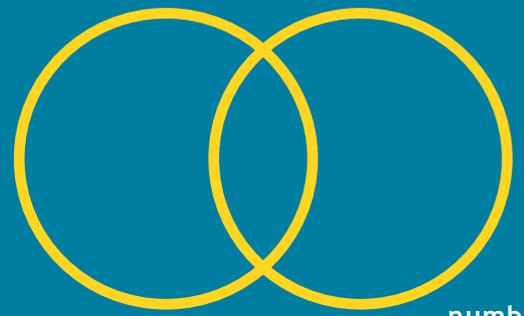


# SURVIVORS' POETRY NEWSLETTER

january february march 2000



number

**Bristol finds the  
truth is out there**

**A look at "I am Live"  
the arts extravaganza**

## promoting poetry by survivors of mental distress

### INSIDE

Book Reviewers get the ball pen rolling  
Personal Stories, News, Articles,  
Letters and Events, Readings,  
Performances, Workshops  
to wake you up this spring!!!

### PLUS

Name this Newsletter  
Inspire our London events  
Win publications  
Look inside ...

# who's who. at survivors' poetry

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# ... from the editor

Dear reader,

**It has been a long and exciting process putting together this new issue of our newsletter. As you can see, we have doubled the size and redesigned it, both in look and content. You may remember that in the last issue, (number 6) I asked you to send in contributions: your personal stories, letters and articles. Survivors' Poetry realises that for many of our readers this newsletter is the only contact that you have with our work.**

**I was very moved by your response. So many people stepped forward and offered to review books, many of you sent me stories of your struggles with depression and your passion for poetry. It is because of your contributions that you now have the best ever Survivors' Poetry Newsletter in your hands and I do feel honoured to be so involved at this exciting stage of its growth. I have a feeling that it is going to get better and better and I encourage you to take an active part.**

**Survivors' Poetry is dedicated to developing the newsletter to be fuller, fresher and more inspiring. We would like to print the kinds of things, the advice, the news, the articles, that you would like to read. What do you want from this newsletter? How can we help you? What are you hoping to get out of being involved in Survivors' Poetry? We want people from every corner of the UK to start taking an active part in what goes in this newsletter. We need your advice, your news, your articles. Do you have advice about how to set up a writing group in your area? Are you wanting to be in touch with other survivors? Is there an event going on in the town or city where you live that you think we should all know about? Do you have any tips about getting published, overcoming writers block, writing exercises - you know the kind of thing I mean.**

**Writing can feel very isolating, sometimes that's just how writers like it sometimes it's not - this newsletter is aiming to offer you the opportunity, if and when you want it, of sharing your experience.**

**I would like us to "name" the newsletter as well - it really needs a title to give it a strong sense of vision. What do you think? Please send your ideas to me at Survivors' Poetry by 6th March 2000.**

**I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our two assistant editors Roy Holland and Emma Parish for their ideas and input and hard work and to everybody who has contributed to this new newsletter. Thanks also to Demet Dayanch, for all her encouragement and support and for bringing the office to life!**

**I hope you enjoy what you read. Tell me if you do and tell me what you'd prefer if you don't. I don't mind - I can take it !  
Spring is coming !!!**

**Yours, Lisa Boardman (Editor)**

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Survivors' Poetry Newsletter is a quarterly publication. It's purpose is to publicise events and activities organised by Survivors' Poetry and by Survivor-led Poetry groups all over the country and to offer a forum for debate in which to share and discuss information and experiences. Please send us articles, small features, photographs, artwork and events listings about your group or about anything that you think may be of interest to our readers. Work should preferably be typed or on disc. We cannot guarantee publication and the editor reserves the right to edit any contributions. No more than 500 words. No poetry please. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily the views of Survivors' Poetry. Next copy deadline (for April/May/June issue) Monday 6th March 2000. The Survivors' Poetry Newsletter is distributed free around the UK.

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# welcome to demet !

Survivors' Poetry has a new  
member of staff ...

**Hi, my name is Demet, the new finance worker, and I am delighted to be working for and with Survivors' Poetry.**

**As well as dealing with finance, I am very excited about all the work that Survivors' Poetry does and feel passionately about poetry. I have always expressed myself through poetry and feel that it is a part of me which I long to share with others. That is what led me to Survivors' Poetry and was the missing piece in my jigsaw. I am now more complete by working for an organisation where my desire to express myself is encouraged in a nurturing and positive environment.**

**One thing that has struck me since my arrival is the commitment and support of all the volunteers and members which I find extremely energising. I hope in the future to meet more of the people who make Survivors' Poetry the success that it is.**

**I come from a psychology background and advocate alterative healing through astrology, spirituality and**

**creativity. These are my main interests in life and I am constantly exploring the links between the three entities. These subjects feed my curiosity for life's deeper meaning and reinforce my fundamental beliefs.**

**Needless to say I am a Capricorn, practising yoga, writing poetry and dancing to the beat of my own drum - de rum rum rum!**

**PS if anyone is interested there is a short article written by Nicola Woods in The AA newsletter, "Transit on Astrology and Art", where she makes reference to poetry and astrology. Nicola asks people to contact her if they would like to form a poetry group of some kind related to astrology.**

**Email address;  
[woods@stroods.netlineuk.net](mailto:woods@stroods.netlineuk.net)**

**I thought that this may be of interest to some of our readers as my experience with talking to people so far indicated that there is an interest in the field of astrology. I thought that this might be a good link to explore further.**

Did you know that if you are involved in a local writing group you can join the Survivors' Poetry National Network of groups completely free ???!

Contact the Outreach Worker at Survivors' Poetry on 0171 916 5317 for more details.

## ***NIBBLES : A COOKBOOK OF IDEAS FOR WRITERS***

Compiled and edited by Larry Butler, Anne Hay and Janet Paisley. Survivors' Poetry Scotland.  
(ISBN: 0-9529140-5-0)

We have just received this new guide, which is aimed at both facilitators of workshops and writers. It is presented loose-leaf in a folder and is peppered with illustrations of medlars, figs and grapes. It raises many interesting questions. For example, in the section on free-writing, is it fair to exclude fantasies from the stream of consciousness, when these could make or break a poem?

We have a free copy of Nibbles to send to any facilitator of SP workshops who would like to review it for the next issue of our newsletter. First come, first served. Copies may be ordered from Survivors' Poetry Scotland, 30 Cranworth Street, Glasgow, G12 8AG, (price - £10.00 plus p&p)

# Millennium Mayhem

## A Play for World Mental Health Day 1999 by Bristol Survivors' Poetry

Bristol Survivors' Poetry's drama project, the Stepping Out Theatre Company, goes from strength to strength. Their second play, "The Truth is Out There - Somewhere", was featured in Survivors' Poetry's newsletter last year. In November, this play was one of the winners of the Rosalind Caplin Award, coming second in the country for Best Event, World Mental Health Day. This is the second time the group have won an award, and their third play, "Millennium Mayhem (or Jill and the Beanbag)", performed at Bristol's Hope Centre on October 9th and 10th 1999 was felt by the group to be their best so far.

The performances were the culmination of a six month series of workshops and rehearsals. This year's production had something of a "panto" feel, and this resulted in a much larger than usual number of children and young people in the audience, something we were pleased about, as we feel it is particularly important to get out survivors' message across to this group.

Media coverage of the event was good. We got a brief mention in The Bristol Evening Post and also in Venue, the local listings magazine. We were particularly successful in obtaining coverage on BBC Radio Bristol. This is probably because of the very good relationship we have built up with them over the



last three years. A group of four of the cast were interviewed by Radio Bristol on Thursday 7th October, and a further group of six people on Friday 8th October. We talked about our experience of being in the play, and about mental health problems, and we performed some extracts from the script. The two features resulting from these interviews were broadcast a total of four times, giving excellent publicity for the group and the production. After two years of trying, for the first time we were also successful in obtaining television coverage for the event, which was covered briefly on local TV news.

The Sunday night's performance was filmed on video, and this has since been made available to the group and to the general public. The group have now come to the end of their two-year funding from a Mind Millennium Award and face a period of uncertainty as they apply for funding to keep the drama project going next year. However, with two national awards under their belt, they feel confident that the quality of their work cannot be ignored by funders.

For more details about the Stepping Out Theatre Company, telephone Steve Hennessy on 0117-9832790.

# When Poetry Rescued Me

*by John Hirst*

I write to express my feelings, my views and my beliefs. It is the greatest form of expression. You have the power of words plus the visual impact of form and layout/ presentation. Your title can also attract the same attention as a newspaper headline. I came to poetry later in life. Like most people, I had read the classics at school, but they went in one ear and just as quickly out the other. I've battled against poor health all my life. I was 2 years old when I had a bout of bronchial pneumonia which left my lungs scared and developed into chronic asthma.

I spent much of my infant and teen years confined to bed following asthma attacks, either at home, in hospital or in a convalescent home. To pass the time I read a lot, I enjoyed travel and geography. I would study an atlas for hours, but I would mainly read fiction. I was a dreamer and would invent situations to escape the pain of my reality. But I was determined to overcome my disability and succeed in life. I joined the retail trade aged 17 and progressed from salesman to the position of Retail Operations Director of a major High Street retailer, until in 1992 I was forced into premature retirement. My lungs had deteriorated, I was suffering concurrent attacks and infections. High-dose steroids were causing appalling side-effects, swelling, internal bleeding, brittle bones, bruising, kidney damage and water retention. For five long years I also suffered severe depression, sleeping only 3-4 hours

per night. I was weak and agitated and I had lost all self-esteem and self-confidence. I spent my time reading, letter writing, watching videos and painting Monet-style water-colours. (I painted in this style because my hands would shake so much because of the steroids). I had always wanted to try and write a novel but because of my

*"... To pass the time I read a lot, I enjoyed travel and geography. I would study an atlas for hours, but I would mainly read fiction. I was a dreamer and would invent situations to escape the pain of my reality..."*

problems I very rarely had physical and mental co-ordination and control. I would be in physical pain and my mind was over-active. Then I would feel physical relief only to be brain-dead due to the

*"... I love trees and flowers, the evergreen every greens of nature and flowers, my beloved vivid red poppies...."*

drug regime. So totally by accident following a session with my psychologist who suggested I write down my

concerns and frustrations, I came to poetry. One morning at 3 am in March 1997 I wrote my first poem. It was called 'Breathless' and described the effects of my nightly asthmatic spasms. It was published within a month and has since appeared four times. It only took a few months to purge my mind of health-related confessional concerns, I then moved on to write about nature. I love trees and flowers, the evergreen every greens of nature and flowers, my beloved vivid red poppies.

During my working years I had the influence and connections to help raise funds for good causes and charities. This was lost when I finished work. I was also unable to contribute physically. This was when poetry came to the rescue. I was able to put together three self-published booklet collections. (the second two by Pro-Print, Peterborough, who I strongly recommend you use). I managed to sell over 300 copies and raised nearly a thousand pounds for my local church, hospital, school and the National Asthma Campaign.

I always have a notebook and pen with me. Observation poems have been some of my better efforts, coming from a village decimated by the loss of the mining industry - the subject of some heart-rendering offerings. I have built up a notebook of words that I have come across by reading other poetry. I read extensively and enjoy today's contemporary divas Carol Ann Duffy - who should have been appointed Poet Laureate -, Jo Shapcott, Sophie Hannah and Ruth Padel. I have written certain poems influenced by the late and much missed Ted Hughes and his love of animals and landscapes. I also relate to Sylvia Plath's vivid and depressive verse. What a loss to the poetry world when she died so young. Other poets that I enjoy reading include Simon Armitage

and the late Dylan Thomas. I have had modest success with over 50 poems published in small press magazines and anthologies. I have received unselfish help and advice from Black Country poet Geoff Stevens, editor of the Purple Patch Magazine. He, like me, writes from the imagery of post-

*"...Poetry is now very central to my life. I have combined a few sketches and water-colours, overlaid selected verse and had them produced as framed copies for family and friends...."*

cards and artistic photography. I have also had a tape produced by poet Jay Woodman. It's a great idea to read your poetry or have it read. It really brings out further depth and meaning to your work. Poetry is now very central to my life. I have combined a few sketches and water-colours, overlaid selected verse and had them produced as framed copies for family and friends. I have just completed my third 'commissioned' poem, that was requested by a lady to celebrate her husband's retirement. Last year I produced special poetic Christmas cards. Poetry for me today has so many opportunities for expression. I also recently attended my first two poetry workshops, great experience and good fun. Although I still lack confidence and am severely restricted in what I can do, I desperately try to attend events to learn more and share views, ideas and etc. Poetry has not only purged my system and helped to channel debilitating depression. It has given me a new lease of life.

John Hirst is interested in setting up a writing group in the West Midlands. You can contact him via the office if you are also looking to join or set up a group in this area

# Noticeboard

... news ...

## **BEXLEY POETRY GROUP**

A poetry group, open to all persons, but especially those who suffer or have suffered from mental illness, will happen on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at the Crayford Centre, 4-6 London Road, Crayford, from 4 pm onwards. For details please contact John Exell at the Crayford Centre, Tel: 01322 521162.

## **FILM PRODUCER/DIRECTOR LOOKING FOR POETS TO WORK ALONGSIDE.**

I am making a series of short films based on the experiences of other survivors. Translate your work to screen, get involved in the film making process, and/or just submit a poem.

Fee payable. Call Lou Birks on 020 7498 3081 to find out more about the project. All contributions welcome.

## **LDAF ANNOUNCES ITS SECOND DISABILITY FILM FESTIVAL, 6TH AND 7TH MAY 2000.**

Last year we lifted the lid. This year we are going to lift it even higher. This time it's going to be bigger. We are linking up with Mobile Culture Clubs in Hackney and running workshops, and with the Stoke Newington Festival who will commission one filmmaker to follow the festival team and make a film/documentary telling the real story. What do we want from you? We want it all ... Get in touch if you want to take part in the workshops, put in a tender for the commission, volunteer before/during/after the festival. Most of all send in your films for the viewing panel to see. Closing date is Friday 17th March 2000. What to do next? - Contact Caglar, Debs or Julie. e-mail: [disability.filmfestival@virgin.net](mailto:disability.filmfestival@virgin.net) [dw.mcc@virgin.net](mailto:dw.mcc@virgin.net)  
Tel: 0207-916-5484 / 0207-691-4203 Fax: 0207-916-5396 Minicom: 0207-691-4201.

## **NOT TO BE MISSED... UNLEASH YOUR CREATIVITY.**

Free, fun, uplifting, inspirational workshops run by CORE ARTS. Lose yourself in the drumming rhythms of Africa, exercise those vocal chords or immerse yourself in some collective art. Open to both users of mental health services and anyone involved in mental health support work who'd like more info. about what Core Arts does. We invite you to see how the arts can benefit mental health and emotional well-being. Tuesday 22nd February 2000, 12 noon - 5 pm at St. John's Community Centre, Stratford, E15. For further information contact Mina Sassoon 020-8533-3500.

## **BLACK WOMEN'S WRITING WITH DOROTHEA SMARTT**

Saturday 6th & 20th May 2000 and Saturday 3rd & 17th June 2000  
10am to 4pm Course fee £44 (conc. £22)

A course for those ready to begin a commitment to their creativity - to feel the fear and do it anyway! An opportunity to practice and develop your creative writing skills in a supportive atmosphere and to read, appreciate, and learn, from the diversity of African-Caribbean and Black British women writers. The course will cover three overlapping areas of focus: 'Nurturing our creative selves', 'Writers are Readers', and practical Writing Workshops. A commitment outside class meetings will be necessary to complete readings and two pieces of writing. Dorothea Smartt was Brixton Market's first Poet-in-Residence, and an Institute of Contemporary Arts Attached Live Artist. Most recently she's contributed to Bittersweet [Women's Press, 1998], The Fire People [Payback Press, 1998], and Mythic Women/Real Women [Faber, 2000]. Awarded several commissions and bursaries she is a member of the Black Arts Alliance and an Afro-Style School 'graduate'. For enrolment and further information contact: Carol Watts, Faculty of Continuing Education, Birkbeck College. Tel. 0207 631 6652 Fax. 0207 631 6686 email. [ce.watts@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:ce.watts@bbk.ac.uk)

## **NO BONY ABNORMALITIES - THE MAUDSLEY MONOLOGUES**

presented by the Pleiades in association with the Diorama Arts Centre.

Wednesday 15th March to Saturday 18th March 2000. 7.45 for 8pm.

Studio Theatre, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 3ND.

TICKETS £8 and £4 concessions. Box office reservations may be made on 020 7 419 2000. Carrie Thomas combines wit and energy to create a host of characters in her one woman show, No Bony Abnormalities - the Maudsley Monologues. Her humorous observations people the stage with the inmates of a modern day psychiatric ward. Whilst the pain of mental collapse and the trials of recovery are laid bare, it is impossible not to laugh at the wry insights before catching oneself aghast.

On Thursday 16th March there will be an open post-show discussion with an invited panel on the nature of creativity and mental health. The performance and discussion that evening will be BSL signed.

# News of our ev

## Performance Somers town 2000

Survivors' Poetry at  
Somers Town Community Centre  
150 Ossulston Street, (off Euston Road), London, NW1

**Doors: 7.00 pm.** (If you wish to do a floorspot on the night please aim to arrive by 7pm to book your place).  
**7.30pm - 10pm with interval**

**Admission: £3.50, concessions: £1.50,  
floorspots and current inpatients: £1.00**

**Tube: Euston/Kings Cross.**

**Buses: 10,30,68,73,168,188 and 253.**

**Wheelchair Access. Accessible Toilet. Induction Loop.**

**NB. If you wish to walk with somebody else from Kings Cross BR station to Somers town you can meet with a Survivors' Poetry volunteer (they will be wearing a badge) at the entrance to WH Smith inside Kings Cross Station. Please plan to arrive at 6.30pm. The volunteer and group will leave Kings Cross for Somers town at 6.45pm sharp.**

### **Saturday February 26th.**

**MC Isha**

**featuring Phil Baird, Mala Mason and Jane Bom-Bane with songs from Bom-Babyhood to Mermaidhood..!**

### **Saturday March 25th.**

**MC Joe Bazouki.**

**Featuring Frank Bangay, Asher Hoyles and Viv Youell.**

## **ARE YOU AN MC AT POETRY EVENTS?**

**If so, I would be interested in making contact with you in order to exchange good ideas, tips, horror stories from your experience. If enough MCs are interested, I would be keen to produce a short leaflet about the skills of being an MC at poetry events sometime in the coming twelvemonth. Please contact me through the Survivors' Poetry office.  
Peter Campbell**

## **Camden Writing Workshops**

**The Garden Studio,  
Diorama Arts Centre,  
34 Osnaurgh Street,  
London NW1 3ND.**

**Nearest tube:  
Great Portland Street  
or Warren Street.**

**7.30pm:  
Alternate Tuesdays  
FREE**

**Survivors' Poetry holds fortnightly workshops for survivors. These provide participants with an opportunity to have work reviewed and discussed in a friendly, supportive environment. Two facilitators will be present at each session. Participants of feedback workshops should bring along a poem typed (or clearly handwritten) from which we can take photocopies.**

**Tuesday 22nd February 2000**

**Creative Writing Workshop  
with Amita Patel and Razz**

**Tuesday 7th March 2000**

**Performance Workshop  
with Isha and Razz**

**Tuesday 21st March 2000**

**Feedback Workshop  
with Durlabh Singh  
and Elvera DeSouza**

**Tuesday 4th April 2000**

**Feedback Workshop  
with Kit Parke  
and Valeria Melchorietto**

# ents in London

## The Poetry Café

“Diverse and delicious”

by **Xochitl Tuck**  
Poetry Cafe Coordinator

The past six months of events at the Poetry Café have ranged from feverishly stimulating to right off the scales of fearless creativity. Many brave souls conquered their nerves, stared right back at all the unknown, upturned watching faces and held forth feasts of perhaps never before shared recipes, some tried, some witty, some difficult, to nourish the soul and spirit and spice up the daily drudge in dozens of diverse and delicious ways. You think I'm exaggerating - Well, then you've probably not yet been there to hear, say, Dee Light's delectable poetry, Carrie Thomas's spectacular performances, Hammersmith and Fulham's Duncan Hamilton, Lloyd Lindsay, LBC's "mad" poet Andrew, the fine, honest poems of Hajra, the Norwegian poetry of an American/German couple, the high-school teacher from San Francisco, the heartfelt poems of Frank, the unique music of Norman, .....

“Many brave souls conquered their nerves, stared straight back at the unknown ...”

Informal and relaxed, the atmosphere of the Café radiates friendliness, and the openness and generous nature of Jess, the Café's founder, and Nick, the unflappable manager, create a space in which survivors' creativity flourishes. Come along and rise to the occasion!

## POETRY CAFÉ DATES

Thursday 24th February  
Thursday 16th March  
Poetry Café,  
22 Betterton Street, WC2  
9BU

(nearest tube  
Covent Garden)  
7.30pm - 11pm  
Admission £2, £1 conc.

A wonderful opportunity for new and more experienced poets to have their work heard in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. There is a lift to the lower floor and a wheelchair accessible toilet. Smoking upstairs, non smoking downstairs.

In you want to read or perform your work you need to arrive between 7 and 7.30pm in order to book your floorspot.

The doors will open to other audience members from 7.30pm and the performance will start at 8pm sharp.

We do not have a finish time for the event and this very much depends on the amount of people who want to do floorspots.

## Mailing Party Volunteers

Survivors' Poetry holds a mega mailing party four times a year to collate and stuff our newsletters into envelopes and send out to survivors all over the country. We provide a room, a big table, lots of refreshments and will pay your travel expenses up to the value of a zone 1-6 off peak London travel card. Dates for this year's mailing parties are Wednesday 29th March, Wednesday 28th June and Wednesday 27th September. They start at 4.30pm and usually go on until about 7pm. They take place in the same building as our offices at the Diorama Arts Centre. Please let me know if you are able to come and help out! - Lisa Boardman

# A passion not a hobby

a personal story *by Christopher Major*

Like a lot of people who suffer with depression I started to write poetry during my early teens (20 years ago). It was the usual rambling adolescent doggerel the majority of us write at some time, however, it did help to release some of the turbulent emotions I was feeling.

Later, in my twenties I managed to get hold of a list of poetry magazines from my local library. My latest adolescent spewing was what I sent in, it was rejected, and I was hurt. Like many people I wrote, but read very little poetry, consequently I had no idea what was happening in the poetry world. I then started to subscribe to a few poetry magazines, and started to buy and loan all different styles of verse. I slowly began to understand what magazine editors might be interested in.

For two years I struggled with rejection after rejection, until eventually, my first poem was accepted in Pennine Platform - I'll never forget how elated I felt!

That was 15 years ago; and since then I've published over a 100 poems in the whole spectrum of small press magazines, and also in many internet E-zines. All through the last 15 years I've suffered rejections, sometimes feeling (if the rejection arrived at a bad time) that I'd had enough, but somehow you dig deep and

continue.

If a particular poem is rejected, it might not mean that it is of a low standard, try it again with a different editor. One poem of mine was rejected by three magazines, before being placed with Outposts, who receive 80,000 poems a year only publishing 120. So even failure is relative!

I'm now 37. Still writing. Still suffering from

depression and anxiety. Poetry helps me to off load certain feelings in, I like to hope, some sort of skilled way. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but it is something to try. Certain people who know me will say that poetry is a "nice hobby"; that annoys me, its much more than that, it is at very least a passion. I know from reading the Survivors' newsletter you're not interested in receiving poetry. Forgive me

*"Poetry helps me to off load certain feelings in, I like to hope, some sort of skilled way. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but it is something to try ..."*

for including one on how I felt when prescribed that 'cure-all' Prozac.

Prozac  
His head maybe swimming,  
but something drowned  
months ago,  
and as it sank,  
its screams bubbled  
to the surface  
and  
broke  
as  
smiles

---

## HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION?

**Have services discriminated against you because you're a survivor?**

Here is a chance to influence and have your say about services. As well as my association with Survivors' Poetry, I am a freelance Disability Equality and Awareness Trainer, giving training to arts and entertainments businesses such as the BBC. As a survivor myself I want to ensure that survivor awareness issues are properly addressed in my trainings. I would welcome your writing to me, in confidence, c/o Survivors' Poetry office, to let me know of any experiences you've had of discrimination from service providers and how they could behave better towards survivors. If you would rather speak to me on the phone, please write to "Isha" c/o Survivors' Poetry office with your phone number.

# I am live..an inspiration

A conference at Stanford Hall, Loughborough, with MIND THE .... GAP and THE FORUM FOR ARTS IN MENTAL HEALTH on 5th - 7th November 1999

by Roy Holland

*"The performance was superb. everyone performed with real showmanship and style. A man who was attending another event at Stanford Hall crept in to find out what was going on and stood enthralled. 'This is wonderful', he said, 'I wouldn't have missed this for the world. Who are you? What are you?'"*

*An anonymous quote from the now published report from I AM LIVE 1999*

I was fortunate enough to get a bursary to attend this conference, organised by mind the .... gap in the idyllic surroundings of Stanford Hall with its art deco theatre, acres of rolling Leicestershire countryside and gardens. A beautiful Sanctuary Room had been arranged with starry messages for inspiration set against a profusion of irises and white chrysanthemums. The events fell broadly into five categories. There were discussions of labelling and identity, seminars on fund-raising and the Mind Millennium awards, presentations on individual projects, practical sessions ranging from breeze-block carving and instant batik to poetry workshops, and the evening performances, incorporating music and poetry developed during the day.

We knew we were in for something rather special when a giant firework was let off in spite of the rain in the seal-pit. The conference was an opportunity to get to know survivors involved in creative activities throughout the country. Alison Smith represented Survivors' Poetry and there was a large contingent from Survivors' Poetry Scotland. All performances were given sign-language interpretation by a spirited team.

For me the high point of the weekend was Victoria Bennett's reading from her new book, *Anchoring the Light*. She has set up a community poetry organisation, for women, in Cumbria, which may be contacted at Whale Cottage, Whale, nr. Askham, Penrith, Cumbria, CA10 2PT (please send an SAE).

What I was not so happy with was some of the discussion on labelling. It was proposed that The Forum for Arts in Mental

*"Many survivors have received some kind of help, even amidst a lot of anguish, from the medical profession. It is important to challenge both psychiatric and media stereotypes accompanying diagnoses ..."*

Health should be redesignated Inspired Arts. I can understand the reasoning behind this, but I am afraid that, without extensive publicity in mental health contexts, many survivors of mental distress would not realise the organisation was meant for them

under the new title proposed. On the other hand all artistic endeavour is inspired to its creator.

I also found Ron Coleman's introduction to mental health labelling rather one-sided. Many survivors have received some kind of help, even amidst a lot of anguish, from the medical profession. It is important to challenge both psychiatric and media stereotypes accompanying diagnoses, but I do not feel that alternative medicine can provide substantial help, for example, to those who hear voices, and this kind of discussion seems to produce a form of anger which has no resolution.

However the event, as a whole, was most enjoyable, and it is important to strike while the iron is hot. Jo Verrent of mind the .... gap has produced a report on the conference and it is important that contacts are developed. Alison reported that two new Survivors' Poetry groups had come out of the conference. For further information about I am Live, please contact mind the .... gap, Queens House, Queens Road, Bradford, BD8 7BS (tel. 01274-544683)

# letters page

We would love to hear from you. Please send us your letters on any subject which you think might be of interest to our readers. You may wish to respond to what you have read in this newsletter. Send to "Letters" Survivors' Poetry, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 3ND

Dear Survivors' Poetry,

I'm taking up the suggestion in the current issue to write a little about my experience of writing poetry. I particularly welcome being able to do this because I'm not close to any SP group and this makes me feel more in contact.

Although I have written on and off most of my life this was only in short bursts and was really an overflow from bad experience and illness. I had a spell of writing about 12 years ago which resulted in the publication of a piece in Acumen, but it was very short-lived and I relapsed into silence. Indeed I was not only convinced that I could not write but also that I had nothing of value whatsoever to say. The odd piece I tried to squeeze out was, objectively, utterly dreadful. I really had nothing at all. Then at last therapy that was some good (the NHS in my area was until recently a very sparse provider of therapeutic help) and some new drugs which I can only say are wonderful came my way. No side effects other than feeling that I am actually living and, though 57, young for the first time. Not euphoric, just RIGHT.

On January 11th 1998 at about 19.15 I sat down to listen to a piece of music I knew well and which said a lot to me. All of a sudden (and really I had no pre-warning) a tremendous feeling like a ball of light or a fountain

or whatever grew in me and for the first time in years I started to write poetry and that outpouring has not yet stopped. It was extraordinary and, had it been a one-off, I'd call it an hallucination. Luckily I have an excellent CPN and she told me of my local health authority's Healing Arts programme which runs, among other things, a poetry group with a Writer in Residence attached. We call ourselves the Green Room Poets because we meet in the theatre green room at the Quay Arts Centre in Newport. It has changed my life and is a tremendous help to all sorts of different types of survivors throughout the Island.

Thanks to the Survivors' Poetry Newsletter I saw the ad. from Acumen for a survivors' edition earlier this year and I felt confident enough to submit and was one of those accepted. I have had four poems accepted/published in addition to this since then. I have found out what self-respect means (though the Black Dog still walks sometimes).

Thank you for all you do,

Robin Ford,  
Ventnor, Isle of Wight.

Dear Survivors' Poetry,

I am just writing a short note to say that I disagree strongly with

the definition of survivor in the Survivors' Poetry Vision Statement.

It makes no sense to me to include people who empathise but have not had the experiences set out. It is like saying someone who is not a survivor is a survivor. Worse, it really undermines the whole proposition that there is a discrete "survivor experience".

In Survivors Speak Out they have/used to have "survivor" and "ally" members (it is a membership organisation). I think that is a possible way of dealing with those who empathise but do not share the experience as defined. There may be other ways but I certainly do not think the current Survivors' Poetry solution is anything but a rather poor fudge.

Peter Campbell,  
London.

Dear Survivors' Poetry,

The Newsletter has been very helpful. I found two publishers. The Oxford Chronicle have published a short story and also the Millennium Book are publishing my autobiographical writing. Keep up the Good Work,

Fatma Durmush,  
London.

Dear Survivors' Poetry,

As someone who lives in rural Pembrokeshire in West Wales, I am writing to congratulate all concerned with the content, design, printing and production of the early Survivors' Poetry Newsletters up to and including Number 6.

It is good to have news of creative writing groups in Britain involving survivors of mental distress and other related matters. Moreover, the Newsletter has an international perspective and I for one would never have heard of the writings of Nikolay Gumilyov of Russia, had it not been for the Survivors' Poetry Newsletter.

Continue the good work. The Newsletter is clear, intelligent, courageous and pioneering.

Hywel Davies,  
Milford Haven.

Dear Survivors' Poetry

I am a poet, an artist and a member of Survivors' Poetry. Recently I had a solo exhibition of my artwork and during the show I ran some poetry workshops of which I would like to share my experiences.

For the first session the people who turned up were mainly young and female with a multicultural background, - Nigerians, Indians, Turkish and English. A few people had gone through periods of mental distress and depression and were keen to express their emotions through the media of poetry. They were unable to communicate these experiences with their friends and families due to lack of understanding.

We normally started by talking about the attraction of verse making and discussed the main

themes involved. The selection of words came next for each theme. Then we sat down to create short poems individually. I helped with the structure of lines/rhyme on a one to one basis.

The results were encouraging. Everyone was able to create a good-quality poem in the allotted time. We decided to carry on with the workshops for the following weeks, emphasising the reading and performance of poetry.

I found experiences of these worth-while and thus approached Haringey Arts Council who

provided me with an excellent venue at the Central Library in Wood Green. I now run poetry workshops including reading/writing/appreciation of poetry. I have named this group Sangam Poets. Sangam means coming together or meeting of minds.

I would like to invite members of Survivors' Poetry and friends to come and sample it. The session is of two hours' duration, starting at 1pm on the first Saturday of each month. Please get in touch with me if you need more information.

# What's in a name? Competition

## What are our events in London all about? You tell us ...

**We are looking for ideas to re-name our three regular London events. We would like to add a bit of spark and create names for the events which let people know what they should be expecting. We want to capture the imagination, inspiration and talent which you have put into Survivors' Poetry over the last few years and to emphasise the sense of celebration and sharing.**

**Any ideas ...?**

**We hope to put out a lot more publicity in future and introduce a lot more participants and audience members to our work. Do you have an idea for naming one of our events?**

**Just to remind you, our key events in London are currently called:**

- ~ Survivors' Poetry at Somers town Community Centre
- ~ Open Readings at the Poetry cafe or Poetry Cafe Readings
- ~ The Camden Workshops

**These are really sub-headings, explaining where the event is and briefly what it is about.**

**We have to do better than that! Can you think of one or two key words that would sum up the spirit of this event for you?**

**Please send your ideas by Friday 3rd March 2000 to "Rename Events", Lisa Boardman, Survivors' Poetry, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London N17 6TR. If we choose your idea for the new title of this event we will send you a free Survivors' Poetry anthology of your choice. We will announce the winners in the next issue.**

# NEW POETRY &

## the way it is

by Daniel Roberts  
reviewed  
by John Hirst

This really is an inspirational book. Author and self-confessed manic depressive Daniel Roberts lists 446 sayings and jokes. This publication was launched in 1997 and is now available as an updated 4th edition. Roberts, a London based property manager has been writing for eighteen years. His favourite motivational saying is listed at number 233, "DEPRESSION. You've got to go to it and through it."

The varied sayings lift you; they are sharp and fully focused. They make you think and reflect and they are real. As a sufferer of deep clinical depression I can relate and understand. Robert encourages you to take part and adds blank pages at the back of the book for your own notes and efforts. I list below five of my favourite sayings and close by recommending you to buy and try this book. My cheque will be in the post today!

"Mother doesn't know best... but she knows."

"Don't ride on your pride."

"Loneliness is a hard cell."

"When in doubt, do nought except write poetry."

"BRANSON is making a fortune out of his virginity."

Self-published by the author.

Price £3.99 from R & D

Publishers, 4 Carlos Place,

London, W1Y 5AE. Special price of £2.00 for survivors reading this

newsletter.

## page fright

by Carol Batton  
reviewed  
by Emma Lee

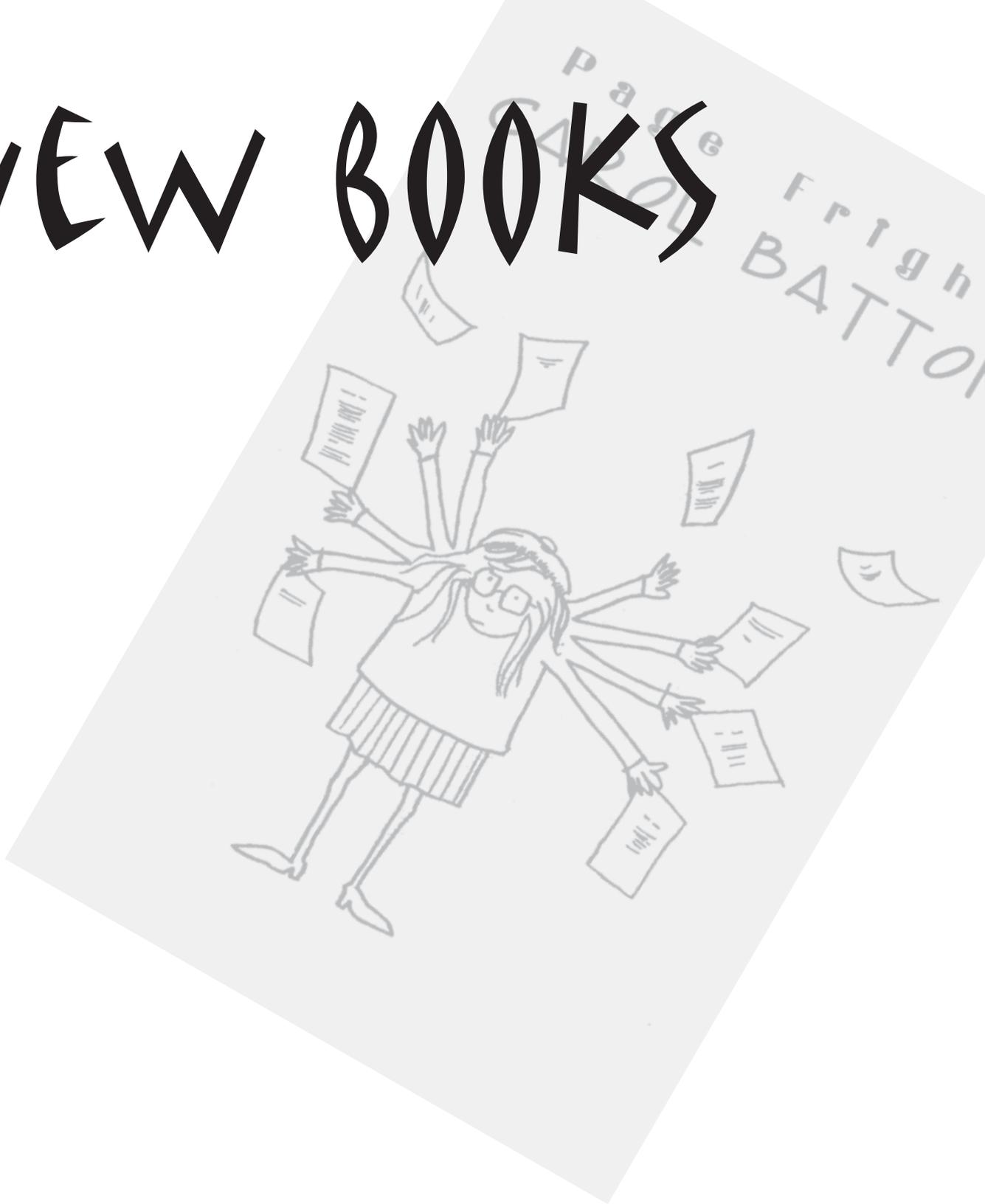
Carol Batton is a performance poet and uses a simple vocabulary that sometimes expresses some complex ideas; "The confetti swirled/along streets,/and the wedding blew away", (from "Confetti") The poem captures that after-the-celebration feeling of a bride and groom after the guests have left. The best poems focus on small details.

She explores her own mental distress, without alienating a reader. "Did some of you try to be pink? Be content - be yellow./It is not a failure if you are not a pink Dandelion." (from "Bee-ing"), which later says, "At any time there may appear opportunities./Take credit for having flowered when you could": Although some of the language is a little twee in places, "Bee-ing" is about acceptance of self. Humour lurks even when a serious point is being made; "rather like a politician/ They lie, to get a good return" (from "Drug Selling") - a dig at drug companies sales representatives.

I wanted to hear most of the poems performed. They contained an energy that would be brought to life on stage.

The Bad Press, PO Box 76,  
Manchester M21 8HJ, [www.thebadpress.co.uk](http://www.thebadpress.co.uk); dated 2000;  
£6.95; ISBN 1903160006

# NEW BOOKS



**Survivors' Poetry** is a national literature and performance organisation dedicated to promoting poetry by survivors of mental distress through workshops, performances, readings and publications to audiences all over the UK. It was founded in 1991 by four poets with first hand experience of the mental health system.

Our community outreach work provides survivors with opportunities to actively participate in writing or performance training workshops, poetry performances and publishing projects throughout the UK. We support the formation of a nationwide network of survivors' writing groups and work in partnership with local and national arts, mental health, community and disability organisations.

#### **workshops**

We hold regular workshops in London at the Diorama Arts Centre, NW1 and organise many one-off projects in London and throughout the UK.

#### **performances**

We have regular performances twice a month at two separate venues in central London. These give space for new and established survivor poets to read or perform their work in relaxed surroundings. Survivor Poets regularly take part in literary and poetry festivals throughout the country.

#### **publications**

We have published a variety of poetry anthologies and are currently undertaking a number of translation projects within our *Surviving the Millennium* project funded by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of England. Please do not send us poetry for publication. We regret that we do not have the resources to give feedback or criticism regarding your work. We will ask for submissions through this newsletter when we publish our next anthology.

#### **support to writers' groups**

If you are involved in a writing or poetry group you may find that there are benefits in your group becoming an affiliated member of the Survivors' Poetry national network of writing groups. We offer workshop facilitator training and other training opportunities for members of your group. There are opportunities to visit or take part in literary festivals and the chance to share skills and information with other writers and writing groups throughout the UK. Contact us for further details.

#### **free mailings**

We publish and distribute our *sixteen* page, *Survivors' Poetry newsletter* four times a year. It's purpose is to publicise events and activities organised by Survivors' Poetry and by Survivor-led Poetry groups all over the country. We publish articles, features, personal stories, news, letters, events listings and book reviews. Through joining our mailing list you will receive this newsletter, quarterly - completely free of charge!

[survivor@survivorspoetry.org.uk](mailto:survivor@survivorspoetry.org.uk)

