley Creative Writing Group is held at the Heart Centre in Headingley on a Tuesday morning and is open to anyone with an interest in creative writing. Further details can be found on www.wea.org.uk

The Osmondthorpe Creative Writing Group is held at the Osmondthorpe Hub (previously the Osmondthorpe Resource Centre) in East Leeds. It provides inspiration and support to people who have a physical impairment.

The two groups have met each year for the past five to produce writing for the Headingley LitFest. During this time they have been encouraged, enabled and enthused by David Fletcher, Sally Bavage, Richard Wilcocks, Chris Sharman, Biddy Coghill, James Nash, Adam Roe, Melita Crawford, Becky Cherriman and David Pittaway.

The writers would also like to thank Leeds City Council, The Headingley LitFest, (and especially the cake-makers,) Jimbo's Fund and the Workers Educational Association for their commitment and vision in making this publication possible.

We hope you enjoy **Surviving**.

Supported by

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A STORY OF SURVIVAL

by Carl Flynn

This was the way that the way had to be
I did what I did when I chose to be free
A fight to gain peace and a struggle for health
Or find a high building and killing myself
The battle began when they messed with my head
The abuse I endured and the lies that were said
With my body and soul bouncing off every wall
I wondered if life was worth living at all
Enslaved and imprisoned in a place I called home
I was bled to a husk and then stripped to the bone
But though I could barely remember my name
I knew the abuse wouldn't happen again

Found stood in a corner not saying a word
I'd stay there and make no attempt to be heard
As I desperately struggled and at any cost
To find just a small shred of my confidence lost

Lying alone, through the night in my bed
Thinking about all the things that were said
And with determination racing all through my head
I laid out my plans for the battle ahead
I did what it took to dispel all the gloom
And moved from the fringe to the crowd in the room
With confidence growing I thought, "What the heck"
While I gritted my teeth as I stuck out my neck

I stuck to my goals then, regardless of length
And worked to exhaustion to gather some strength

The road that I walk is both hard and uphill
If there's lesson to learn there then I'll take my fill

Now there's nothing to fear when I switch off the light
If I keep the dreams I acquired through the night
I'm proof of survival, believe what I say,
I'm shouting out loud and I'm walking away.

GRAVESTONES

by Adrian Simmons

“Down the road, out of town south towards Roye, the old road to Paris,” said the *gardien* at the Campsite at Peronne. “It is about a kilometre out of town, on the left, you can’t miss it.”

We set off on our afternoon walk that warm day in September, making the war cemetery part of a circular *randonnet*. Every year when we passed through northern France or Belgium, towing our caravan to or back from holiday, we would pass by war cemeteries, or signs to them. If we had time, or were staying overnight at a campsite in Picardy or Flanders we would search one out and make a visit. It had become almost a compulsion to pay our respects.

Not that we had forebears who had died in the Great War. Two grandfathers had survived. One never talked about his time in France, the other had spent much of the war in Egypt and apart from dysentery had come out of it scot-free.

We expected this allied war cemetery would be little different than the others we had seen. Row upon row upon row of identical small white gravestones, placed absolutely equidistant from each other, set in immaculately kept and edged lawns, each row with a rose bush at both ends. On the face of each stone, a regimental logo at the top and below inscribed the name and rank, the age, the date of death, and often the action in which the soldier had given his life. So many were aged under twenty; many graves bear just the message - an unknown soldier.

However many times one goes to see these lasting memorials to spent youth a lump comes into the throat. There is peace and silence all pervading. Looking at the graves one is aware no longer of wind or rain or the passing traffic. All one can think of is the futility of it all, the unnecessary sacrifice made by a generation of young men who knew not what the war was all about, or what extreme privations would befall them, advancing, retreating, advancing repeatedly for weeks, months on end over the same half mile of no man's land - 'pit ponies led by donkeys'.

Peronne war cemetery was not a large one and rows of gravestones were disposed on three sides of a square. We were alone examining the inscriptions. The customary lump came into the throat as we read off the names and details of the dead in the centre and right hand rows. We turned to the left block of graves, perhaps forty or fifty in number, and read the inscriptions. But they were not what we expected, not what we had seen before.

Each stone bore either a Sikh emblem or writing in Urdu or Hindi. Below were the names and rank – Sepoys, the occasional corporal, Singh, Patel, Khan, Hussain, Without speaking my wife and I looked at each other. There were tears in our eyes, not just a lump in the throat. Why on earth did Kitchener and his cronies bring these poor men thousands of miles to their deaths in the freezing cold mud of Flanders? They would know even less about what they were fighting for than the British Tommie. All soldiers know that their life is at stake, but these Indian soldiers could not have known the conditions in which this war was being fought here in Western Europe. These graves and their occupants, more than anything we have ever seen, underlined, highlighted, augmented all our previous feelings about the so-called Great War.

TRENCH HOLDING

by Howard Benn

O officer of artillery,
Accept this common courtesy
Of whiskey water, and perhaps
An issue cigarette.

I thank you for letting me stand ill-at-ease.
I have but one request.
While the shells have stopped falling,
May I search through the dead?
For my brother's among them, I'm led to believe,
And I've spent this day digging your gutter trench.
He's somewhere in the middle ground,
Between the coils of wire
(Though the middle ground is missing,
Now a resting sea of black).

So I humbly ask
For time to inspect
The Division of Bodily Parts.

I will not hunt for souvenirs:
No German boots, no hand grenades;
My treasure lies with those fallen British
Unable to utter a word,
Their identities wiped from their faces,
Their names in their pay books,
The blue lips shaping
One final curse, that No-Man's-Land
Lies behind us too,
Where the high command
Works out maps of mud
For our men to traverse.

But you say you must carry out orders.
You are here to deliver your fireworks,
To clog up the air with your orange flares,
Make a metal sky, where bullets and shells
Form in acrid fumes, like stars in gas
Where worlds will live again.

So you send out your message,
Blind our ears and minds,
And scatter the bones of your enemy,

Which land like seeds on unfertile ground
 (Ask my brother, should he be...).
My gunner guests, your fun is over.
Depart, and we'll take the retaliation,
Try our best to ignore the shooting
 Pains that strike the nerves
 Of legs that slip and slide
 Till stand-to is over;
Then we'll sip our tea, brewed eloquently
 In water from petrol cans.

From boredom to terror to boredom again,
 We'll keep on trench-holding,
 Constructing the hole,
Extending our sewer both left and right,
 So the rats will have a clear run
 Down this open barrel, where
 I found a German officer,
 Who smiled and presented
His Iron Cross, which fell at my feet
 When I pulled my spade away.
 These frequent exhumations,
These violations of the human soul

Make us wretch in our boots,
As we wonder if
This position will change hands again.
Still, you mustn't delay,
You must be away to the next front line,
Which one day, no doubt,
Will meet up with our own.
For us, this trench is never-ending.

A message for home, if you please.
Tell them we are living still,
But missing, believed dead.

SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS

by Jenny Ruddock & Paul Jeffrey

Jenny and Paul like to go to Skegness for their holidays. They like it there because it is nice and flat, so Paul is able to walk and Jenny can use her wheelchair. They enjoy meeting other deaf people when they are on holiday. They also enjoy the food, drink and shows at Butlin's. One year Paul paid for a scooter with four wheels. And there was a time when Jenny's wheelchair broke down. It ran out of petrol, so she had to get more.

SURVIVING

by Lynn Alexander

You see. He didn't understand. Telling him that the difficulty was mostly because his Venus was placed in Scorpio, would simply add to the Eton Mess.

Butterfly wings are flapping. Are they causing someone I know to stir, way beyond the equator?

I sit within my haven of space and equanimity and listen to the hum of quiet. No owls. A door slams shut. I am alone – again.

The numbness of separation blankets the cold of anguish. We tumbled and tousled around of differences and culture. There is a calm that resides in the heart when the fighting is done.

I gather together nuts and bolts the held us together for so long and look at how to recycle the unwanted items of our chapters. What can now be planted? Seeds of hope, bulbs of strength. Roses of love.

I will buy a flamboyant red rose for him and leave it by his doorstep accompanied with a tortured letter of thankfulness and regret.

Venus in Scorpio. One who has the tendency to possess. One who attempted to capture a butterfly but didn't see the hole in the net.

Flying gives movement to wings and stirs the warm oceans far beyond the equator.

BIRDMAN

by Karen Byrne

At first he appears as a grotesque monster, I don't want to have his image in my brain. After a moment I dare to gaze on him, to see him, to give him time.

Who is he? Where has he come from? Where is he going? This quizzical creature elicits these questions.

The painfully emaciated frame, green stinking trench mud forming him, sticking to him, weighing him down. He touches my heart with his youth, with his weariness. The dark small eyes stare, unseeing into the distance, he has no need for words to tell his story.

A young man, prematurely aged, with rosy, freckled skin now burnt and patchy like a worn leather football: his proud nose squashed and broken. The mouth once smiling, set like stone. But he holds his head erect, despite the heavy load upon it.

His whole statue is long and tall and purposeful, he's a survivor of sorts. The sparrow thin legs carry him onwards, supporting his broken ribs. His dignified gate belies his butchered arms and the heaviness he carries on his back, in his head.

He is soldiering on, as he's been trained to, but he's leaving one battlefield to face yet another unknown theatre. He won't return to golden summer days where he once laughed and shone.

SURVIVING WINTER

by Winkie Whitely

The quivering daffodils in the park
Bright yellow and green
Came out in the blazing springtime sun
Through the winter the bulbs were safe underground
The soil like a continental quilt, keeping them warm
Now squashed in a pot, on a table in Osmondthorpe
In the creative writing group.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

by Cate Anderson

Ooh, yeah, that's better. Don't know what came over me. Never seen a dead body before - must be the shock - y'know what it's like - not that I had much to do with her.

Didn't think there was anything wrong at first. Just didn't feel right, door open that early. I gave a shout but no-one answered - then I saw her - on the settee - just lying there.

Thought she was asleep, or passed out - I gave her a poke, and I knew. You do, don't you? When something's not right. Eugh! Touching a dead body like that - makes me feel funny just to think about it. Ran out as quick as you like, called 999.

What do you want to know, Officer? Not that I can tell you much. Like I say - never really knew her. Kept herself to herself. And that son of hers - never had a word to say to anyone. Poor little sod. I could tell she was on drugs. I said to my husband, Dave, she'd come to a bad end. And that bloke she moved in. Screaming and shouting at all hours.

The language. Well! Effing this and effing that. I'm sure he was knocking her about. These houses - walls like paper ... Mind you - wasn't like that when she first came. Real stuck up cow - all proper coffee and smelly candles. The little boy was a lovely kid then, always laughing, loved my Dave. Be outside with his ball waiting for him to come home from work so they'd have a kick about. No-one else to play with see. Don't know what the council was thinking of - sticking a family out here. How was she supposed to live, with a kiddie to bring up? But she said she liked it, liked the peace and quiet. She found a job in the village, some sort of teaching in the community centre. They run all sorts there now. Course -

changed when she started seeing that bloke. I used to keep an eye on the kiddie when she first knew him – so she could go out. Then she started bringing him back here and he moved in as quick as you like. Knew a good thing when he saw it. That sort always do. Didn't like the boy though – you could tell. He didn't work, lazy sod. A real lay about – never liked him. Couldn't trust him. He'd before nice as pie to your face – but Dave and me - we could hear what was going on next door.

That's when the boy started to change – after he moved in. Sullen like, wouldn't look you in the eye or talk to you after. Never seemed – cared for – know what I mean? He must have been going to the big school in town by then. Old enough to get himself there. They never took him.

She lost that job in the community centre – must be about a year ago now. You could see her going down hill. Stopped going out much – let herself go. We was worried about the boy really, but when they start growing up it's difficult to know what to do for the best. And once you get the social involved that's it – isn't it? And what could we have said? You just hear things and see stuff and you start to put two and two together... There was nothing you could really put your finger on. And at the end of the day – you don't want to cause trouble for people, do you?

RIBBON

by Caroline Wilkinson

Fluttering ribbon distracts my numbed stare,
Your free and illogical path shines light across my stubborn,
resentful connection.

A loved child, turning, you hook your gaze and I break my view.
My tarnishing sorrow should not be shared.

The feasting hole grows no smaller each day, though the wind
carries your curiosity; shaking and warming its edges.
Nothing to give, this icy shiver reminds me.

Running up, your ribbon dances to the beats of damp leaves.
“Hello nice to meet you.”
Is it?

Unfamiliar words echo, I close my eyes, to make them stop.
More questions, ones that puncture, don’t follow.

Instead you sit and we both stare, patiently, waiting for
something to catch our eye.
The far off flock gracefully waves, “Look” you say pointing,
“Beautiful”, I reply.

Absence sends panic; your Mother's head spins and scans.

“Molly!” She screams, breaking your marvel at
the flight in unison.

Sliding your feet firmly on the ground you say goodbye,
I nod in return, and you lift a warm smile on this
sagging face of mine.

Shuffling round in my seat, I trace fingertips along your name,

Having rejected it so far, thank you my love.

I'll go now, you wouldn't want me to catch my death in this
cold.

EAST OF ENGLAND

- An Extract from a Novel by P.D. Newton

This is an extract from my first novel 'East of England'. There are some things you need to know.

It's a story about a husband and wife. This scene is set in July, 1966 in Felixstowe, England.

The man and woman are Yugoslavian. They last saw each other in Belgrade of 6th April 1941 when he left to go to war.

In the 1950's she attempted to find him through a special agency in London. She wrote him a letter but he did not reply.

In spring 1966 she wrote another letter. This time, eventually, he replied. She came to England. When she got there she found he had a problem, a problem you will only find out about if you buy the book!

The other thing you need to know is that after the war the Yugoslavian government collectivised many flats owned by the middle classes.

P.D. Newton

East of England – Mrs Karlovic's flat

She looked directly at him. He looked back. Slowly, she lifted herself from her chair. She leant forward, over the table. He did not move. The bottom of her jacket hung over the plate; its edge touched the fork. It slid silently over the greased plate and clattered on the floor; neither heard. Her hands moved to his cheeks, gripped and squeezed. She twisted his head a centimetre to the left and pulled it towards hers.

‘I beat them in the end. I beat them.’ Her breath bounced back at her from his face. He did not flinch. ‘But you don’t even know who they are, do you?’

His empty eyes looked back; she rocked his head, left then right, and she remembered.

The collectivisation of the flat. Five families living where there had only been him, her and the child; all widows and their children. The constant petty squabbles over food, washing, kids. Their despair when she had received that letter from the agency, a secret revealed by their daughter against ceaseless taunting; their boundless, hateful joy when there was no reply to hers. How they had grown fat whilst hopeless silence kept her thin. How she used her slim, hurting body to wound so deep it killed the bullying of women whose girth and ugliness only grew. How her clothes, her smart old clothes, worn in the sacred name of austerity, clung to her slender lines as they always had. How that clinging twisted the knife in the fat old widows’ wounds, and deep in their heads boiled up their envy of a lost age they thought golden for her and cruel to them.

And how she had won; and how that victory was against them, against all like them, and yes, against him, against the ghost that had been him.

And how, in this victory, she had... not... needed.... to... come.

And through all this she rocked his head in her tight grip, slowly side to side.

And she said none of this.

And she looked down into those dark, empty eyes.

And he offered her no resistance.

HAPPINESS OF DAFFODILS

by Sue Heath

There were three young daffodils called Fred, John and Peter who were juvenile daffodils hoping to grow bigger next Spring. They were soft, good to touch, delicate, beautiful, yellow with dark trumpets sitting still in their pots on the ground, turning their heads towards the sun. They needed to survive snow, ice and freezing temperatures like us, staying strong so they would come up every year. They make us feel deliriously happy and glad about Spring.

LEEDS UNITED

- *Keep on Trying by Richard Sharp*

They have got a lot of money

One day they are doing ok

They've got millions in the bank

Then the very next day

It's all gone away

And they are skint!

Where did the money go?

(In Ken Bates' pocket)

They pay their players too much money

They spend it all on good living

They don't really care

But they are in the Championship

I hope they win (Go On Leeds!)

Come on Leeds

STRETCHER BEARER

by Malcolm Henshall

I got the idea to write about stretcher-bearers from a talk given by Richard Wilcocks. Whilst doing a very small amount of research I came across a poem by Tommy Crawford written in 1916. Whilst the prose piece is fiction written by me, the poem is very definitely written by Tommy Crawford.

Malcolm Henshall

My name is Tommy Crawford. I am 114 years old. Don't raise your eyes. This is creative writing. I died in 1980 really but for the sake of this exercise just imagine I'm still alive.

I was a stretcher-bearer back then, when I was 19. I was in the battalion band, played the drum but we were given this extra job. Others were conscientious objectors, Quakers. Don't let anyone tell you those men were cowards.

I bumped into a young lad the other day, told me he was a stretcher bearer, too. At football matches. I had a real devil of a job getting him to understand the difference.

He said he got things thrown at him from the crowd.

'Right', I said. "But now listen. After heavy rain it took four of us, sometimes six, to carry the stretcher, our feet sticking in the mud". He just couldn't understand the effort it took to carry a twelve stone man across those rain sodden god forsaken fields. All he could say was, "Tell me about it". So I tried.

"Whilst we were being bombed and shot at, the smoke billowing around, making it hard to see, we had to make sure to keep the stretcher still. The pain of shattered bone-

ends grating together could be so intense the wounded man sometimes died of the shock”.

My companion looked into the middle distance. I felt like shaking him.

I continued. “We were dodging bullets and shrapnel, not rolled up programmes and empty plastic bottles. The enemy were trying to kill us, not jeer at us. One time I was carrying the stretcher, tripped over a clump of something or other, put my hand down to steady myself. The earth gave way and I found I was clutching, not a fistful of mud, but the blackened face of a half-buried dead soldier”.

My young friend seemed to be paying more attention now. Death has that effect on people. “Times **have** changed, I guess”, he said.

I went on. “The people we are carrying have changed, too. Men who walked into certain death and destruction, far from home, lying wrecked, bleeding, quietly waiting and hoping. Your footballers rolling around in agony yet walking a few moments later. We were sent into the most dangerous, dark, hellish places. Casualties, hanging, by a thread, on to life, strewn everywhere, yet there were always men ready to volunteer for the job. It was hard to find the dead and injured out there. Some, then, thought it glorious, many still do, but I’m not so sure....

THE STRETCHER BEARER

(1916) Tommy Crawford

My stretcher is one scarlet stain,
 And as I tries to scrape it clean,
 I tell you what – I'm sick of pain,
 For all I've heard, for all I've seen;
 Around me is the hellish night,
 And as the war's red rim I trace,
 I wonder if in Heaven's height
 Our God don't turn away his face.
 I don't care whose the crime may be,
 I hold no brief for kin or clan;
 I feel no hate, I only see
 As man destroys his brother man;
 I wave no flag, I only know
 As here beside the dead I wait,
 A million hearts are weighed with woe,
 A million homes are desolate.
 In dripping darkness far and near,
 All night I've sought those woeful ones.
 Dawn suddens up and still I hear
 The crimson chorus of the guns.
 Look, like a ball of blood the sun
 Hangs o'er the scene of wrath and wrong,
 "Quick! Stretcher-bearers on the run!",
 Oh Prince of Peace! How long, how long?"

COME ALONG WITH ME

by Michael Patrick Taylor

Shaking Stevens got up early for school. He drank a strong cup of coffee and grabbed his lunch – a crusty white bread cheese sandwich.

He was learning to play cricket. He was very good at cricket. He had a difficult relationship with his parents.

When he was much younger, he overheard a song on the radio which changed his life. He started to sing. As time went on he sang more. He played cricket and his relationship with his parents seemed less important. What did he care? He could sing! The more he was picked on and called Shaking Steven Custard, the just sang! He stood in front of his mirror and sang every morning to strengthen his spirit.

MY LITTLE SOLDIER

by Janice Maldonado

John, John, the farmers hand
Found himself in no man's land
The only prayer that he could pray
Was over the hills and far away

One two, one two, one two
lucky lucky lucky
Keep me strong and plucky

Da da, Da da, Da da
One two, one two, one two
Foggy foggy foggy

Poppies Poppies Poppies
Pop pop pop
Stop! stop! stop!

His friends were laid
and John was saved
and John went wailing over graves

Dada Dada Dada

THE SURVIVAL OF SIGNIFICANCE

by Carol Swift

I read his poem and found his meaning –
It was about meaning
What could I add for I couldn't say it better.
But I would like to say something of my own.
I don't believe in an out there God though I could maybe talk a
little about the Divine.
The beloved hills, that might convey something,
Or,
Wet winter trees in moonlight against a midnight sky,
Their branches not the known lacework of white
But lovelier still for that sudden seeing with the innocence of
children
Their bejewelled branches.
That gets nearer to it
But it has been done before.
I could look for it or lack of it,
in past infant turmoil
watching over myself lest the cataclysmic disconnection should
eclipse the light plunging my world into a burning catastrophic
darkness - a million nights of an obliterating blood red sun and
it's madness of grief.
But truly, only a body memory remains of that an early
separation from my mother.

Better by far, I think, to recall the way I set out grey as the dawn

that still was not quite breaking,
on a coach returning from Paris.
Intent not to waste the day in a dozy drowse or retrieving
night's lost hours of sleeping,
I sat gathered.
I could be at work, thought I,
My last of day's morning light might break like now,
Slowly, as if reluctant, lighting up the underbelly of low hanging
clouds.
No! Awake I'll be.
Much on that day was given,
Experience yes, but of a different order:
rising light of dawning day roused up my coach companions -
now friends - through shared laughter at the film with Depardieu
on the overhead screen,
hearing and seeing simultaneously a Mozart symphony and
landscape's lights and colours,
walking in keen, bright air with energy's elation
resting quietly in self, during the channel crossing.
And the best was yet to come!
It took four hours in those days to travel from Victoria to
Bradford and all were spent in *such* communion.
She told me – only at the end, on parting, that her name was
Sylvia, but we didn't need to tell, or arrange to meet again, for
we had MET so completely.
I remember well what we talked of:
her concern for a nervously ill daughter, tentatively, pausing to
rest in the space we had created,

the dark, stormy day I stayed with my mother's cheyne stroke
breathing till she died, and how the peace in the room was
palpable when she eventually passed,
Together we contemplated the fear and significance of losing
one's mother.

Incredible it seems it seems to me now, as if we'd known
each other forever, how easily we slid from that intensity into
conversation about a shared acquaintance, a medical man.
She said that in spite of the apparent absence in his outward
manner, he was a caring person.

However, it is this to which I come, that tells you best what I am
trying to convey.

Our compartments light now were lit!

All around us, before playing cards, now with drooped heads on
shoulders were - and silent and asleep.

Only from these things did I know of time's passing.

From dawn to dusk that day

Given magic moments of 'isness' strung together like beads
everything connecting.

They call it the eternal now!

Even after that it still continued. I was completely in love with
the taxi driver throughout our conversation of ordinary things
though we'd never met before.

It is said that the cosmos itself is a vast communion event,
And our lives are the universe become conscious.

How about that then!

SURVIVING ONE WORD

by Lee Rowley

Mandy was middle aged
She was strong and quiet and proud
She held a one word secret
From the prying crowd

Driving nine to five
To her office job
Home for tea by six
Then chilling like a slob

Mandy watched her man
Watch their favourite soap
Wondering what to tell him
Wondering if he'll cope

In her mind she's shaking
On the one word fence
As her husband sits there
Feeling very tense

He looks back at Mandy
“Is it true what I’ve heard?
That you are trying to say
One short word”

The relief slowly builds
As conversation flows
But their lips can’t say
What each of them knows

WOMAN OF STRENGTH

by Val Wright

She creeps through life, this woman of strength
Timid and unassuming
While all around her, people (mainly men I must say)
Posture and pontificate
Giving her the benefit of their unasked for
and irrelevant advice.

She creeps through life, this woman of strength
Timid, apologetic and unassuming
After all she is to blame for much that is wrong in society
She is the feckless, the useless, the burden
The burden on us all
THE SINGLE MOTHER

Husband walked out on her and the children
Left her for a younger model who wore short skirts
and didn't argue
But he is not to blame for leaving
Oh no, he had no choice.
He had no choice because **she let herself go**
Which is an unforgiveable sin.
She let herself go during the long sleepless nights

With the baby who screamed and twisted in her arms

The angry child born too soon, refusing to be loved.

She let herself go, loving and grieving for
what might have been.

However grief can bend but not break

Sadness turns into reflection

Adversity triggers steely survival

And abandonment becomes a gift.

Victims transform into non victims.

Slowly the burden is lifted

And the victim becomes the woman of strength

Creeping no more but standing up tall and straight

With no apology

SURVIVING THE WAR

by Mandy Hudson

People fighting to keep the war going, children and families
crying about the war

They hope the war will end very soon

Because they have lost loved ones, over the years

Because of the war.

GRIDLOCK ON A SNOWY NIGHT

by Rod Jeffries

Twenty silent statues
in cubicles of air
stare steadfastly
at the misted windows

a necklace of ruby lights
strings out on the frozen road
ahead

only the diesel heart-beat
of the bus
signifies life

a chime from a handbag
an embarrassed fumble
and a cheerful voice
dispels our reticence

as time goes by
strangers smile
swap tales
and confidences

suddenly we move
the red lights stretch out slowly
shops and houses whiz by
emotions are clawed back
lips pursed
and a dignified silence is resumed

SURVIVING POVERTY

by Jane Moody

Erin is not an ordinary little girl, she has a swollen belly
She doesn't have the luxury other children have of getting
jelly.

Erin lives in Ethiopia, she is six years old
And she lost her mother, this leaves her soul cold.

Every day she walks down to the well
Three hours there and three hours back
In the dry salt heat
It's a long way for her sore feet

She collects dirty soiled water, then takes it to her brothers
and sister to wash their skin and drink
They know it's not clean, it stinks!

Erin and her family grow onions and peppers;
They keep a goat for meat and milk and keep a group of
chickens.

There is not enough food to go around
When the crops don't grown in the dry cracked ground

THE TWO PHOTOGRAPHS

by Robert Thorpe

James went to war to fly spitfires and to get Germans. Here is his letter to his sweetheart in England.

Dear Liz

I got 96 German planes. I was so frightened. I want to get a ring for my darling Liz (and flowers and chocolates)

Will you marry me?

James

YOU COULD SAY...

by Myrna Moore

You could say:

'They came, they saw, they conquered'

but that would not explain

how they survived

how they thrived

Goodbye

Farewell

So long...

bright

light

skies

until...

New skies

grey fog smog

and drizzle

Closed shores

'No Irish, no dogs, no Blacks'

Closed doors

Closed minds

but buoyed
by memories
Friends
Associates
Communities emerged

Strong
bold
determined
to make a good life
to make life good
to bring about change

Like others before
them
who came saw and conquered
The Mother Land

THE GREAT ESCAPE

by Michael Freeman

I was shaking.

I didn't like water at the best of times and avoided swimming pools, unless they were adjacent to a five star hotel. But here I was, trapped inside a small metal cage that was slowly filling with water.

I was dressed in swimming trunks and a large, yellow inflatable life vest. A cloth belt was wrapped around my waist which had two stands flapping behind. I also wore a nose clip and a pair of goggles.

I am nervously waiting for my turn to enter the escape tank that was adjacent to my metal cage.

My prison was 10 metres down from the surface of a huge circular tank that was 30 metres deep. I was a member of a small group of recruits who were completing their submarine training.

The Navy felt it would be a good idea for submariners to learn how to escape from a submarine.

I was praying that it wouldn't be too long before the water stopped flooding in. The level was now around my waist. I was beginning to get very worried.

'Stand by. Inflate your vest,' our instructor barked his orders as I shuffled up to a round hatch that had just opened. The water in my prison had equalised with the pressure of water in the main tank.

'Don't forget to breathe out. Do not hold your breath. If you do you will die.' This command sent shivers through me, as I desperately tried to remember what had been taught in the classroom the previous day: 'You will enter the main

tank backwards, two of our divers will swim across from their respective air locks and help you. Place both your arms by your side. Look upwards and breathe out. You will travel upwards at one foot per second. Think pink balloons and you won't have any problems.'

Sounds simple, until it actually happens, sheer panic took over. I backed up towards the open hatch as I was slowly pulled into the tank by one of the divers who had swam across from an air lock and had grabbed hold of my straps.

I found myself isolated inside a tank full of warm water. I could clearly see the surface as the inside of the tank is lit up so well it can be observed by the Officer in Charge sitting in an observation platform peering through a large piece of glass so he could observe every action.

'I must get to the surface,' I thought. So I started to hold my breath and start to swim upwards. Bad idea. Within a second I felt a light thump in the middle of my stomach. I could clearly see one of the divers signalling wildly to breathe out. His companion was behind me forcing my arms down by my side.

'Better do as I'm told,' I thought. I puckered my lips and made a concentrated effort to obey. Within ten seconds I arrived on the surface of the tank, gasping and choking like a beached whale and feeling acutely embarrassed.

'No problem,' I praised myself as I was helped out of the water by the staff who looked at me with cold stares.

In an hour's time I was to repeat the same exercise at 20 metres. If that attempt was successful trainees completed an escape from 30 metres. This involved getting all dressed up inside a large orange jump suit. We were shown a video.

You were locked inside a small tube that filled up with water. At the command from a voice that echoed inside

your suit, you filled the suit with oxygen from a small tube that poked out of the top of the suit. When the pressure equalised a hatch would open at the top of the tube and the trainee would be asked to breathe normally whilst you shot up to the surface attached to a long wire, just like a bullet out of a rifle. Not a barrel of laughs if you had trouble clearing your ears whilst the pressure equalised.

Once all the training had been completed I was presented with the Submarine badge, which is a very smart looking piece of kit shaped like two Dolphins facing each other. I wore it on my uniform with a great deal of pride. I could now claim £1.00 a day extra pay and receive a stronger tot of rum. You can plainly see where my priorities lie at the time.

DID THEY KNOW?

By Hazel Kilner

Did they know when they sent our children to battle,
boys who went willingly to muddy fields to be
slaughtered like cattle?

They slept as they marched, they dreamt as they slept
of fathers, of mothers, of sisters and lovers.

Lads just fresh out of school, pals just like brothers.

Did they know of the swamps where cows once
grazed in the sun

by the Somme in the heat of the day that the boys
would return injured

and maimed or left for dead where they lay?

Did they know when they saw poppies blowing in the
wind that they would mean remembrance
at the end?

Testament to youth; strength and bravery.
Broken hearts, broken families, broken lives
Fighting to the bitter end,
Uncles, cousins, neighbours, friends.
In spite of battle some survived to tell the story,
to remember their comrades
and to testify to their honour and their glory.

Shadows of a million crosses
Shadows of a million crosses.

Did they know?



Illustration: Howard Benn

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