

# Poetry *Express*

Summer 2009

Issue 30

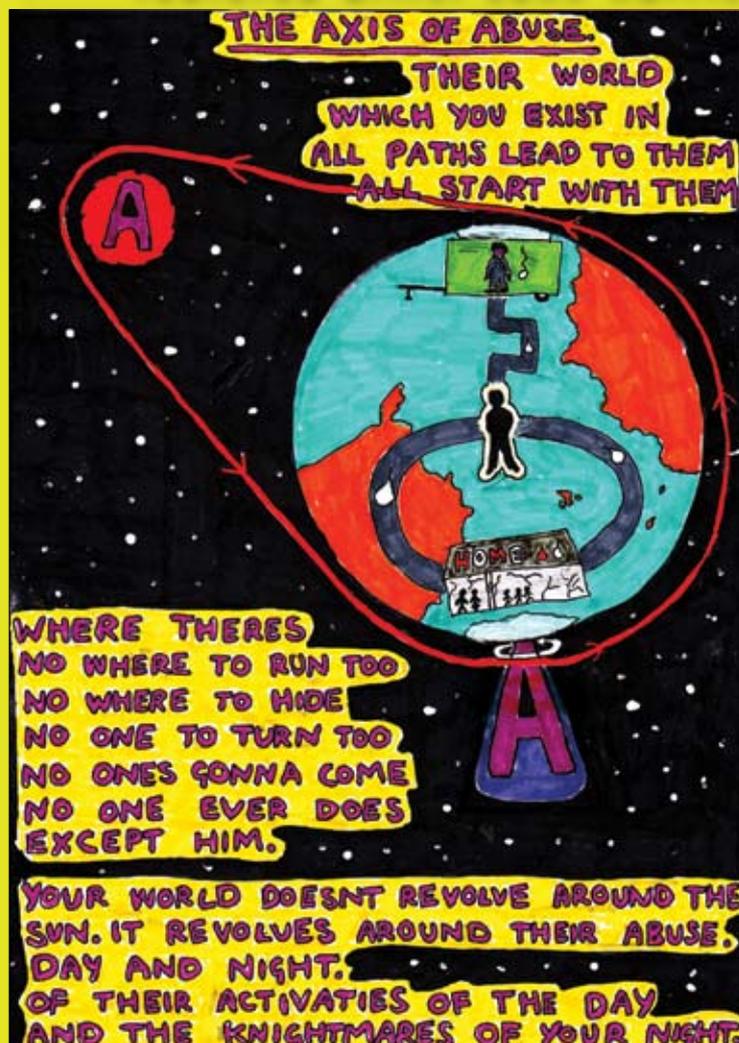
Update from the Survivor History Group by Chair Peter Campbell

About GROW - SP's New affiliated Writing Group in Hastings by Ashley Jordan

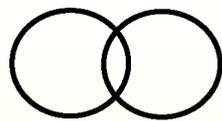
Express Yourself - a showcase of talent by Simon Jenner

Surviving the Waiting Room - by Michael Lee

featured artist John Harrison - Axis of Abuse



supporting the survivors'  
of mental distress



SURVIVORS' POETRY  
ON

NATIONAL POETRY DAY  
AT THE POETRY CAFE

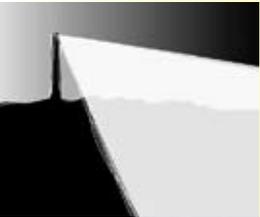
8TH OCTOBER, 2009 @8PM START

ALAN MORRISON & DAVID KESSEL

**The Poetry Cafe**  
**22 Betterton Street**  
**London WC2H 9BX**  
**tel +44 (0)20 7420 9880**  
**fax +44 (0)20 7240 4818**  
**<http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk>**



*supporting the survivors'  
of mental distress*



**tall-lighthouse poetry competition closing date 31 August 2009**

the winner will have a pamphlet of twenty poems published by **tall-lighthouse** in the first quarter of 2010 - to celebrate ten years of **tall-lighthouse press**, as well as our continuing success with the Poetry Book Society pamphlet choices, we are holding a one-off competition. this is an exciting and unique opportunity to be published by us. In addition the winner will receive a cheque for £100 & four runners-up will have three of their poems published in the next **tall-lighthouse anthology** (due at the end of 2010)

*the competition will be judged anonymously by*

**helen mort** (Manchester Poetry Prize winner 2008)

**maggie sullivan** (Trustee of the Poetry Society)

**alan buckley** (*shiver*, alan's pamphlet is PBS pamphlet choice Summer 2009)

**HOW TO ENTER** - poets can send up to ten poems for a fee of £10

- please send email to [tall.lighthouse@btinternet.com](mailto:tall.lighthouse@btinternet.com) with the header **competition** & we will send you full competition rules & entry criteria

**tall-lighthouse**

Stark Gallery  
384 Lee High Road  
London SE12 8RW  
United Kingdom

**tel: +44 (0) 20 8297 8279**

**[info@tall-lighthouse.co.uk](mailto:info@tall-lighthouse.co.uk)**

# Poetry Express

## SURVIVORS' POETRY

Survivors' Poetry is a unique national charity which promotes the writing of survivors of mental distress. Please visit [www.survivorspoetry.com](http://www.survivorspoetry.com) for more information or write to us. A Survivor may be a person with a current or past experience of psychiatric hospitals, ECT, tranquillisers or other medication, a user of counselling services, a survivor of sexual abuse, child abuse and any other person who has empathy with the experiences of survivors.

**Co Editor:** Dave Russell

**Sub-editing, design and layout:** Blanche Donnery

**Cover Image:** John Harrison

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Survivors' Poetry  
Studio 11, Bickerton House  
25-27 Bickerton Road  
London N19 5JT  
Tel 020 7281 4654  
[info@survivorspoetry.org.uk](mailto:info@survivorspoetry.org.uk)  
[www.survivorspoetry.com](http://www.survivorspoetry.com)

### Staff:

**Simon Jenner** (Director)

**Roy Birch** (National Outreach Coordinator and Mentoring Scheme Coordinator)

**Blanche Donnery** (Administration, Marketing and Media Design)

### Freelance Staff/Contractors:

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Survivors' Poetry apologises for the late publication of this issue; due to illness

## Express yourself

Congratulations! You're possibly our fifth, sixth, or seventh thousandth reader of this edition of *Poetry Express*, fitting tribute to a thirtieth edition of this groundbreaking and groundmaking magazine. No prizes to you for now except the PE30 team's congratulations, but in time, let's get ourselves in the wider winning frames. Why not? The survivor movement from its diverse constituencies has a lot to write and shout about, as well as celebrate. Create, and share your artwork, figure-work, views and critique - after all, we've been looking on at Parliamentarians doing just that for long enough this summer. SP has been prudent with its funds - stretching them to get the most and best from them - yet despite that, money's running short.

Sustainability is the catchphrase for these times; if you can catch it and transform it into actual balance sheets, then all the better. Don't hide away, share it around. The more comment - sent or cc'd on - lobby activity, interaction, expressions of contentment, elation or - yes, we invite the critical and even try to learn from it, then our voices won't be wasted on the metaphoric frippery purchased out of public dosh as others have, or diverted into - I'd better write alleged - mythologic metaphysic mortgages or moats, the latter being material and - clean. Time to re-route the streams of consciousness...

PE30 has ducks (you don't believe me? turn the pages, see why they need the privacy of islands), exquisite edgy guested art, the fine and tragic, comic, sacred and profound in the reviews, poetry, more poetry (yes, the magazine's title has finally sunk in with me!), essays, commentaries, events, exhibition notices, performance programmes, group updates and - remembering the summer's catchphrase - in the where-to-contact-us info lines.

To summer-rise and stay the course, increasing submissions to *Poetry Express* is a goal. The team at SP goes out of its way to find people's art and literature that we think will have and should have wider audiences, but we're very aware that we can't get to all places, or as yet reach people or communities who would have a mutual interest. Nor do we get to hear of the fullest range of writing, publications, and work of survivor artists that is out there. Similarly, developments, challenges, or campaigns, for example, from the survivor movement don't always arrive regularly enough. But we give it our best effort to stay informed and offer up what's there.

So please let us know if your poetry is published, if your collection is available - send us a review copy or let us know where we could get one from, for instance. Keep the poetry flowing in, and if you're a visual or audio or both format artist, again, get in touch - there are opportunities to display your work with SP, and if it's possible and practical, SP is always keen to seek mutual promotion opportunities. There are several calls for wider comment in the *Poetry Express* pages - genuine and generous requests inviting views and debate, the review *article 'B Safe 1st Always'* - John Harrison's statement and associated website concerning abuse, is one to particularly highlight.

Survivors' Poetry overall has had a good year, in my opinion. As Chair I'd like to thank everyone that's made it possible, who've given way beyond what could be or should be expected, and my hope is that they and the organisation will be rewarded with sustainable levels of funding from those sources we've applied to or are about to apply to. There'd be justice in that, and for SP's members, allies and for those who find SP offers a service or information that can assist.

Express yourself - on your, and on SP's behalf. Never forgetting the poetry.

Phil Ruthen Chair of the Board of Trustees, July 2009.

# Update from Simon Jenner

Hello to High Summer. For many of us it's a little too hot, and now a little too wet. I know for one old friend who lives a few yards from these offices, suffering from Lupus, that it's an ill wind that blows her no good. Sunlight tries to kill her on a fairly seasonal basis. June is hell, but July and early August remind her that hell has no fury like sunlight scorned. Her body scorns it and she prays for English summers like we used to have before global warming.

It reminds us, as if we really needed any such, that different strokes take out different folks. Nevertheless, summer is one of those times at SP when the spacious office comes into its own, the huge sash windows swing open to let in the fresh grime of Archway, and birdsong is clubbed by the scoring suck and whine of jet engines and ground-heated pre-catalytic converter motors. We're on a rise here and Highgate's trees drift down something more than the dead and a few nightingales.

Summer takes stock in most places. The spring offensive bids are mostly in. Ones earmarked for summer will be heard soon, and others deferred till September. We knew we couldn't wait that long for all of them, and when a chance came – I was asked to present SP's case to the John Ellerman Board on July 16<sup>th</sup> – I took it, rather than wait for the general advocacy that should attend a September meeting. I did this with trepidation, since Tim Glass of John Ellerman has been so effective on our behalf, but this was his idea and he's placed faith in me, which makes me gulp, rather. We're asking for £25,000 per annum, for three years, from the organisation that effectively saved us and encouraged everyone else to, in 2006.

Since those darken-ship days, we've returned to the status of an Arts Council Regularly Funded Organisation (RFO). I've just recently completed our Annual Submission, another taking stock, albeit one whose efficacy I'm still querying. Who sees it, what précis is made, where does it end up? Do the Literature Officers who must after all take the real decisions about us, see it? I sent the Narrative part to them, just in case. ACE itself is undergoing a cruel metamorphosis, which will affect all the arts since those funded by ACE won't have so many people to talk to. Everything is being centralized, condensed, and compressed. Pear Tree Court, home of ACE's London office, is to cease in 2010. All will move to the national office, which elsewhere in PE 30 I characterize as a Victorian Gothic School blown up like an inflatable institute. Pear Tree Court people shudder, but only 60 of their 100 will ever enter their new, semi-autonomous Valhalla at Great Peter Street – and trust they won't be absorbed over time into the National operation. 40 are being made redundant and that's regarded as lucky. ACE regional offices will be harder hit. Alan Davey's plan is for ACE itself to absorb these recent £4m government/DCMS cuts, and not punish the arts. That seems noble and immediately popular with the arts. But ultimately the service ACE provides suffers, sketchy decisions are made, calls aren't answered as fully as they once were, with people wearing five hats. We suffer. *Bonjour Quatorze Juillet*. That's the day our colleagues find out who's out, who's in.

I put a caricature of it to a couple of colleagues there, who grimaced recognition: already one battery of them faces the government, answering their dictats and firing initiatives, proposals and invitations at arts organisations. Another, almost sitting back-to-back with another row of computers, is trying to address the arts organisations. There's little more than a banned cigarette paper in between for a functioning Arts Council to deliver autonomous decisions. Davey was appointed as a critical gamekeeper from DCMS turned poacher. So it was appropriate I discussed this with a huddle of them outside, taking a few puffs on their roll-ups. No thanks, I don't smoke. I worry about this expertise and often great empathy with arts organisations going up in smoke too.

But there are enough people there to champion us, despite the personnel cuts. I think that was the message that ACE London CEO - the bubbly and cheerful Moira Sinclair - was trying not to dwell on, on June 4<sup>th</sup>, at the annual RFO (Regularly Funded Organisation) Love Fest. Many of these people have been known to us for years, even a decade. Elsewhere I outline one of the initiatives made before the chops were announced. **Well London** is an ACE-designed umbrella organisation promoting health and well-being through the arts. Some ACE officers like Karen Taylor, a friendly, very approachable and candid person, are seconded and placed at its head. ACE had a few days earlier included her in a panel of people meeting myself and Phil Ruthen, SP Chair; and soon after, met her again at *The Hub*, the mental health awareness festival 'Express Yourself' that she and we attended. You can read more of that elsewhere. She had said she knew little of Survivors' Poetry and really wanted to hear more, so we welcomed her doubly. By the time we'd met again, just days on, she was fully up to speed on us.

What June 4<sup>th</sup> did allow some of us to express was the way forward for the arts in this country. As usual, I made myself heard. I've expressed a desire to see Browning and Dickens celebrated: their bi-centenaries fall in 2012. They're both culturally inclusive and positive writers – perfect for the Olympics. Shakespeare is already on board. But more widely still, the way to address the arts as sufficient in themselves - as a colleague at my elbow continually made clear - was a better way than showing how little we cost the tax-payer and how much revenue we brought in. That'd be ideal but the former argument is of course effective to an ex-Chancellor. Another argument was one based on what we should be encouraging, and I raised this. Anyone seeing Georges Dudamel and his street-children Venezuelan youth orchestra's conquest of the audible world has noted how schools and academies in this country are enthused by the Next Big Idea. I hope they are, and that other continental models, far more positive for the arts and aware of their efficacy, will further undermine this Anglo-American special relationship of a dour Protestant Work Ethic we're grimed with. And I hope it lasts for more than the statutory five years Next Big Ideas tend to run for. We need a change of culture – and one which imagines we exist.

That's good for mental health, but is there any model to follow here? In these times, fall-back positions become reflexes, and innovation only works if it's cheap and everyone has covered their backs. Alan Davey has heralded risk (opera in black leather?) as one of the Great Art for Everyone stakes. The trouble is that this admirable rhetoric tends to go hand-in-hand with risk-averse methodologies, and implementations. What has happened to everyone's relief, is that the audit culture of a few years ago has receded. The baroque questionnaire isn't a thing of the past, but it's becoming more classical. It's led to a shortening of those bits of paper that anxiously asked what sexuality you were, as this would have a direct bearing on the next funding decision.

These things tend to come in cycles; and excellence, a buzz-word of the millennium, is back (Great Art for Everyone). But how arts and mental health can address it is another matter. Affirmative models, from reiki and rehab to the way poetry changes lives by crystallizing a pure moment, has been with us for rather longer than local initiatives. But these things have to be repeated in new guises and for every half-generation. This should be the place to talk of such things, but we find ourselves at a white coal face of fundraising paper, justification, and an asthmatic culture to tussle with, or even something like psittacosis. It comes in short, breathless stabs of attention. For now, we have to live with it.

And the next ACE initiative was: *Sustain*; to un-freeze £40million of its £70million from the lottery, in these days of zero interest, and offer it to larger RFOs. Phil and I have argued the case for our inclusion, towards the old level of funding, perhaps – since ACE has confidently asserted we can fund-raise to that level. However, this initiative is based on the premise that RFOs, through no fault of their own, are facing hardship and failure because the revenue is no longer being offered (£300 for a pantomim course with all 13<sup>th</sup> century forms considered); and the Foundations no longer giving out what they did to charities such as ours. Those RFOs deemed particularly good at normally harvesting such monies will be favoured. We come in squarely under the second category. So that's where we're focusing attention and any residual eloquence.

Who loses out? Yes, those reflexes hit us. Mental health and poetry? Mental health generally. Mandarins remember that bit about Stephen Fry, why he was so moving. But that was so 2007. One of those greatest invisible casualties in the recession – the biggest really – is mental health. And invisibility is the first thing being made redundant. There's a circle here to be squared whilst the sun blazes down. Those very invisibles that people sweep under the dust because more obvious cuts cause greater howling (bankers, and corporate giants) are of course what the recession will ultimately be about. Perhaps when enough of those people who can't see, are brought to seeing through their own sudden invisibility, we might receive a few more nods. But this is a negative, and passive way of fighting our corner. You don't improve things by making more people sick to wake them up to illness.

Summer is here. The bids are in. The birds are in their trees for a gusty Archway sunset. The Big Ideas parties are winding down with all data collated; the collators off to the Vic or playing thump-tump reverb in their eco-cars past Tufnell Park. We're part of that and - like the dusty sparrows of Highgate - still singing for our supper.

# GROW by Founder Member Ashley Jordan

**Grass Roots Open Writers (GROW) is a community writing and publishing group that is based in Hastings, East Sussex. We have 25 members.**

What draws people into our group is the social side - creative writing is almost a by-product for us! Obviously there are exceptions but our members usually come to us seeking friendship and companionship. They tend to have failed at school, have very low self-esteem, be ultra sensitive to criticism or rejection and lack confidence in their ability to write, form or express their ideas or feelings. Many have physical disabilities and illnesses which limit the kinds of activities they can do. Some have tried joining other groups but found them to be unfriendly, unsupportive or inaccessible. Others have never written before - and aren't really interested in writing - but come with a friend who is already a member. Most of our members find and join us this way - and soon are bringing in new people themselves. It's a peculiarity of our group that new people become part of the gang within a couple of weeks and very quickly take responsibility for helping to run it, suggest new projects, join the committee, organise social gatherings etc. They do all end up producing some writing eventually.

## **We run three groups every week:**

- a writing workshop in the Hastings Children's Library
- a skill sharing workshop in the Roosevelt Court Lounge
- a writing / performance workshop in the Roosevelt Court Lounge

We also arrange social gatherings, attend writing and performance events and share information about such events with each other. All the GROW groups and activities are run voluntarily, by the members themselves. Our members help each other by offering lifts, making drinks, typing up and recording each other's work, and by sharing their skills, resources and knowledge. We have a website ([www.grass-roots-open-writers.btik.com](http://www.grass-roots-open-writers.btik.com) <[http://www.grow.btik.com./>](http://www.grow.btik.com/)) and this is updated at least once a week. We use our website to keep our members informed about our activities as well as to showcase their writing and to build an online archive of our publications and a record of our achievements. Many of our members are disabled or have serious health issues that at times can make it difficult for them to attend our workshops. Our online presence means that anyone with Internet access can actively participate in group exercises and share their writing.

## **Current Projects:**

Illumination - an anthology of our member's writing and artwork with an accompanying DVD.

## **Group Discussion on what being a member of GROW means to our members.**

(A common factor for many of our members is that, before joining GROW they felt very isolated and lonely).

## **Mental & Emotional Health**

"Before I joined these groups I was very depressed. I didn't go out and I didn't want to go out. I thought that everyone was laughing at me. I felt stupid. It was very difficult to join in with anything. I thought that nobody liked me. Now when I come along to the groups and everyone is smiling and laughing and friendly, I feel much happier. I'm very glad I joined."

## **Confidence - Achievements and Successes**

### **Security - Continuity**

"Even after a long break I know I can come along to the groups and join in with whatever is going on."

"I've had an operation and can't come to the groups at the moment. I'm very pleased when the other members come and visit me. I miss the writing group and hope I can come back soon."

## Poetry from GROW members

### My Book of Dreams

In my fairy box my fairy cards are there. When in distress I go to venture on my cards, to give part of my life back to me. When negative thoughts overwhelm the positive side of me, it shows the pathway back to reality. Joy of this fairy box also contains my fairy companion set of letterheads and envelopes. I get so much joy sending them my family and friends a letter from my special box. They really get me back from all struggles in my life, at these present days.

Fairies flying in my box  
Come to the top  
They flutter their wings  
And twinkle dust over  
All things to make a better  
Place for all of our dreams  
And are a beautiful team.

Jan Humphreys

### A Miracle

I wonder how it went before  
The Internet arrived with us  
I am so far from homeland shore  
My friends I'd lose in days of yore

To Writers' Groups I still belong  
Without the meetings to attend  
I know Ashley will read ere long  
And that my words won't come out wrong!

A miracle it is to know  
That with my friends I join each week  
My limited talents to show  
My compositions row by row

Thank you so much, Microsoft  
To give the chance to write each week  
Thoughts which cross my mind at times oft  
And keep my spirits well aloft

Henry Dallimore

### Faith

In my soul lives a spirit  
Unseen.  
He came to me one night  
He told me, I don't know how  
My father was safe in his land  
This we all know as heaven.  
I can still visualize  
He came to me  
He was floating like a mirage  
He had a red cloak around his shoulders  
And I had but one day on  
Heard my father had died.  
I lost my father when I needed him most  
A Peacekeeper to me  
I had just had my first eye operation  
It was important  
I was checked out on the day of his death.  
Thank you to the eye department  
At the Conquest for giving me an open day to visit -  
15 years on....  
I have had ups and downs in my faith  
But faith is the ruler of my life  
Quietly...  
Words are written sometimes as a miracle.  
In the past - I have written words in the middle  
of the night - raised from my bed  
Unknowingly until morning what has been written.  
I changed my name as life changed  
My new name was blessed.  
I started to live again  
But still the pen can be  
A Master Tool...  
Tears have come from my eyes uncontrollably  
I sometimes don't know why  
I just wipe them  
But - the Spirit always lives in me -  
But sometimes...  
He lays dormant  
and I -  
Well, I continue - writing....

Josie Lawson

### Forthcoming Events (Summer 2009)

A GROW Open Day, Exhibition of our Art and Craft work and Fundraising

Afternoon (with Raffle and Refreshments.)

A sponsored cycle ride to raise funds for GROW

A Beach Party / Picnic / Pizza and Performance Night for GROW members, friends and family.

A Summer Outing to Batemans (Rudyard Kipling's House in Burwash)

Weekly Visits to the Barby Keel Animal Sanctuary

<http://www.grass-roots-open-writers.btik.com>

GROW, c/o The Children's Library, Robertson Passage, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 1HL. <http://www.fed.btik.com>

# Surviving the Waiting Room

## by Founding Editor Michael Lee

When your post includes a Wall Street business card with a scribbled note on the back “Thanks for the poems at the Doctors” clipped to a £20 note, and a simple plaintive letter “I have just picked up a copy of Poems in the Waiting Room, and I thought what a great thing. Full of thoughts of self and sorrowful me, it plucked me out of my doom and filled me with a moment of beauty. Whosoever you are, thank you; great idea!”, you know that Poems in the Waiting Room (PitWR) happily meets the waiting patient’s need.

PitWR is an arts in health charity which supplies free poetry cards with short collections of poems for patients to read while waiting to see their doctor. The patient may keep the free poetry card as an enduring rather than ephemeral contact with the poetry. The poems draws from both the canon of English verse and from contemporary works - poetry from Quill to Qwerty.

PitWR has published quarterly in this format since autumn 1998. Some 50,000 poetry cards were distributed in summer 2009, while to date well over half a million poetry cards have been made freely available to NHS patients and staff. The charity was described in a House of Lords debate: “Poems in the Waiting Room is the most widely read poetry publication in the United Kingdom...” PitWR is also the most extensive arts in health programme in the NHS.

The registered charity’s aim is to show gratitude to health service staff for their care and to promote poetry. PitWR has concentrated on NHS Primary Care. General practice deals with the public in their daily routine, and not in a way isolated by their morbidity. The benefits of the poetry flow directly into the population at large. NHS General Practice is also well diffused throughout every sector of the community, so benefits are socially diverse and penetrate hard pressed problem areas. The poetry cards are as readily taken away by patients in the high-rise concrete wilderness as in the leafy suburb. PitWR reaches parts other arts cannot touch.

The editorial policy is the key to PitWR success, and its wide acceptance by health professionals and their patients. The guidelines for submissions were devised with the advice of a consultant psychiatrist and experienced family doctors, while the selection of poems for each edition is monitored by a psychotherapist with extensive experience of NHS General Practice.

The crucial issue is an appreciation that readers are patients waiting for a medical consultation. They are therefore already likely to be in a heightened state, anxious and concerned, and possibly even emotionally disturbed. A poem is acceptable only when it is sensitive to these feelings in ways that alleviates the pressure and avoids new emotional challenge.

In a patient centred NHS, poetry arts in health too needs to be patient centred. The readers are patients: the worried well and the worried sick. The poems selected draw on the springs of well-being. Hope is all-inclusive, but like images and symbols, such as home and acceptance, safe journey and arrival, friends and companionship, care and security, harvest and abundance, work and reward, books and learning, beauty and transcendence, spring and renaissance, together with all the joys of love and loving, are eminently appropriate. In time of trouble, a measure of comfort is welcome. The poems act as an adjuvant to NHS care, hopefully enhancing its benefit. “In the desert of the heart/ Let the healing fountain start. (Auden)”

The editorial policy for Survivors’ Poetry is sharply different. Rather than produce poems for waiting patients, Survivors’ Poetry encourages patients to write their own. Their poems then explore the anatomy of their sickness in all its forms, experiencing the dark end of illness. The emotions expressed are often negative, an angry response to morbidity in all its forms, especially to the anguish and intractable grip of mental distress. The anxieties, pains and fears, rising directly from our human frailty are exposed. Even therapy becomes engulfed as part of the progress of morbidity. The sole glimmer of hope at best is a strident defiance.

Yet the two approaches to poems and health have much in common. They are the two faces of one coin; the precious metal between is Poetry. The poems express the strength of feelings and through this perhaps to heal in an emotional rather than clinical sense. All in the end meet one final defeat.

Poetry, either simply read or painfully composed, offers a generous incitement and invitation to self-transcendence. It encourages a more resolute and abundant sense of being a person, fully alive, wholesome and individual despite life’s frailty. “What’s the use of a held note or line/ That cannot be assailed for reassurance (Heaney)”.

Poems in the Waiting Room

[pitwr@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:pitwr@blueyonder.co.uk)

[www.poemsinthewaitingroom.org](http://www.poemsinthewaitingroom.org)

# Broadsheet

## S u i c i d e M e

I won't die by my hand  
In a New York gutter  
The razor slash... No!  
This blood act summons,  
Anonymity's Ghost.

The city has no solicitation,  
I seek nature's reward. Release!  
Lost of its imagined greatness,  
Black city streets, I find no peace.

I'll take me,  
Suicide me,  
Away and a ways.  
On a northwest trek.  
To the frontier,  
The Falls -  
The American Falls.

Dive down into  
The icy azure chop.  
The river runs,  
Wicked run, river's run;  
Can't you hear my  
Long, slashing strokes?

The Niagara,  
My Niagara  
Falling splintered,  
And white-capped  
Always for me.

Phenomenal sheer drop,  
She calls forth -  
An aquatic narcotic,  
To quiet and seal,  
In the idyll of my moment.  
The volatile fluctuations,  
Of a seeping mind.  
The Falls;  
Huskily her words skim along the mist.  
She is alone of the world, as am I.  
Together we meet,  
Still alone of ourselves.

Down and naked,  
Over The Falls.

The world is resplendent,  
In its mendacity to itself -  
To them - I was an intruder.

So I leave it, it to its self  
And in doing so, in my magic,  
In my prose and verse,  
I depart -  
One final breath.

Last of this temporal sphere -  
To tumble and crack against the boulders,  
Fractured body in its beauty of self -  
Unrepentant to all and all of myself.

Chris Roberts

USA

*Survivors' Poetry's*

*August 2009 Poem of the Month*

## R e s o l v e

Like an alcoholic, I am craving  
an overdose of sodium valporate  
to fill the hollow ache which is not having  
and never one day loving a mate.  
Some take crack, others wine and vodka.  
I want epilim and valium  
to numb the existentialist fear  
of facing forty and becoming barren.  
I empty a bottle of Diazepam,  
stare at counters, like a child's game,  
run them through my hands, like the sand  
of an hourglass, watching wasted time,  
return the letters to the Scrabble bag,  
recall my vow to take what I'm prescribed.

Sarah Wardle

## Pauline of Arkington

(for Richard Branson 'cause eye contact with the natural world is looking in upon the heart of darkness: J Conrad)

Love hearts for Pauline  
she's cut her luck of hair  
no gold locket for me  
no chivalry voodoo charmer me  
Samson without no Delilah  
love hats for Pauline  
show hats not to be seen  
one thing you can say  
about these injections  
dark rooms alone is bad psychology  
unless there's too much light  
puffins off the side of cliffs  
putting your teeth on edge  
comical silent comedies remedies  
puffins the silent comedians  
your face has no mirror to be seen  
that's the mistaken identity  
a star of Bethlehem tell him  
like a plane rising full of grace  
love hearts for Pauline  
Arkington she hails from that place

Molecular biology tampers with space  
can't fiddle but produce side-effects  
Chinese medicine highly recommended  
Indeed without a watch on you  
Time ships out of space  
D.N.A athletic teachers live in peace  
What disabled form of the world  
black men are tundra and heat  
primitive spirituals captured negativity  
that's it then Pauline  
Pauline of Arkington made my day  
Love hearts on her mug of tea  
Love hearts on her T-shirt  
She gave to me for a day  
I haven't had a date for ages  
Tropical fruit without a disease.

*Comrade Danny*

## The Fifty Minute Hour

My therapist said  
you need to get in touch  
with your inner anger  
so I threw the box of Kleenex  
at him, called him a useless fucker -  
he crushed me with a word.

## A Pair of Red Shoes

Soft patent leather, four inches high  
matching stitches round the edges  
bright shiny red in the shop mirror,  
they'd look fantastic over black fishnets -  
heels to feel alive in  
eighty five pounds a pair;  
stashed away in the back of the cupboard  
while I wear flat black lace ups.

## Amazon dot com

amazon dot com  
search books

Borderline Personality Disorder:  
The Facts

gift wrap available

Lydia Hill  
*SP Mentee 08/09*

## The Streets of London Are Not Paved With Gold

The Streets of London are Paved with Dog Turds,  
Chewing Gum, and Slimey Nuclear Spider-Worms.  
The Sky is Steely-Grey, the Sun so Bright,  
I Have to Wear Dark Glasses,  
Even At Night.

Be Aware of The Jabber-Wok My Son,  
The Diet of Worms Will Make You Sick,  
And Glue Your Guts with MonoSodium Glue-te-mate, Mate.

Thus Spake The Walrus, My Son,  
The Six-Billion-Dollar Question Remains Unanswered E'en Today.

But Eye Don't Care Anymore About Who Started What.  
In Fact, I'm Going to Hibernate for The Entire Nuclear Winter,  
And I'm Never Going to Appear in The Daylight Hours,  
Until The End Of Days is Finally Over.

Laura Wilson

## The Song Thrush

From a dead tree a song stark and steadfast as solitude.  
I have known some friendship but none like this aching  
dark terrible singing across a small plot at dusk  
betraying our humanity with its pitiful desire where  
meeting the night beckons desperate cottages surrender  
to the roving wind and hawthorn copses' nurture.

July 1988

**David Kessell**

*from O The Windows of the Book Shop must be Broken;  
published by Survivors Press 2006*

## After Winter

A warmer sun breaks through  
The light changes  
like sheets billowing on the line.

The nourished earth enriched with buds  
rises with the sap.

Among grassy slopes the sight  
of delicate snowdrops.  
In the shade a spreading purple stain  
of wild violets; fragrant smells of hyacinths.

Branches of tender shoots  
Fresh growths of vegetables and fruit  
Usher in the piquancy of Spring.

Twittering sounds reverberate  
An abundance of birds boldly appear  
Willow-warbler, blue-tits, chiff-chaffs  
On walls and greenery - build nests  
spread wings.

Waves of surprising sunshine suffuse the day  
Chime with rain and a swathe of cold winds  
like laughter through tears  
The elusive shape of Spring.

Vera Kryshek

## The World of Silence and The Silence You Shame

The world is full of abusers  
The minority are here to be abused by you  
Mustn't disobey  
Mustn't tell  
Or you will be abused by others  
In the name of  
Love, care, help or treatment  
It's not the real abusers  
That create the worse reasons to be silent  
It's you and what you do  
That creates the world of shame and silence  
I must be ready  
I have spoken out  
Even in words  
When they read this  
They will come and abuse me again  
Maybe it's my fault after all  
Maybe you're right and I'm wrong  
That's a shame  
or  
Is it shame?  
You decide  
Shall I be silent?..  
Like before

John Harrison

## Voicing Fears

What am I scared of?  
A few half interested listeners  
Miles away.  
Minds on other, closer people, familiar places.  
What am I really worried about?  
Will you clap, or will you jeer?  
A day and a bit in contemplation,  
Of the unobtainable warm cheer.  
You're either in the bar animating,  
Or looking out of windows.  
Old conversations milked to a turn.  
What am I scared of?  
I am only like you,  
Am I not?

P C Vealey

## INQUISITION OF FLESH

sometimes the hours bleed like Christ  
sometimes lightning flashes  
sometimes god photos his thoughts  
but photos have no value in court  
inquisition of flesh  
blood is crucified  
beyond the borders of the body  
voice flows and walls explode  
inquisition of flesh  
around noon under a circle moon  
take the eye out  
shave the moustache  
rip the teeth away  
pull the roots out  
shovel the crown  
die and resurrect  
then from upside down  
build the tower  
with philosophic cornerstones  
with precious stones of madness  
inquisition of flesh  
pyramid sarcophagus mummy pharaoh sphinx phoenix  
raining blood of osiris  
time waters  
at night in the desert flowers blossom

yaSSen vaSSilev

You Are Mad see - trust me I'm a doctor

Then whilst in their care  
my supposed illness; got real bad  
'Till all I could do to survive  
was to play their game'.  
And then really go mad  
Being in their hospitals  
Leave a stigma worse  
than prison

3.20 A.M

DON'T BRING ME TO THE LOONY BIN  
WHERE SPLINTERS OF LIGHT  
PRISE OPEN  
UNWILLING EYES  
WHERE PARROTS CACKLE TILL I STOP UP MY EARS  
AND HEAR  
THE DISTANT CRY OF INNOCENTS

THE RAIN TAPS GENTLY ON THE WINDOW PANE  
THE BLOOD DROPS QUIETLY ON THE PAGE  
AND MAKES THE SAME DULL SOUND  
THE LAUGHING AND THE RAIN  
FALL LOUDLY  
INTO MY HEAD  
AND I CANNOT SLEEP

Glory and shame

When I couldn't sleep I went under the covers  
To the land of sheets  
My great head was the king who controlled everything  
But the head was a kind king  
who granted favours like late night entertainment

I STARE AT THE BLOOD RED TIME  
THAT GLOWS IN THE BLACK ROOM  
ITS 3.20 am  
THE WINDOW RATTLES  
AND I AM COMFORTED  
IN MY TROUBLED WOMB

Pam Hardyment

The folds and crevices of the sheets  
made grand seats for the princes, princesses and courtiers  
the overhead light strategically seeping through the frayed cotton  
made convenient spotlights for the stage.

*Survivors' Poetry's*

*July 2009 Poem of the Month*

The show would begin and my six year old fingers  
Would dance for them all whilst they ate popcorn  
I would fall asleep before the show ended  
But would brutally awaken in the semi half light of early dawn  
to the stark, cold, clammy reality  
Of a wet bed

"Six years of age and still wetting the bloody bed"  
My dad would say

Avis Cowell (Clare)

## SCARABEUS SACER

he who gives birth to himself  
hardly suffers from oedipus complexes  
hardly knows electra closely  
he crawls like a snake out of the ground  
and evil omens thrive around  
magicians grow  
in the apple of his eye  
a boatman tirelessly rowing the sky  
brooding stars and hatching ark  
the moon opens its eyelid  
and the ship sinks into the sun  
spanish armada in the clouds  
tristan the mad is doomed  
geo milev must die  
the ego disfigured  
somewhere there marches  
samuil's one-eyed army  
somewhere there marches  
beheaded the last poet  
and September Septembers the Scarabeus

yaSSen vaSSilev

## S c r e a m

Haystacks and Augusts  
and country lanes.  
Woodland swooping birds.  
Country roads and pubs.  
Rivers, bridges, waterfalls.

Cornfields and bubbling streams.  
Willow trees and rivers in bloom.  
July is my lover.  
Blossom pink flowers  
Floating away.  
Bang!  
And the dream is over.

P C Vealey

## C o n f i n e d

And reckoning we  
green exist by walls  
of institution  
Violet light lets  
out our screams  
for restitution  
Where were the minds  
black white no reason  
put us inside their cage

so waiting for  
a yellow bus we  
retrograde, stand out  
shout this is all an illusion

somehow confusion shouts  
among us 'no-ones'  
knowing better than  
to scream sing dance

we retroflect on us.

S. Ctvrticka

## My Hard Sunset

Mountain clouds  
evening light sword  
scars reflections  
inside my pain  
thunderclaps  
rhythm to hurt  
spasmodically  
hard

toward an irate  
nimbus weave  
I see distant vines  
without a breeze  
no gain outside  
no love,  
nor same within.

S. Ctvrticka

## Metropolis

in a city under a glass lid  
raw knees rub the rails  
print the map of the net  
she wolf romulus and remus  
synchronicity and constant  
neon eyes blink  
rails and tunnel through time  
metro

tomorrow  
yesterday  
today  
randomness and coincidence  
ecumenopolis  
heliopolis  
metropolis

skyquake  
flying chunks of road  
solomon's temple destroyed  
nabuchadnezzar and nostradamus  
synchronicity and constant  
the future remains far behind us  
as scheduled in the dungeons  
metropolis collapses

yaSSen vaSSilev

## Ireland

In a Kerry bus station jackdaws eat rubbish;  
an old Republican carries plastic bags  
weighted with friendship and old ham.  
The hills bequeath the memories of the Troubles  
and a longing for young blooded boots. Great  
age has made this land schizophrenic  
with Deirdre's love and Kilkenny races; suffering  
suffering in old faithful faces, and affluent contempt.

The cars run on slaughtered pigs. A man  
who carried a gun now has a hacking cough.  
n bended knees this land lives, hard  
slog and the crack at street corners.  
A whistled song and the jackdaw soaring  
over misogyny and open serious faces.

July 1990

**David Kessell**

*from O The Windows of the Book Shop must be Broken;  
published by Survivors Press 2006*

## Lullaby

A police siren shocks through London air,  
bringing flashbacks of men, cells, wards, locked doors.

All darkness is that night in a station,  
waiting, without a watch, for light of dawn.

Pub laughter shrieks at the end of the street,  
leaving me out, like a burdened scapegoat,  
and even the social worker has gone,  
though I call his voice on the answerphone.

The pieta would be my father's face  
and that's why I don't take an overdose,  
as though his crying, if he found me dead,  
would cut worse than mine now, alone in bed,  
like the patients in rooms across the square,  
as if I were still sectioned with them there.

Sarah Wardle

## Don't Judge

Don't judge a book by its saddle  
Nor a horse by its color  
And never never never judge  
Anything about your mother  
Life is a gift to you  
A gadget with some gum  
And only your mother  
knows from where it does come

So never never truly never dead  
Just a book by its saddle  
Nor pull a sows ear

G David Schwartz  
USA  
*Survivors' Poetry's  
June 2009 Poem of the Month*

## Blood on Sandals

Black cold trees, sweating with sap  
Dripping from tips of buds  
Shines under silver moon  
Gold glittering xmas tree  
Adorned with baubles and lights

Faces lit up, anticipate delights  
Pop of corks, champagne sparkles  
Shoppers like ants — moths —  
Attracted to light!  
While the band played  
a pseudo Christian army.

The choir sing, "Peace on Earth!"  
Wind gusts a newspaper page  
Headline; Israel wages war  
And the prince of peace sleeps...

Far, far away, a building crumbles under fire  
Blood stained sandals amidst  
A rubble covered street  
While the devil of religion plays his fiddle and laughs.

Nigel J.A.M

## Damage Limitation

I  
*'You're a hard man'*,  
his companion had said in the billet.

Deep inside the hard man feels like jelly,  
crying silently at night under rough army blankets.

II  
Now in civilian life,  
he hides his grief in the bathroom  
where he had run as a child.  
His parents, numb with confusion.

III  
They are all voluntary patients  
in this particular bedlam.

*'The only way to remain a gentleman here  
is to have a bath every morning'*,  
the elderly emigre says.

A child is exposed to lysergic acid.  
*'Treatment'*, they say.

In the grounds of the hospital  
he talks with the child -  
petrified, and distressed.  
*'Treatment'*, they say.

Dennis Evans  
*Celebration Press*

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## Rather devious in retardhood

It is rather retarded to think that you are a Knight when you are on sick leave for years on end.  
I will never call me a knight no more. I need only to feel the knowledge throbbing thru my  
brain cells that I am not eligible for a Knighting.

## B a r a c k O b a m a

I hail thee Barrack for being what you are a pleasant person without qualms to help the Jews. If not then I do hate you! I hail thee and make thee a born saviour, saviour of the earth. The fairies of the land brings flowers to your doorstep, but no such folly I need to work.

## S t r a n g e r s

We are strangers to one another strangers without need to love feel you wanting me beside you I lie forever more. I needed to be free of your complaining that you wanted me. Now you want me no more anymore. When we are buried we lie together at the same place.

Thom Stevenson  
*Sweden*

## D a u g h t e r s

He smiled and said to her if I only get daughters I still will be willing to be with you stay with you for the rest of my life living near to danger was not what you intended me to say even if that was what all wanted out of you my dearest lovers. You said that I was good at what I am doing but not as good as you were yourself.

## T h i n k i n g

Thinking what you think of me is not vital not vital to you at all even if I need to feed on the richness of you soul even if I need to tell you that I was not living near to you at all telling you that darkness reaches out top your soul even if I liked to live with you before the day is over I will sleep with you again

## D a g g e r s

I send you daggers of my thoughts of you dreaming to get to you to get you near me in my inner sanctum there so happiness to be with you all now I must abide by the rules that you wouldn't love me at all now it is be as it may be I loved from the start the first time that I saw you

Thom Stevenson  
*Sweden*

## Songs of Soho

'Adam in me, in you Eve fears to tread  
a world not moulded in the heart's desire'  
*Edgell Rickword, 'Poet to Punk'*

Do the Songs of Soho sell good food and sex,  
the easy things men like when they race into chaos?  
Is this the Playland where we touch but can't trust magic thrills?  
Is this the sound made when an emptied head bangs on a hollow world!  
Can the good wine of the city be the wide-ringing voice of the apple seller?  
And is it also the sparrow, whose song may be sung within?

The photo doesn't show what tarts up the shy Sicilian girl.  
Green as young oranges when she came awkwardly to these streets  
strange as her customs are narrow to us.  
Something devious about the roses here makes an earthquake  
in the childhood garden where she'd heard spring birds  
and when alone she sings her sad, fragmented songs  
we throw her stares like harsh flashing pennies.  
Our suggestions like neon scar the meaning of her tears.  
Then she learns the hopelessness in our easy laughter; fancy  
flower that's forgotten home's provincial evergreen.  
O what makes it seem that she is not assaulted?  
She's singing now in empty shaded groves, her mind  
out of the terrible sun of her solicitous night.

*Step inside gentlemen, leave your guilty minds;  
sit in the warm and worldly lap of your genesis.  
The hounded brain obeys, kills the rhythm in the blood.*

What makes George believe he can only sing in her secret holy passage  
when his song is for us all in a frank, generous sky?  
After the hurried act, leaving the pain of the world unmoved.  
He lingers in bright alleys with the well-respected fuck.  
Does he mistake its vigour for his freedom - is he too unsure  
to chance it behind her eyes? Unsung, ordinary  
love - the steel of freedom - jeered at  
by the winking eye of a cynical world.  
The dirty old man murdered by sterile lust in these streets.

*Step inside gentlemen, dull your guilty minds;  
sit in the warm and worldly lap of your genesis.  
The hounded brain obeys, kills the rhythm in the blood.*

Along exotic pavements a youth tramples his confused soul.  
Can the music he finds be welcoming the chaos of change  
to move but not to change, to sing but not to alter.  
The image of himself is his cool and desperate hope.  
When he finds himself different, in a new light,  
he gives this stranger a ticket to an anonymous side-show,  
so no-one will see him with a strange love, forgets  
where he has come from. Fearfully pockets his soul.  
By the slot machines of the Crystal Room his leaping notes ring bells  
and impressively turn lights on within reflecting walls.  
Kept inside glass his songs are surrounded by night;  
his sun shut-in burns a hole in his heart.

*Step inside gentlemen, forget your guilty minds;  
sit in the warm and worldly lap of your genesis.  
The hounded brain obeys, kills the rhythm in the blood.*

Now he never stops trying to bed his genesis, being so holy, with his  
dreams  
desperately he fucks the world-green sweetness out of himself,  
O but he was born also from the midst of growing, ravaged forests,  
the cold winds, rains, stones of rough-diamond Nature.  
Will I and my world-joining hope of Socialism be drowned in this lusting ocean?  
Never more the pained soul's angry leap to the loving edge  
of an inchoate, curiously open world?  
Between the difficult need and easy solace there can be no communion;  
I must fight my lust yielding a song of sweet struggle;  
in the arms of the universe find the liberty of my becoming.

Fierce-loving bells of St. Martin's are tolling  
against the difficult cause of Man-bound history.  
Perhaps if we could ring out from within the frail  
unspoken substance of that to-be-died-for meaning  
in our hearts, our songs would carry us to Heaven?  
I dearly hope when dead to spend eternity in Hell,  
for when with comrades in these streets we do not sing the Internationale  
our painful thoughts disturb the arguments of brotherhood therein.

Out of weeping shadows the persistent drumming  
of bitter strangers from the downtrodden Orient mock us.  
Through bloodless streets we hurry home, to bury our heads  
before the rosy raucous dawn of neglected brothers.

A rasping melody of charlady morning challenges conscience.  
One day her acid rain will scour Soho  
and men see themselves cut-up in its razor light.

Now the hellish throbbing's stopped.  
A drunk's daydreams break across unfamiliar streets,  
and a songthrush wakes his mournful love for Ireland.  
Why can't he take his daily threnody with milk?  
He observing the gentile flowers of Soho Square through a haze of insult  
fallen with conforming hours, would find them stunning funny,  
but their blooms aren't worth bleeding for by their thorns.  
This evil animated by his grin simplifies the stubborn world.  
O once when the city's smirking stars are out he'll dig up his garden  
and plant the soft wild Irish flowers that bloom on tears.

Now Candy she's waking choked with our consuming narrow passion,  
and he must numb the throbbing void with whiskey.  
Here we all become outcast; English with Chinese and Italian.  
If we could form a choir, our one and many voices  
would pluck the heartstrings of London.  
The suffering Cockney must make, with tunes and whistles,  
tough worldly songs of anger, irony and hope.

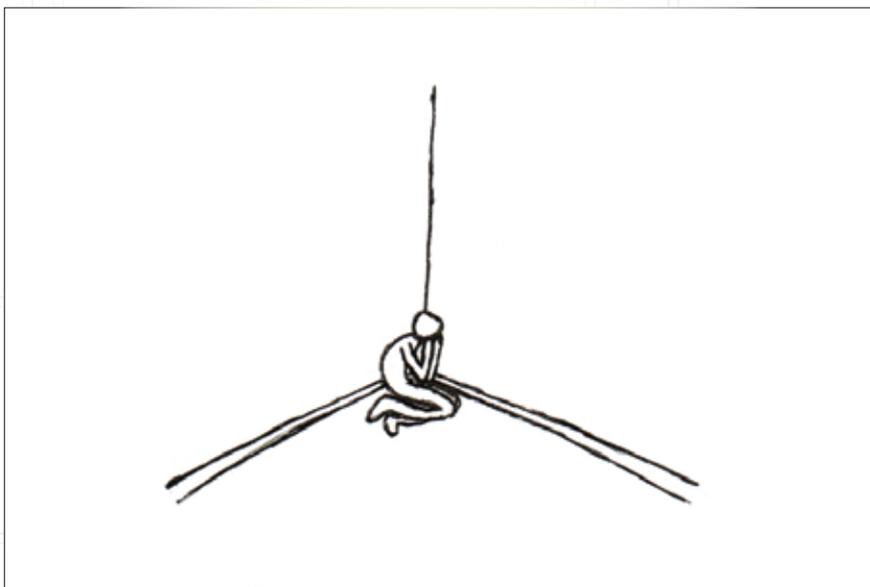
1972

**David Kessell**  
*from O The Windows of the Book Shop must be Broken;*  
*published by Survivors Press 2006*

john harrison  
**featured artist**



THE JOURNAL OF THE JOURNEY.



7/10/05

**A** **BRAKE**, **THE**

**SILENCE**

**RING OUT**

**THERE SHAME**

SO WE KNOW WHO AND WHERE THEY ARE. FOR THE SAFETY OF THE CHILDREN. AND EACHOTHER.

**WHICH MUST COME FIRST NOW**

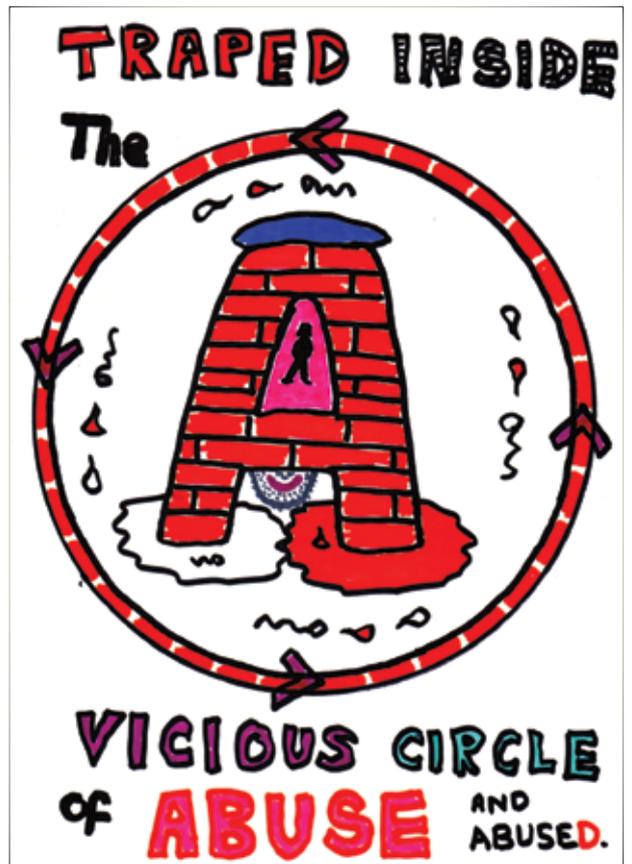
**FAMILY**

ONLY TOGETHER AS ONE.



John Harrison is a poet and an artist. He lives in Hampshire and is currently working towards his first collection of Poetry and Prose Writing. See Dave Russell's review of Johwebsite:

<http://www.bsafelstalways.com>



ARTIST:- THE BOY  
 THE RECOLD :- ABUSE.

TRACK 1. The Spunk of a man  
 TRACK 2. The blood of a boy.  
 TRACK 3. The Tears of a boy.

THIS RECOLD DOESNT SPIN TO R.P.M  
 BUT TO THERE WANTS  
 OR FAILINGS. OR HOW YOU FEEL.

TRACK 3. IS HOW IT MAKES YOU FEEL. WHEN AND AFTER  
 THEY MAKE THIS RECOLD



# Survivor History Group Notes by Peter Campbell



photo by Phil Ruthen, © Survivors History Group

Peter Campbell, Frank Bangay (on right) during interview with journalist Catherine Jackson'

## Summer 2009

Four years after its foundation, the Survivors History Group continues to make progress. During its development up to this point, the group has had a comparatively small management group of about half a dozen committed people. But now that the group has a higher profile and a better network of interested supporters, we are in a position to assemble a stronger management group with a wider membership. We will be doing this over the next few months, first by inviting people to join our management group mailing list and then approaching some of the new members on that mailing list to become formal management group members. In this way, we hope to progress as an effective force promoting survivor history.

Last autumn the group received a setback when our funding application to Comic Relief was turned down. Although this was a disappointment, and has meant that we have not been able to go ahead with some of our plans, the group has small but workable funds from donations and other sources and has remained active over the last six months. We continue to meet monthly in London and to develop contacts throughout the rest of the country.

Throughout its history the group has been involved in staging small exhibitions at conferences and other events. We now have the nucleus of an effective exhibition and are looking to develop it further. The group has been providing a regular exhibition at a monthly series of seminars organised in London by the British Sociological Association and the Survivor Research Network. We have also staged an exhibition and a workshop at a conference organised by the University of Brighton and are scheduled to do the same at the 9th Annual Mental Health Education and Training Conference in London in September.

One of the original aims of the History Group was to establish a physical archive somewhere for all kinds of documents and other materials relating to the history of the survivor movement. At present, this appears to be a long-term rather than a short-term goal. In the meantime, much of the focus of the group's work has been on developing a virtual archive on a website, built around a historical timeline. This has been progressing and can be accessed on <http://studymore.org.uk/mpu.htm>

In all this work, the group realises that we are really dealing with histories rather than a history. It is important to avoid creating a monolithic London-centric account of the survivor movement. As a result we are keen to build up links around the country with interested people and to encourage the formation of local groups to research and write the history of survivor action in their local area. A group covering the Greater Manchester area has already been formed and there is the possibility for similar developments in other areas like Birmingham and Leeds. We are in touch with the Oor Mad History Group operating in the Edinburgh and Lothians region.

If you are interested in what the Survivor History Group is doing and want to get involved or support us in our activities, or send a donation, you can contact: The Secretary, 177 Glenarm Road, London E5 0NB

**Peter Campbell is the Chair of the Survivor History Group and a founder of Survivors' Poetry**

## Ben Okri Showcase

### Poet in the City Event

28th February, 2009, New Academic Building, LSE

This event was chaired by Palash Dave, who is well known as a film maker.

Ben Okri is probably best known for his novel, *The Famished Road*, which won the Booker Prize. But at the very beginning of the evening he emphasised that "I am primarily a poet". Indeed, his concept of fiction is essentially poetic: "The greatest stories are those that resonate our beginnings and intuit our endings, our mysterious origins and our numinous destinies, and dissolve them both into one."

*The Famished Road* admirably illustrates his point:

"The main character is boy named Azarro who is born into a relatively poor family who are forced to take harsh measures to feed each other. The mother (his parents are not given names) is a stereotypical female character; dedicated, hardworking, caring, beautiful. Black Tiger, Azarro's father, is a thoroughly principled man. The son of a chieftan he is forced to carry bags of cement to earn a living but eventually admits fate and becomes a boxer. He later becomes political and fights proponents of various corrupt political parties. *In parts the plot reads like a bad Rocky film but the style is so poetic and ingenious that it draws you further and further into it's heart of darkness.* Azarro on the other hand is followed by strange beasts and haunted by malevolent spirits. But the most inspiring aspect of *The Famished Road* is Okri's style; it really has to be experienced to be believed! Spellbinding! It easily makes my top 20!" (Review in Swerve).

The role of poet was compared to that of an actor, who must play on whether s/he is being applauded or booed - a true imagination breaks the rules and takes the consequences.

His work, as one of the leading African writers, is a dynamic synthesis of African and Western European traditions, experimenting with new literary forms, different styles, genres, and traditions. Okri started as a realist, with postcolonial themes. After exploring the stream of consciousness Okri published novels

which blended realism and modernism with oral forms, especially those of his native Yoruba culture. This style has been characterized as an example of magic realism with African flavour, although the author himself has emphasized the realistic dimensions of his work – myths and local beliefs are part of the real world, urban life-world, not that they exist next to the real world.

"We are the miracles that God made  
To taste the bitter fruit of Time.  
We are precious  
And one day our suffering  
Will turn into the wonders of earth."

His poetry collection *An African Elegy*, exploits the themes of dreams, spirits and the legacy of colonialism. He did readings from both in Europe and in Africa. Okri is described in the *Britannica* as using "a **magic realism** to convey the social and political chaos in his country". It cannot be overemphasised that Ben Okri is a truly cross-cultural writer, highly educated in the English/European tradition, with which he fine-tunes his sensitivity to his own roots – and emphatically no abstract, detached writer - his introduction to the British educational system was no passport to safe comfort. He became passionately involved in all manner of politics and dissension.

"I got a crash course in internationalism. I met people from just about every continent and country in the world. I encountered philosophies, styles, attitudes, from all corners of the earth. I lost my detached relationship to life, and become engaged to action. I got a thorough briefing in politics of all kinds, anarchism, communism, capitalism – you name it. I brushed up against it. I saw more great and bad films than you'd see in a lifetime. I met weirdos, and had to find my way to out-weird them. I met music-heads, literature-geeks, theatre-freaks, destroyers of television sets, plummy-voiced sedentaries, working class fire-breathing Trotskyists and the coolest Afro-Caribbean geezers and the most beautiful girls in the world. I acquired a red beret, and it never left my head for seven years. I ran for office, and the communists betrayed me at the last minute, thank God, and I lost by seven votes. I wrote and directed and acted in my own plays – how bad can you get? I fell in love. I breathed and lived a wild air of freedom, of mental freedom." (*Kinetic Nostalgia on Graduation*)

The Chairman mentioned that the Nigerian government withdrew his educational funding: surely one can understand the reasons. He progressed to the conclusion that “Politics is the art of the possible; creativity is the art of the impossible.”

His epic poem, *Mental Fight*, whose title comes from William Blake’s *Jerusalem*, was a direct source of inspiration for the Mental Fight Club, which does excellent work presenting concerts in the spirit of William Blake. Its founder, Sarah Wheeler, had suffered from Depersonalisation Disorder, and was refocused by reading Ben’s poem. He was very moved by the news of her recovery, by the power of poetry to intervene in matters of mental health. Okri passionately believes in the dynamic role of the reader into bringing any work of literature to full life: reading, like writing, is a creative act. If readers only bring a narrow range of themselves to the book, then they’ll only see their narrow range reflected in it.”

He said that “the reader creates the poem” and added that the poetry of her (ie Sarah’s) spirit is at work here. In answer to one questioner, he said he believed in Novalis’s dictum, “I am you reaching out”. The poem, roughly of short-story length, faces the issue of the millennium. Okri feels strongly for the significance of that time division, aware of its ‘evolutionary potential’, of the feeling of ‘marking time’ for centuries, and of ‘habits developing their own resonance’. It is probably the most significant celebration of the millennium in literature, facing as it does the utter darknesses of despair and negativity, and giving a basis for hope and progression.

“Allow un contemplated regions  
Of time to project themselves  
Into your sleeping consciousness,  
Inducing terror, or mental liberation.  
Much as death-confrontation  
Paralyses some with despair  
Makes others poison  
Themselves with emptiness  
But releases in a fortunate few  
A quality of enlightenment  
A sense of the limited time we have  
Here on earth to live magnificently  
To be as great and happy as we can  
To explore our potential to the fullest  
And to lose our fear of death  
Having gained a greater love  
And reverence for life  
And its incommensurable golden brevity.  
So it is with this moment.  
A gigantic death  
And an enormous birth  
This mighty moment.  
In timelessness.”

All Survivors should inwardly digest this work!

He made the following distinctions between poetry and prose: Poetry is silent/prose speaks; poetry is hearing/prose is listening; poetry is seeing/prose is looking; poetry is meditation/prose is contemplation; poetry is spiritual/prose is psychic; poetry is timelessness/prose is time. However, Ben Okri is concerned to blend the literary forms of poetry and the short story, most consciously so in one of his latest publications, *Tales of Freedom*. He radiates even more power through his apparent self-contradiction.

“*Tales of Freedom* brings both poetry and story together in a fascinating new form, using writing and image pared down to their essentials, where haiku and story meet . . . offers a haunting necklace of images which flash and sparkle as the light shines on them. Quick and stimulating to read, but slowly burning in the memory, they offer a different, more transcendent way of looking at our extreme, gritty world – and show the wealth of freedom that’s available beyond the confines of our usual perceptions.” (Review in *Fantastic Fiction*)

He described the spiritual as “things beyond three dimensions, which can only be glimpsed by the mind, not the eye”, and quoted Saul Bellow’s remark “It takes courage to use the word ‘soul’”.

“The worst realities of our age are manufactured realities. It is therefore our task, as creative participants in the universe, to re dream our world. The fact of possessing imagination means that everything can be re-dreamed. Each reality can have it.”

A passionate defender of the imagination: “Only those who truly love and who are truly strong can sustain their lives as a dream. You dwell in your own enchantment. Life throws stones at you, but your love and your dream change those stones into the flowers of discovery. Even if you lose, or are defeated by things, your triumph will always be exemplary. And if no one knows it, then there are places that do. People like you enrich the dreams of the worlds, and it is dreams that create history. People like you are unknowing transformers of things, protected by your own fairy-tale, by love.”

Ben drew a distinction between **Contemplation** – clear, logical thought, good prose and clarity of movement, and **Meditation**, which involves emptying space, that things can come into: *you clear your mind rather than filling it*. Talking of the development of his style from the time before *The Famished Road*, he said “I became dissatisfied with realism’s picture of the world; it didn’t tell us anything about the gaps between thoughts, the role of myth within history, dreams. I had to go back to the beginnings of language.”

Palash Dave quizzed Ben according to the principles of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* (1819). One answer, poets should be acknowledged as legislators of the world, not unacknowledged. They should be valued for the electric light that burns within their work.

His poem *The Clock* is frighteningly surreal. A mechanical device has the power to poison somebody's mind. It is 'a secret between two enemies', a harbinger of death, resembling a statue of a disdainful Roman God. Later, his readings of *Change* and *Picasso* gave the evening an extra charge. He reflected on the nature of change, both honouring it: "change is the God that Heraclitus saw in the Golden River" and wistfully referring to Isaac Newton's adage, "change is good, but no change is better", with Newton venerated as having 'freed us into new sight'. *Picasso* made some impassioned pleas: one must multiply one's language, let material speak (as it did in Picasso's paintings), transcend morality, do not be your own censor. A true disciple of Picasso, Ben reiterated the maxim: "always give a child something to do". Form follows vision. To have no purpose can be conducive to creativity, keep the artistic libido alive.

His forthcoming novel, *Starbook* was described as making up in mystery what it lacks in irony. It presents Ben Okri's credos in an intense, accentuated form:

"It is also a novel about art and its capacity to creatively reconfigure the cruelties of the world . . . Okri loves paradox, one of the striking affinities he has with Blake, and uses words to point at the hidden, the space where the sacred lives and breathes. 'To understand too quickly was a failure. It was a blinding. Understanding stopped them from seeing and looking.' The intrusion of humanity's inhumanity anchors the metaphysical lyricism of the book, creatively chills its enchanted air, reminds us that all the best fairy tales hold a mirror up to the darkness and terror of the world. This is a vision of a paradise both found and lost.

"Okri's vision pervades every page and a vision so spiritualised, so peculiarly optimistic, will not be to everyone's taste. There is not a shadow of cynicism or knowingness here; the ironic, the distanced, are remarkable by their absence. But it is the imaginative generosity and peculiar purity of the writing that continually touch the heart. Here is a prose with a tender tread, alive to human frailty. 'The king loved to watch over sleeping beings. Often he wandered the kingdom at night, watching over his sleeping subjects ... the good and the bad all slept in the same way, under the mercy of immense forces, under the mercy of the ultimate mysteries.'" (Ben Brown, *The Guardian*)

Indeed, with many readers' prejudices and inhibitions as they are, Okri will not be to everyone's (preconditioned?) taste. Indeed, it requires a conscious effort to attune to the full substance of his work, and also patience. But he is also supremely reader-friendly. This was my first experience of hearing him live. No-one present at that session could deny the utter clarity and simplicity with which he made his incredibly profound points.

Ben Okri's latest Publications: *Tales of Freedom*: Rider 978-1-8460-4157-0; *Starbook*: Rider 978-1-846-04081-8

Dave Russell

## R i m b a u d   a n d   V e r l a i n e

**Poet in the City's Event**  
**27th April 2009, Kings Place, London**

This presentation was chaired by **Alan Jenkins**, Poetry and Deputy Editor of the TLS. It featured **Graham Robb**, Lecturer at Exeter College Oxford, literary historian, and biographer of Rimbaud; **Dominique Combe**, Professor of French Literature at the Sorbonne and Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford, whose study of Rimbaud was published in 2004; **Martin Sorrell**, Professor of French at Exeter University, who has edited editions of the Collected Poems of Rimbaud and Verlaine, and **Yann Fremy**, author and co-editor of recognised Rimbaud and Verlaine studies, organiser of Rimbaud/Verlaine seminars at the Sorbonne, and member of the CERIEL group at Strasbourg University. An excellent presentation, about which I would only have one mild criticism. Dominique Combe made some substantial points. But the event was slightly marred by his difficulty with English; it might have been better for him to speak entirely in French, as I am sure all the audience would have understood this.

### **The Campaign**

The event is linked to a campaign to preserve 8, Royal

College Street, where the two poets lived in 1872-73 and produced their most important works, and develop it into an Anglo-French Cultural Centre. The house was in danger of demolition, but was saved by a vigorous campaign. In his introduction, Alan Jenkins expressed thanks to Rosalind Jordan and Melanie Lowe, prime movers for the proposed Centre.

The evening was introduced and punctuated with a selection of poems, both in the original French by Bill Homewood, and in English Translation by Estelle Kohler, both members of the RSC, who recorded the best-selling *Shakespeare's Lovers*. It was good to have the perspective of a male and female voice conveying the same material, crossing language and gender barriers – in the spirit of the dominant sensuality of these verses; the poets were not exclusively of gay orientation. The event had an exciting backdrop of paintings by Hervé Constant, some portraits, some depictions of where the poets lived. The evening opened with spirited readings of Verlaine's *Il pleure dans mon coeur*, which has been arranged as a song by Billy Cowie and J Carpenter. The French original felt stronger, partly because of the tight rhyme scheme. There were also read *Pensée du Matin* (Rimbaud), *Le ciel est pas dessus le toit* (Verlaine), *Colloque Sentimentale* (Verlaine), *L'Espoir Vit* (Verlaine), *Spleen* (Verlaine), *Charleroi* (Verlaine) and *Le piano que baise* (Verlaine), and *Laeti et Errabundi*, Verlaine's extended eulogy to alcoholic hedonism:

“Laissant la crainte de l'orgie  
Et le scrupule au bon ermite,  
Puisque quand la borne est franchie  
Ponsard\* ne veut plus de limite.”

**(Leaving the fear of the orgy**

And all scruples to the good hermit  
Since when the boundary is crossed  
Ponsard\* wants no more limits.)

\***François Ponsard** (1814-1867) was a French dramatist who pioneered the theatre of “l'école du bon sens” and applied to the theatrical area many of the concepts and ideas which motivated Rimbaud and Verlaine.)

As a teenager, **Alan Jenkins** was deeply affected by Oliver Bernard's translation of Rimbaud's poems in the 60s. He has recently published *Drunken Boats*, a translation of Rimbaud's *Le Bateau Ivre*.

Rimbaud was a definite outsider in the French literary tradition. He came from Charleville, near the Belgian border, and was never assimilated into Parisian literary circles. He found Paris a 'pretty provincial town. In comparison, he loved the smog of London, and got to know the city like the back of his hand. His affection

for the metropolis contrasts starkly with Verlaine's feeling that it was 'unbelievably brutal . . . a gigantic overflowing toilet'. Rimbaud cultivated the art of insult and obscenity. This is referred to in *La Vierge Folle*: “if brass wakes up a trumpet, it is not its own fault”.

Some critics, citing the abrupt change in the tone of his poetry over the turn of 1870, speculate that Rimbaud may have experienced a traumatic event—possibly sexual abuse by soldiers—during the months he spent in Paris and Belgium. The sentimental verse of his earlier years gave way to poetry that expressed his growing cynicism and disgust with life.

Most scholars, regardless of their critical perspective, agree that Rimbaud's poetry represented something . . . innovative in its time. According to Victor-Guy Aboulafia, the poet's “first act of aesthetic revolt” was his opposition to the ‘art for art's sake’ doctrine of the Parnassian school. He expressed overt hostility towards the Parnassians, but to some extent, with his embracing of the exotic, he continued in their vein. Aboulafia reports that “from early on the young Rimbaud had become aware that this trend-setting, nihilistic aesthetics was intended for an élite readership only,” and his reaction to it was therefore oppositional. Aimée Israel-Pelletier contends that Rimbaud's poetry is innovative because it is so completely grounded in everyday life. She believes that “his work is most radical not for its turning away from reference or coherence, but rather for the way it coerces a traditionally subjective genre – lyric poetry – into interfacing with the real.”

It is generally assumed that the “Foolish Virgin” section of *La saison en enfer* represents Rimbaud and Verlaine's domestic life in and around 8 Great College Street (now Royal College Street), where a little plaque commemorates their stay between May and July 1873. Verlaine's words capture what this must have been like:

“On several nights, his demon seized me, we rolled around together, I wrestled with him! – At nights, often, drunk, he lies in wait in the streets or in the houses, to frighten me half to death. ‘They will cut my throat, truly; it will be disgusting’ Oh! these days when he walks around with an air of crime . . . In the hovels where we used to get drunk, he would weep at the sight of those around us, miserable beasts . . . He would go about with the innocence of a little girl on her way to catechism – He pretended to be an expert on everything, business, art, medicine – I followed him; I had no choice!”

Sometimes it takes only the lightest even imperceptible action to set irreversible wheels in motion. “If only you knew how much of a fuckwit you look carrying that

fish,” the young poet **Arthur Rimbaud** shouted down from the window of 8 Great College St, Camden to his older lover **Paul Verlaine**, as he returned with their groceries. Already pushed to the edge by the ravages of semi-destitution and drink, his own guilt at abandoning his long-suffering family and the depraved actions of his partner, Verlaine finally snapped. Bounding up the stairs, he burst into the room, slapped Rimbaud about the face with the fish and stormed out. Later, there would be time to shoot his companion and ineptly attempt suicide. To the respectable passers-by of Victorian London, they were merely two wretched sodomites concluding a sordid affair in predictably degenerate fashion. Yet today, over a century later, they are the subjects of theses and exam papers (analysed for “verse spatiality” and “Sapphic aesthetics”), admired by academics and French statesmen (*chieurs d’encre et cravattés* – ink-shitters and tie-wearers respectively) with all the sordid aspects carefully removed and elevated above the rabble to which they belonged.”

Their 40-day affair became an iconic legend, providing a role model for gay rights activists and many a pop star. Like all such legends, it glamourised and distorted to a degree. Rimbaud has often been mythicised, considered as the total rebel, the total nihilist. But he did periodically return home to ‘cool off’; his mother not only subsidised him, but read his works.

The two poets, temperamentally, contrasted strongly. Verlaine was vacillating, while Rimbaud was rigorously self-disciplined, single minded. Though much younger in years, he was the mature partner and the source of whatever stability there was in that stormy relationship. In view of the course of Rimbaud’s later life, he may have been coolly, clinically experimenting with his own sexuality, while Verlaine’s involvement could have been wholly emotional. Could one say that Rimbaud retained control, while Verlaine lost it. In a letter to Rimbaud, Verlaine could say ‘being weak, I am in need of kindness’. Rimbaud initiated the association of the two poets, via a ‘fan mail’ letter he wrote to Verlaine when only 16 in response to Verlaine’s collection *Fêtes Galantes* (1869). There was obviously a two-way quality to their relationship. In some ways, Rimbaud the disciple became the teacher of Verlaine; the latter’s most fully evolved work certainly related to the period of their mutual contact.

Parnassian poetry failed when, in order to express its scientific or philosophical ambitions, it lapsed into precisely the ‘didactisme rimé’ to which it was in theory opposed, but its emphasis on poetry as an organized system of rhymes, stanzaic structures, and descriptive, picturesque effects defined the basis

from which Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé and Rimbaud would, in their different ways, ‘creuser le vers’.

He wished to develop a form of poetry which was ‘absolument moderne’ – to reject the older forms of poetry, which he found over-subjective, and pioneer a new mode of *objective poetry*. He considered poetry to be a means to an end, and as is well known, he abandoned poetry at the age of 21, to find satisfaction as an arms and ivory trader in Africa. One of his key expressions was ‘je EST un autre’ (I is another). The poet must *become* the poem, the vision, though this is hard on the self. In the opinion of Iris Murdoch “Rimbaud failed because he was overloading the electrical circuit”. This remark merits careful evaluation. The term ‘failed’ is highly questionable, because his extant body of work is of a high poetic order; there is the possibility that it would have deteriorated if he had not made his act of severance at age 21. ‘Overloading’ may well be an accurate diagnosis. He applied obsessional intensity to his verbal expression. For someone considered to be totally self-indulgent, he was extraordinarily self-disciplined. The same principle may apply to his efforts to provoke and outrage in a social/literary context. One wonders whether he always kept a careful monitoring eye on himself during that brief period of ‘self-abandonment’. Yves Bonfoi described his attitude as ‘ascèse créatrice’ (creative asceticism). The main articulation of his credo comes in his famous *Lettre du voyant* (May 15, 1871), to a friend, Paul Demeny: “I say that one must be a seer, make himself a seer. The Poet makes himself a seer by a long, immense and reasoned *derangement of all the senses*”. He exhausts in himself all the poisons, to preserve only their quintessences . . . For he arrives at the *unknown* . . .” He constructed the poetic fiction of addressing Satan. Martin Sorrell argued that Rimbaud had ‘no firm commitment to truth; he can only refer to falsehood/fiction’. This is articulated in no uncertain terms in the Prologue to *Une saison en enfer*:

“I summoned executioners to bite their gun-butts as I died. I summoned plagues, to stifle myself with sand and blood. Misfortune was my god. I stretched out in the mud. I dried myself in the breezes of crime. And I played some fine tricks on madness . . . Ah, I’ve practised too many! – But, dear Satan, I beg you, an eye a little less inflamed! And while awaiting my few cowardly little deeds, for you who prize in a writer the lack of descriptive or instructive skill, for you, I tear off these few hideous pages from my notebook of a damned soul.” He looks to Satan (perhaps his own, imaginary, ‘inner Satan’ as inspiration and judge.

Éclat, lui, d’un météore, allumé sans motif autre

que sa présence, issu seul et s'éteignant. (With the impact of a meteorite, lit up by the power of his presence alone inspired by a solitary model, he issues forth and destroys himself)  
Stéphane Mallarmé

*Une saison en enfer*: Professor Combe outlined the history of this, the only comprehensive collection of Rimbaud's work to be published in his own lifetime; all his other works were only preserved in manuscript form, published posthumously. It was a 500-copy edition; only 75 copies were distributed by the author; the remaining 425 were discovered in the Brussels printer's cellar in 1901. This work embraces several genres, dramatic and hysterical mode, and narrative – all in the framework of a diary, with some feeling of an interior monologue novel. It is predominantly in the form of prose poetry, with some use of structured verse forms.

*Illuminations* was first published in the Symbolist magazine *La Vogue* in 1874. The poem is loosely divided into nine parts, some of which are much shorter than others. They differ markedly in tone and narrative comprehensibility, with some, such as *Bad Blood*, being much more obviously influenced by Rimbaud's drug use than others.

“From my ancestors the Gauls I have pale blue eyes, a narrow brain, and awkwardness in competition. I think my clothes are as barbaric as theirs. But I don't butter my hair. The Gauls were the most stupid hide-flayers and hay-burners of their time. From them, I inherit: idolatry and love of sacrilege; – oh! all sorts of vice, anger, lechery, – terrific stuff, lechery; – lying, above all, and laziness. I have a horror of all trades and crafts. Bosses and workers, all of them peasants, and common. The hand that holds the pen is as good as the one that holds the plow. – What a century for hands! – I'll never learn to use my hands. And then, domesticity goes too far. The propriety of beggary shames me. Criminals are as disgusting as men without balls: I'm intact, and I don't care. But! who has made my tongue so treacherous, that until now it has counselled and kept me in idleness? I have not used even my body to get along. Out-idling the sleepy toad, I have lived everywhere. There's not one family in Europe that I don't know. – Families, I mean, like mine, who owe their existence to the Declaration of the Rights of Man. – I have known each family's eldest son!

Attain death with all your appetites.  
Rimbaud, *Une saison en enfer*

This language will be soul for soul's sake, summing up everything: perfumes, sounds and colours, thought latching onto thought and pulling.  
– Rimbaud, *Letter of the Seer*.

**Night in hell (Nuit en enfer)** – highlights the moment of the narrator's death and entry into hell.

**Delirium 1: The Foolish Virgin - The Infernal Spouse (Délires I: Vierge folle - L'Époux infernal)** this bipartite piece is in confessional mode, where both the male and the female entity speak from the perspective of the damned. They do, however, appeal to a 'Celestial' power and express hope for a less damned existence.

**Delirium 2: Alchemy of Words (Délires II: Alchimie du verbe)** – the narrator then steps in and explains his own false hopes and broken dreams. This section is broken up much more clearly than many other sections, and contains many sections in verse.

**The Impossible (L'impossible)** – this section is vague, but seems to describe an attempt on the part of the author to escape from hell. XX qu'il n'y a de poésie que de l'Impossible.

**Lightning (L'éclair)** – this very short section is also unclear, although its tone is resigned and fatalistic and it seems to indicate a surrender on the part of the narrator. But still, the illuminating quality of lightning may indicate hope for an escape from hell: “That explosion lights up my abyss from time to time . . . Oh! - poor dear soul, eternity then might not be lost!”

**Morning (Matin)** – this short section serves as a conclusion, where the narrator claims to have “finished my account of my hell,” and “can no longer even talk.”

**Farewell (Adieu)** – this section seems to allude to a change of seasons, from Autumn to Spring. The narrator seems to have been made more confident and stronger through his journey through hell, claiming he is “now able to possess the truth within one body and one soul.”

“Perhaps because it is a richly complex work, there is no critical consensus regarding the principal motifs in *Une Saison en enfer*. Some critics emphasize the theme of evil, others focus on the topic of alienation, and still others stress the significance of sin and redemption in the poem. Many scholars have called attention to the narrator's struggle to reconcile the ideals of Christianity with the hypocrisy and corruption of Western civilization. The poem presents a myriad of dualities or conflicting themes, most of which have their origin in the Christian opposition of body and spirit. The attempt to resolve these dualities—to achieve salvation through some yet unknown means—is diffused throughout the work. The motif of damnation occurs repeatedly and is variously met with hope, despair, mockery, and resignation. The poem's title itself suggests the theme of time and the different stages of life, including innocence as well as corruption. Although the issue of literary aspirations is dealt with most extensively in *Délires II*, it appears

frequently throughout the poem, as the narrator alternately speaks with pride of his earlier verses and denigrates these lyrics as failures. Whether “Adieu” presents the poet as vowing never to write again, resigned to his role as an ordinary man, or still hopeful that he can find a way to express the ineffable and achieve personal salvation, is unclear. Alluding to the essential ambiguities of *Une Saison en enfer*, C. W. Hackett has asserted that, like most of Rimbaud’s work, it is “both ‘closed’ and ‘open’, final and provisional, an end and a beginning.” (Nineteenth Century Literary Criticism). There was some healthy dissension about the consistency (or otherwise) of Verlaine’s verse. Martin Sorrell strongly disputed Graham Robb’s assertion that he had never written a bad line: “Sorrell misunderstood . . . Robb wasn’t saying that V didn’t write bad poems, just bad lines. In other words, V was so technically gifted that each of his lines is like the brushstroke of a master painter, even if the painting itself is below par . . .”  
*Niall McDevitt*

His most influential publication was *Romances Sans Paroles*. (1874). This work has been described as bisexual in its frame of reference. Indeed, throughout their lives, both poets related to all orientations. Verlaine’s *Art Poétique* articulates his feelings of the relationship of poetry to music: musicality is a prerequisite of vital poetry, of living free verse:

“You must have music first of all,  
 and for that a rhythm uneven is best,  
 vague in the air and soluble,  
 with nothing heavy and nothing at rest.

“You must not scorn to do some wrong  
 in choosing the words to fill your lines:  
 nothing more dear than the tipsy song  
 where the Undefined and Exact combine.

“Never the Color, always the Shade,  
 always the nuance is supreme!  
 Only by shade is the trothal made  
 between flute and horn, of dream with dream!

The two poets exercise an enduring influence on Francophone singer-songwriters such as George Brassens and Jacques Brel. Many of Verlaine’s poems were consciously meant to be sung. Claude Debussy, set six of Verlaine’s *Fêtes galantes* poems to music, and Benjamin Britten did *Illuminations* – settings of Rimbaud’s poems.

Jean-Luc Godard’s film *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) contains substantial quotations from Rimbaud, particularly in the conclusion – an expansive shot of the beautiful Mediterranean Sea and some lines from a Rimbaud poem: ‘Eternity? No, it’s just the sun and the sea.’

The scene of the attack with the fish became a vital cinematographic image.

“*Pierrot le Fou* (1965) had a plot ostensibly set in the real world, but integrated musical numbers, blurred the line between reality and imagination, and demolished the fourth wall by allowing characters to gaze directly into the camera and/or address the audience.” It seems that Godard carried Rimbaud’s poetic theories to the cinema. One of the characters, Fred, is a gun-runner, which of course was one of Rimbaud’s occupations after he abandoned poetry at 21.

The work of both poets had a political dimension. Rimbaud became a cult figure for the 1968 student revolt, partly because of his impassioned attack on the suppression of the Paris Commune, with which he is reputed to have been involved. *L’Orgie Parisienne* seems to be his most outspoken political utterance. Verlaine was head of the press bureau of the Paris Commune highly critical of the imperial regime of the Third Empire, which collapsed with the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. Rimbaud and Verlaine reputedly met when they both returned to Paris to witness the deposition of Napoleon III. Reference was made to Verlaine’s overtly political *La Morte de Philippe II*, and Rimbaud’s *Oraison* essay, which portrayed the social misery of industrial Belgium.

In his later life, Verlaine was converted to Catholicism. In his *Sagesse* collection, the ‘vision’ of this conversion further liberated his verse - if it did not make him modify his dissipated lifestyle.

*Dave Russell*

#### **Related Publications**

*Collected Poems (Rimbaud, Arthur):* by Arthur Rimbaud (author), Oliver Bernard (Introduction, Translator) (1986) *Parallel Text Edition with Plain Prose, Translations of Each Poem, (Penguin Classics)*

*The Drunken Boats (Le Bateau Ivre), Alan Jenkins (trs), Sylph Editions ISBN 978-0-9552963-4-5; £10*

Dominique Combe, *POESIES. UNE SAISON EN ENFER. ILLUMINATIONS* Éditeur : Gallimard  
 Collection : FOLIOTHEQUE PARA SCOLAIRE  
*Rimbaud, Graham Robb, Picador 2001; ISBN-10: 0330488031; ISBN-13: 978-0330488037*

## *The Barking Thing* by Suzanne Batty

Bloodaxe Books 2007;  
ISBN 978-1-85224-772-0; £7.95

I had my first introduction to Suzanne Batty at Poet in the City's *The Divided Self*. I there got an indication of her emotional range and intensity, which led me on to this collection. True to its title (and to the powerful artwork of its cover with its picture of a spaniel's head emerging from a human breast) *The Barking Thing* has a canine theme. The author feels a great need for, and affinity with, dogs, and an impulse to assume an animal – often canine, identity. In *Dog's Gift*, as an outstanding example, she consciously puts her soul inside a dog's body. Her preoccupations have been intensified by her long experience as a psychiatric patient. In *Three colours only*, the dog symbol is made inanimate: "a rock they call The Bitch". It is perhaps both the rock and the raging sea, with the power to shipwreck mariners and strew them out on the beach. This poem also refers to the art of painting, and makes one think of affinities between painting and dream:

"She is, of course, most painterly;/ she hangs her sea-goat's horns/ with chalices of paint – three colours only (representing sky, sun and wind) . . . her voice is colour bruising canvas . . . She takes her brush to the simmering sea,/ she makes it a glass to see though gladly."

In *Only animals*, a dog is elevated to visionary and mythical proportions: "He does not mean to be/ an instrument of God (but he is!) . . . "the sky's open wound speaks to him".

*What happened* is the only poem in this selection centred on a cat – deceased, and seemingly something of an embarrassment to its owner during its lifetime. The subject shows some callousness, even sadism. But some humanity, some compassion comes through; there is a twinge of conscience about having a 'gunmetal heart'. When the subject retires to solitary reflection, the conscience is pricked by 'a mass of feline faces,/ eyes like spaceships,/ weasel fur all flattened on the glass.' This poem expresses the darkest thoughts, and hints obliquely but effectively towards countering them.

The selection opens 'close to home' in the form of a confrontation with a psychiatrist (*Shrink*); it then proceeds to sibling rivalry and her difficult relationship with her father: "Don't make me fly to my hospital bed; my father's dead body lies there."

In *Sisters and twins*: the odd one out can feel her individuality as something very double-edged: "I had the gift of wrongness/ thrust upon me". *Apricot* paints an eerie picture of widowhood. The widow seems imprisoned both by her own obsessions and by outside circumstances. She may be mentally ill. *Moving* highlights the feelings of a mother separated from her baby by hospitalisation.

Suzanne can both parody, undermine sentimentality and express it. *Making something of it* takes the well-known theme of a reflective walk along a beach. The messy underside is emphasised here: "My hair is like a beach, shedding empty crab shells"; there are "Showers of freeze-dried dog turds whistling through the dunes". The lot of mass humanity is integrated into the scene: "The streets are full of babies/ with big faces and girls who carry their bellies/ like riot shields." The seaside theme is also in *Back there*. She goes to Weston-Super-Mare for the usual reasons of health: "I thought this could be where I came from./ I thought the bracing air would do me good;/ keep me from mental institutions." She has an empty casual encounter there, and the reader is left wondering whether she is fulfilled or disappointed – or perhaps about the very nature of fulfilment and disappointment. In *Esta noche* she can bring an 'exotic' Latin American location down to earth, to describe its sordid banalities, and then elevate it, in terms of observing the beautiful sky above: "crowds of Bolivians/ with telescopes and tripods/ forget this town, this desolation . . . We're looking to this shadow/ which eats the moon alive."

One outstanding feature of her work is the utter honesty with which she faces the area of fetishism. For people in extremity, including psychiatric patients, fetishes are invaluable as props and sources of comfort. In *Doll*, a toy is endowed with animate life in the mind of the poet, almost to become a confidant and a conscience figure. Her strongest statement in this area is *Paper baby*. There is something derisory and grotesque about being offered such a gift, but "she helps the barrenness". Again, in the mind of the poet, this flimsy artefact gains animate qualities.

She explores the area of sensuality, from a perspective embracing both orientations. *Amsterdam with Lottie* expresses the depth of her feelings about a woman: "I'm swallowing lust/ in gulps of Dutch coffee and chocolate on bread". *My lover with her long hair* faces areas of dark obsessionism: the lover can become cold, malignantly inanimate: ". . . a nice sword, well-intentioned,/ but inclined to slice your head off . . ." The malignancy could be reciprocated: "I wanted to plait her long hair/ and wrap it round her well intentioned throat". The lover may also be aging; "I smelt decay when she woke." The reader is kept guessing about

the underlying intensities of the relationship with Natasha in *Natasha's house* and *Natasha's shoes*. In *Federico plays dead*, she can, in describing passion, identify with both genders and a flower: "I am a man, a girl,/ a red camellia, opening".

*This horse* explores the erotic equine theme with exceptional intensity. "This horse is like the muscle of the heart . . . It springs directly from the black work of my heart . . ."

She can also express passionate feelings in relation to the vegetable and the inanimate. "I hate to see the mountains as breasts." In *Horizontal*, the lover could be a "stone-one" with a "silt heart". She has strong feelings about hills and mountains, as if she sensed some animate essence in them. "Maybe, later, the hills will lean their long arms over,/ let down their red hair" (*Dog at Glencoe*), "Do I not turn into a mountain, then?" (*2.a.m.*) In *Ice-axe*, Suzanne acknowledges the pain and tension of real human flesh and blood encountering the elements. The subject is in the role of supporting a mountaineering expedition. She sees the climbers struggling and bleeding, and can say "the wind which has me on all fours, will keep us safe". She can also yearn to lose herself in the elements: 'I want to be the field. I want to be the dug field' (*Field*). This is like the 'fool-girl longing/ to be taken to a budding wilderness' in *Shutter speed*.

Having a very obvious attachment to the open air pioneering life, she appreciates the sense of exposure to the elements, of facing the nature of the universe. Such feelings are in some ways akin to those experienced in the course of hospitalisation – *externalised* when 'outward bound', internalised when confined to the ward. *Dog and the bad dream* expresses this point very powerfully. Imprisoned in the world of the bad dream, the subject is cramped, confined – as if on the ward. The dog is portrayed as a saviour, a mentor who will guide and speak as the subject awakens – to the optimistic, yet menacing 'red blade of daybreak'. The canine essence can have a touch of menace too: 'packs of rottweilers march past like stark soldiers'.

The dark, menacing qualities of rivers and the sea are explored in *This way* and *Hilbre island*. In the former, the flow of the river is benign. It is akin to her desperate plea to her partner: "let go of that unfathomable scream, that purple sprout/ wedged in your throat". In the latter, there is an implicit metaphor of drowning – also a feeling of the subject having been deported: "I don't know why they took me there,/ it had something to do with singing,/ something to do with death". There is "a feeling of sinking away from land . . . the crushing of the wind". Bizarrely, the lifeboat station is "referred to as art".

Very interesting in a piece where the imagination seems to have taken over from real life.

The final poem in the selection, *2.a.m.*, really puts her personal angst into a cosmic perspective: in the emotional realm the moon really could be touching the water. True to feeling and aspiration, "The soft stars are moving the absolute darkness."

Suzanne Batty's statements are both supremely disturbing and supremely reassuring. They embrace the extremes of physical health and mental illness, speaking with the first person voice of the sufferer, the second person voice of one in dialogue with suffering – and one forced by isolation to sustain and develop dialogue with animals, and with the vegetable and mineral worlds. Any sensitive person must feel an affinity with her kaleidoscope of viewpoints: "She writes to find out who she is and in doing so helps us discover who we are." (Jackie Kay).

**Dave Russell**

## **Irish Lifelines**

**An anthology of poetry by Irish women survivors in London**

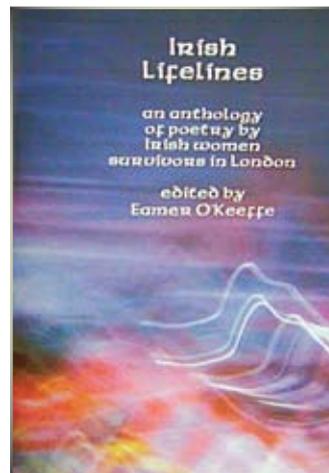
Edited by Eamer O'Keefe

Poetry by: Eamer O'Keefe, Ann Dalton, Anne Ireton, Janet Donaghey, Julie McNamara, Kathleen O'Sullivan, Siubhan McNally.

London Irish Women's Centre (LIWC)

ISBN 978-0-9521522-5-5

[www.liwc.co.uk](http://www.liwc.co.uk)



Available to purchase from LIWC for £5  
Please send a cheque payable to: 'London Irish Women's Centre' for £6.50 (incl p&p)

## **S p o k e n W o r d A l l S t a r s : A p p l e s a n d S n a k e s**

**Poet in the City Joint Venture,  
15th June 2009, Kings Place London**

This presentation involved a significant change of approach from the academic feeling of Poet in the City events. It was chaired by Charlie Dark; it featured Poets Excentral Tempest, El Crisis, Kat François, Lucid, and multi-instrumentalist Jason Yarde. It was a fully electrified event.

Charlie Dark is involved in poetry, writing, teaching creative writing, hip-hop and electronic music. One of his first comments was "It's a bit strangling here". He certainly did his utmost to counteract that feeling, giving the whole proceedings a splendid cross-cultural aura. He was quite prepared to be provocative to the audience, but apologised for using bad language. He asked audience members to put their hands up if they were parents, then whose child had a goldfish, and how the children reacted if the goldfish died. As the MC originally scheduled, John Berkavitch was unable to attend, Charlie was chosen at short notice to replace him – and did an excellent job.

Jason Yarde aired his eclectic virtuosity on soprano, tenor and alto saxes, also some melodica and assorted percussion. He has played at Notting Hill Carnival and the North Sea Jazz Festival; he is a member of the Jazz Warriors. He has played alongside such jazz greats as Courtney Pine, and is recorded extensively on Deal Real Records. Jason particularly shone in the upper register of the soprano sax, and generally showed his expertise in wind instrument harmonics – a virtuoso instrumentalist, arranger and composer.

Kate (Excentral) Tempest is a performer of many parts – including Glastonbury: "I have been performing for the last 4 years, at spoken word, poetry and hip hop nights, also at a load of festivals (from big green gathering and sunrise celebration to Latitude and Bestival), at protests and peace marches, and at squat parties and raves in airport hangars." Kate often works with bands; she fronts a 9-piece ensemble called Zingaro, and even convened the New Cross Philharmonic Orchestra (recently disbanded). The depth of her sincerity and commitment was strongly in evidence this evening. She declaimed with great passion, and invited audience participation; one of her reiterated themes was 'how can we believe if we cannot trust?' Some memorable phrases emerged,

I agree with Tish Collin's view in her Forward to this new anthology that editor and contributing poet Eamer O'Keeffe has crafted a volume 'of such depth and beauty'. As a publication for the occasion of the London Irish Women's Centre's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I found it a highly fitting tribute. If preconceptions of 'survivor poetry' are already entering your thoughts from reading the book's title, this anthology can dispel any notions that poetry from 'inner struggles to survive... difficult circumstances...' will not be upbeat and transforming. Yes, there is grit here, and sombre thudding footfalls. But the poetry from the seven poets represented takes on the struggles, and finds purpose from these with a musicality in rhythm and construction that I think is becoming rarer to find in contemporary poetry published in the UK. This overturns one poet's modest statement of a 'drift into art'. It is a well-produced book complementing the substantial work between the pages. The resulting anthology, as a whole, is poetic art of a fine and consistent quality.

The experiments with forms and design fully work too, I think, and the line-breaks are exquisite; the poets and poems themselves exchanging deeply held mutual respect. 'Swamp City' p4 being an example, the four stanzas displayed as turrets, or hills perhaps, yet the fables, literature and personal journey across the land can be also traced if you seek to look-up names and places. The layering of a narrative becomes increasingly startling with the realisation of what the journey's purpose could have been. And it denies a personal sinking into quicksand, the fate of the 'Beloved, split city/ walled in tiers...'.

From the opening to the final poem, the writers side-step sentimentality, turning their subjects unexpectedly and un-do preconceptions in order to startle and, when you are 'in' the poems, to lend a new sense to the five we are more used to; the poets assist with working out the clues to the 'puzzles of our lives'. The 'afterword' on the Centre's work is further confirmation of the value of 'havens' and exploration through 'free expression'. This anthology moves the poetry to places beyond its roots, it finds affirmation in what has happened, and what can be recognised and then achieved, personally and artistically.

Phil Ruthen

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such as 'words at the bottom of a gypsy's teacup', and 'I'll turn scaffolding to mountains'.

### **Extract from Revelation by Kate Tempest**

Here there is dignity lacking, intent to deface our own worth we lose sight of our substance, allow ourselves to be ruled by the basest of functions. While slippered men walk old through the streets of our youth.

Separated. Polarised. Wisdom is hated, and too many minds have grown stale and frustrated as we feast on our sins, our appetites baited with eating.

the hunger increasing with each fleeting mouthful. a meeting of minds becomes doubtful, lips clenched against secrets, strength dead before weakness.

we're dormant, prostrate before an ideal of power,

is this not what was written then? is this not the hour?

when each from the other is cloven and ravaged, when indifference has turned us to stone,

when neither marriage nor love is forever, and what of the seven seals? and what of the flood?

but how can we believe though if we cannot trust? how can we believe at all if we cannot trust?

El Crisis' style of poetry and performance combines a hypnotic mixture of rap, spoken word power and chant. He emanates an ancient mystic wisdom and a spiritual connection with his ancestors to his audiences. His reality does not end in the spiritual. Crisis raps, sings, chants and recites spoken word poetry relating his experiences, stories, street style philosophy and viewpoints of the world, and society today. Performed with a voice of staggering range and depth, Crisis' performances are enlightening, extraordinary and unforgettable. He has performed extensively across the UK and internationally – including New York, Philadelphia, Amsterdam, Norway and Poland, has grown from open mic nights, to theatrical productions and national tours. Crisis is an inspirational force in today's spoken word scene – one of the most unique and dynamic voices in poetry. He made his debut in the Soul of Black Folks Bar in Brixton Coldharbour Lane, year 2000, describing himself as "Word Power and Sound." Crisis is now an experienced creative writing and performance workshop leader in schools, prisons, art galleries, colleges, universities, clubs and festivals across England, with children in schools and community projects. He has recorded with some of London's top hip hop artists, including Roots Manoeuvre, Blak Twang, Estelle and more, chanting the lead hook on a track called Rise Up, released in Germany

as part of the Brothers Keepers Album. El Crisis has performed alongside Ms Dynamite, Omar and other internationally recognized artists including many legends and greats in the poetry world, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Jean Binta Breeze, Lee Scratch Perry and Muta Barooka to name a few. He has appeared on cable TV, community radio shows and made several features on BBC radio – while trying to maintain a low profile until the release of his CD, which he is now working on.

In His Own Words: Word Power and Sound: The Ancestors and the souls beyond the veil, reggae music and its many kings chosen to push the conscious vibration forward . . . including the sound systems of London and Jamaica in the times of the Sound Man, from Uroy the Teacher in the early seventies to my cousin Caarpral in the early nineties. I was too young to experience the recordings of the early seventies and eighties, but did experience the times of Saxon, Coxson, Taurus, Unity, and the sound systems in London . . . these were the days that influenced my passion and excitement for lyrical expression. Roots reggae music and revival was the music closest to my heart, its vibration, drum and bass line tell the story of the African Redemption from the continent and throughout the Diaspora, but my mother's influences of many of the singing Soul sensations of the sixties Seventies Motown era were my earliest memories of music, when singers sang with feeling and true soul. I admire Revolutionaries and people who bring about great changes and purpose, people who find their purpose and are inspired to find their purpose; I am inspired by music and not by its many genres. I can feel an artist singing rock, just as I can feel an artist singing on reggae, Its not the genre, its the feeling expressed in the music: rhythm and beats may come and go, but true music is eternal.

"I've been compared with just about every ancient and oral lyrical tradition I know of, from Native American, West African Griot, the Celtic Moor, Russian, English, Caribbean and Irish folk music, Voodoo, sea shanty, shaman, rap, chant, poetry, song, but El Crisis is El Crisis, Its not just about how lyrics make your mind think, Its about how spirit makes your soul feel. If true music is eternal, then I guess I sound like Eternity."

For me, he was the high spot of the evening. His vocal quality and lyricism really shone. There was some religion in his utterance, referring to feeling 'the hand of a big demon'; he offered greetings in the name of the most high God. The universal incantation 'we shall overcome' was prominent in his utterances. He completed the London Marathon

in 5.23 hours.

Lucid (real name Samira Arhin Acquah) was described in the publicity as a “socially-sussed Mancunian lass for whom the stage is a second home”. She has worked extensively as emcee, administrator and actress. Lucid has been involved with many young people’s groups, such as Contacts Young Actors Company and Community Arts Northwest’s Urban Music Project. Her production *I Hear Voices* gained special acclaim. Of the performers, she was nearest to standard pop, the one who placed most emphasis on choruses and audience participation. She urged the audience to come out and enjoy the sunshine, and chose material relating to sunny, light-hearted themes. She was also quite prepared to face the down side of life; there was enthusiastic audience participation in the chant-phrase “every day is the same old shit”, about which she said “I should like writing depressive stuff”. Lucid made some case against consumerism, urging people to find bargains at markets, and give money to local businesses. The harmonica-sounding track in the electronic backing was a bit too loud. But the multi-tracked saxes were a treat. The Same Predicament had an appealing organ-style backing. On and On was a powerful rant, backed with a strong midi-bass sound. There were exhortations to ‘never say never’, don’t link with the seasons’ and ‘rewrite your remix’. After this number the musical backing temporarily ceased, and Lucid got into the mood of ‘light-hearted sunshine’. Gradually a soft tenor sax blended in behind her, growing to a soft calypso-ish sound.

Kat François was winner of the BBC3 TV Poetry Slam in 2004 and the World Poetry Slam in 2005. She is also Resident Poet at The Theatre Royal in Stratford, where she hosts and organises monthly poetry and music nights, Word4Word and Word-Up. Kat is also an educator, using performance poetry and creative writing to tackle social issues with children and adults. One of her key areas is that of domestic violence and teenage pregnancy. She has been described as “a woman who can ricochet from hilarious to heart-rending within the space of a single stanza”, performed sensually, powerfully and lyrically. For me, her opener, *White Roses*, with its deep, tender sensuality, was the high spot of her set. There was some rippling, kaleidoscopic imagery ‘solidify the sin . . . pliable body . . . hips gyrating . . . gravity defined sweat streaming . . . organic sway’. She pointed emphatically at the audience, with the exhortation “nothing else matters, only you”. Thick Arms celebrates the physique of a large, muscular woman, arms thickened by years of heavy shopping; he has ‘mango calves’ and ‘palm-tree hips’, is proud to flaunt the signs of ‘whips across

her body’, and her rear having ‘a rhythm of its own’. Poetry Whore is an impassioned declaration of her credo: “I perform just so’s I can breathe, giving my soul . . . I was told I was too proud, confident, outspoken . . . I have taken the word off the page . . . addicted to this shit (an ambivalent attitude - reiterating Lucid’s comment?) . . . my mind offers all the protection that I need . . . I promise I will set you (the audience) free . . . words have blessed me . . . caused me to swear . . . making love to my dying soul . . . when I wish to be deaf . . . sanctified and caressed me . . . succeeded in berating . . . gave me strength when I thought none was left.”

Charlie Dark ended the evening with an improvisation. He complained afterwards that the keyboard had gone out of action. I did not notice. One of his parting remarks was “Some of the best poets are in prison or in the school system.” There were some great musical sounds, including that of a celesta on the keyboard, and a xylophonic set of modulated bells on the floor. The theme of his chant was ‘I’ – the ego. Some surreal imagery there: “I am the kiss”; “I’m a zip . . . schoolbag to hide the shape of your bullet pips . . . new inner cat blood is the size of your head! There was a strong background of inner urban gang violence in his piece: “One of the boys on the mystery corner is dying . . . another boy is shot.” “Someone asked me what is the most beautiful sound I’ve ever heard: the sound of the blade of a knife slithering back into the handle.”

I felt that the majority of the audience were more habituated to the more academic tone of most other Poet in the City events. But the warmth and vitality of all the performers certainly reached them and overcame their inhibitions. Rap poetry is integral to the contemporary oral poetic tradition. One reservation I have about its performance is that the words are often drowned out. Not so in the case of *El Crisis*, which was perfectly sound-balanced, perfectly articulated. Lucid and ExCentral could have had the same degree of clarity. I did catch one of ExCentral’s phrases, “I’m sure you’re thinking people”. Yes; I am sure that audience and performers alike are thinking people; so let’s hear the thoughts enunciated loud and clear.

Dave Russell

# B Safe 1st Always

Website by John Harrison

<http://www.bsafe1stalways.com>



This is one of the best-articulated statements about abuse I have encountered. It is a fully comprehensive site, containing autobiographical details, an extremely well documented history of his campaign, some powerful poems and pictorial material, also contact links.

He has been extremely thorough in his description of dealings with governmental bodies. He took the utmost care in presenting his credentials to all those in positions of power and influence, particularly in verifying his lack of a criminal record. The site contains the complete text of a circular letter he sent to heads of Healthcare departments, Gordon Brown, David Cameron, Nick Clegg and others. This is a fully stated, admirably rationalised indictment of the utter inadequacy of current provision for this problem area, outspoken in its criticism.

He nails down evasiveness: "The fact that you choose to get people to write on your behalf which is and will be used to exonerate you from that correspondence does not exonerate you. You choose what they do on your behalf. You are responsible for their deeds and actions that you have them do on your behalf. I wrote to you about the affects of child abuse. You failed to respond yourself . . . You, your government, previous governments are guilty. You all cannot obviously be blamed for the start of abuse. But all of your and their systems failings to act on the facts known in cases directly leads to more abuse being suffered and deaths . . . Not only have you failed to secure our basic fundamental human rights. But you and your government have undermined and eroded them . . . In many of our cases including mine after these failings and more within the system (and yes outside its jurisdiction) we have little or in most cases no recourse of action . . . They have insinuated things . . . put miss leading things on . . . lied on my medical records. They have broken the Data Protection Act . . . People who abused me or were abusive were compassionately dealt with. I had the opposite for years they said I did not need their help, that I was not even mentally ill. Which they now on record lie about, and

say they knew I was ill and that they helped me. I tried ICAS, and the Health Care Commission; on two occasions they failed me and only seemed interested in preserving the status quo. I tried locally with GP's. With NHS chief executives. Only for more lies, assertions and more neglect to be dished out. I tried and am trying the legal route. Being failed by it as I have said earlier in this letter."

And the on-going call to act: "Why must your system be allowed to lie, abuse, neglect and discriminate against us? Doctors and other health care professionals must not continue to have near if not total impunity. This is a fact. My case and others prove it beyond all doubt. I hold you personally responsible . . . The system abusing and neglecting our rights, our lives, is something you all should be ensuring either doesn't happen or is safe guarded against. You have all failed. You have all actually made it worse. Do not insult our intelligence by saying "how does this happen" when it is so blatantly obvious and well known. And I will continue until I die. I assure you prime minister this is not the last you and others have heard from me. I will never stop until they (within the system health care professionals etc) are in a court of law and become for the first time answerable for their actions and in actions and or if all else fails I intend to totally expose them and all those who have and do fail me and others including you, your government and other members of the opposition. And the organisations that have failed me all these years to help support me to stop it all continuously continuing . . ."

His communications were largely ignored, with the exception of Nick Clegg, who "did talk of the issues involved in a general way". Facsimiles of the relevant correspondence – from ward notes to ministries – speak volumes about their evasiveness and apathy, their perpetual 'passing the buck'.

The detailed reply from the Department for Children, Schools, and Families is a masterpiece of diplomatic evasiveness: ". . . the DCSF is unable to comment on or intervene in individual cases. I would urge you . . . to discuss the local availability of counselling services with your GP and support services . . . Survivors of abuse may obtain help, according to their needs, from a range of statutory and non-statutory agencies in the health and social care fields . . . The Health Secretary and the Secretary of State for DCSF have also established a Social Work Taskforce, to inform a long-term programme with the objectives of reforming initial social work training . . . the Taskforce will root its work in the views and expertise of front line practitioners . . ."

The letter refers to Lord Laming's *The Protection of Children in England, A Progress Report*: "The report makes detailed recommendations to ensure that best practice is universally applied in every area of the country; to improve local accountability; and to provide more support for local leaders and better training and support for the front-line workforce."

The Documents file contains some medical notes and letters;

these too merit careful scrutiny, particularly the claim that Harrison was discharged after refusing DCSF treatment: "It is difficult to see really how we can help him because he is not really mentally ill & we don't have the resources at the moment to deal with anger management in people who are not mentally ill."

"With regard to his childhood, he has very poor recall."

"He did not appear mentally unwell, just plain miserable. He is difficult to work with, and finds fault with all his keyworkers thus far. 2

"In the absence of psychiatric disorder no arrangements have been made for follow-up."

Harrison's sense of justice (and injustice) is poignantly articulated in *The Price*: "The crime is noticing and knowing the truth. That which they wish to deny. That which they wish not to except. It would interfere with their lives. Their answers their conclusions their reasoning their lies. So even though it destroys somebody else or worse. It's a price they think is worth paying. But it is you who pay the price not them. A price that is not and never will be worth paying. It's easy to think it is a price worth paying . . . when it's not you that will pay the price."

"The way to judge society is not to look at all the well off or the top. But to look at what happens to the ones at the bottom how they are helped and treated." (CMHT)

His two files of Writings are enormously honest and powerful. *The Bridge (Temptation or Realisation)* relates the aftermath of abuse, rejection by society, and suicidal tendencies: ". . . at the end of 2002 I had myself built up my hope. An appointment with a Psychiatrist took away my hope. You can not live with out hope. If I didn't know this before I knew on that day or the days that followed. It started so good. I would stand my ground with him and question him and his care. As he discharged me from their care? I left deeply upset, hurt. I walked across a bridge in a slight daze. I stood looking over and down. So knocked back I find myself saying to my self "why don't I do myself and everyone a favour and just jump?" It scared me I moved away and went home. For a few days I was scared to go out. Scared of what I was feeling. I believe this was the most prominent thing that began over the next four months to unlock some truth not just of my childhood but of the recent past and the present too."

In *The Game*, he expresses his defiant, independent spirit:

The problem is I'm not a participant

I am the game/Play well for you can never  
lose/ The game is not with me/It is me

In *Is it a Game like Chess*, he makes a shrewd appraisal of the essence of struggle with a powerful but uncaring system, and surmounts defeatism: "You know the game it can be like chess. Sometimes you realise you can't win. So all you can then do is try and get it to stalemate. When that happens no one wins. But it's the best you can do. So

you don't beat them but you make sure they can't win. How it affects them depends on how much winning means to them. But if stalemate happens you are on top because you couldn't have won anyway. But they could have. You got the best you could have but they lost."

He achieves optimism through expressing pessimism:

"I'm a failure because I try  
I'm sad because I care  
I'm a fool because I want to believe  
It's my fault because I keep . . .  
Trying, Caring Believing  
Even as it destroys me inside . . .  
(*The Dream of Life*)

He sees a way ahead by expressing self-doubt: "So alone. So much victimised. So much wrong. 'What's the point?' An answer is in me. I know it's not good. It's like a silent answer. One that wells up more tears. But the denial of the answer right now keeps me safe. Can so many for so long be all wrong? Hey another question. Reasoning the unreasonable. Can I be so wrong to believe they Abuse me and it is wrong? Why do so many not act when they know? They are so absent. They believe those that hurt us." (*What's the Point?*).

This is of particular import to me, as mentor for Kate Evans's *Journey Into Healing*. Kate was outspoken in her conviction that much mental distress is firmly rooted in sexual abuse. All readers/browsers must remember that this site asks for replies, comments, participation. It could be built up into something really powerful. Do read and respond; browse thoroughly!

Comments and comparable stories are welcomed; do reply. This could be the beginning of a vital database and lifeline for a major area of suffering which has hitherto been severely marginalised. **How many have suffered in silence? Give yourselves and others light and hope!** In 'Links/Books' there is an extremely helpful list of effective support organisations.

An admirable endeavour, which deserves to grow into something large-scale.

**Dave Russell**

# This Is Survivor Research

ed Angela Sweeney, Peter Beresford, Alison Faulkner, Mary Nettle & Diana Rose; PCCS Books, Ross-on-Wye; ISBN H 978-1-906254-14-8

Since its inception in the mid-eighties, the User Movement now has some 300 groups –around 9,000 members. INVOLVE, part of the National Institute for Health Research, is active in this area. Key values are: a) empowerment; b) emancipation; c) participation; d) equality; e) anti-discrimination.

“... Symptoms and disorders are best understood as creative responses to difficult personal and social histories, rooted in a person’s experience of oppression” (p.64)

“We wanted the book to fit the range of survivor research rather than force it into traditional structures . . . this introduction gives an overview to help readers to navigate around its contents . . . choose what they wish to read or where they wish to start reading.”

Traditional ‘research’ posits an observer, with education, intelligence and articulation higher than those observed. **Survivor Research**, values the ‘experiential knowledge’ of users/ inside observers, many of whom are articulated and educated.

Research, to bridge gulfs between researchers and researched, should be *quantitative* (statistical) and *qualitative* (based on meanings).

**Diana Rose:** Prejudices against users being ‘over-involved’ discount researchers’ subjectivity. Scientific methods originated in agriculture and medicine, and then transferred to psychiatry: their ‘universal applicability’ is questionable. *Randomisation* is crucial in testing medications. A patient’s awareness or unawareness of taking a medication may affect its efficacy.

*Service User Researchers* and *Survivor Researchers* are distinct but closely linked. User research proceeds from reporting experience to formulating theory. There must be ‘philosophical underpinnings’ (p6). **Logical Positivism** monitors people’s reactions to the environment, as it does reactions of phenomena in the natural world, claiming the same method is valid for people/society. **Phenomenology** insists on different standards for people.

User-friendliness involves a) *Action Research* –

researching living situations; b) *Participatory Research* – collaboration between researchers and participants; c) *Emancipatory Disability Research* – empowering marginalised people treated as passive entities. Priority should shift from individuals’ ‘deficiencies’ to tackling barriers facing disabled people generally. Many users shun researchers for fear of being controlled and ‘gagged’. Survivor research tends to cooperate with the ‘service system’ (though *Mad Pride* is a major exception). ‘The mental health field still relies on an individual, medical model of *mental illness*’ (p.47) There should be a ‘Rights-Based Approach to Mental Health’: obstacles are a) *stigma/negative stereotyping*; b) *poverty*; c) *isolation*; d) *racism*; e) *unemployment*; f) *relationship breakdown*.

**Alison Faulkner** and **Debbie Tallis** outline users’/ survivors initiatives – like the Mental Health Foundation’s *Strategies for Living* programme: researchers are generally vetted by a Research Ethics Committee before being permitted to deal with users – to protect patients from potentially harmful research. Problems arise regarding confidentiality, feedback and information for participants. Users should participate; there should be adequate funding, proper allowance for sufferers from mental distress. ‘Distress is not necessarily equivalent to harm’. (p57) Relationships between research and research subjects should be equalised. Ethics Committees may misunderstand ‘the vulnerability and capability of the active participants’. (p60). Sufferers from emotional distress “often find it cathartic to talk about their experiences”.

Debbie found that protocol deterred would-be researchers: “What those committees have probably regarded as appropriate protective considerations have often been seen . . . as being overly paternalistic . . . and disempowering.” (p60) Although there is user representation on such committees, it remains difficult for users’ opinions to be voiced.

## Feminist Perspective

The scientific approach involves ‘making male attributes the acme of science’ (p.42); it is a vital research method, but no ‘universal means of producing knowledge’. **Karen Essien** considers women, especially black women, marginalized in psychiatry. In discussions, the women disclosed that they found their ethnicity more significant than their user identity, “which may indicate why black and minority ethnic people . . . are under-represented in the user movement.” (p.63). Karen argues that ‘our identity is socially constructed’. Under multiple

formative influences, identities are fluid. Black women do not identify themselves with one social group. "When the mental health of women is researched, it generally means white women".

**Collaborative Research** has two foci: a) controlled by academics and researchers, inviting user participation; b) user organisations approaching academic and administrative bodies. **Carey Ostrer** liaised between users, a consultant psychiatrist and an academic; – 'a new form of doctor-patient relationship', (p72) – and problematical: "I did not have personal experience of the diagnosis being researched . . . I felt unable to give a direct user service perspective on it, but what I could do was give some advice about how to involve those who had. I suggested . . . we search for a voluntary sector group with specialist service knowledge . . . this was agreed."

### **Making Research User-Focused**

**Literature reviewing:** Guidance is necessary for users' writing reviews, and reading published articles. Categories are a) *Literature review*; b) *Narrative or descriptive review*; c) *Rapid Review*; d) *Systematic review*; e) *Meta-analysis*; f) *Knowledge review*. With the *peer review system*, papers must be approved by two academics prior to publication. Quality criteria: *Transparency* – openness to scrutiny; *Accuracy* – well groundedness?; *Purposivity* – fitness to serve purpose?; *Utility* – fitness for use; *Propriety* – being legal and ethical; *Accessibility* – being intelligible; *Specificity* – meeting source-specific standards.

**Rosie Davies: User-Focused Monitoring** highlights user response to services. *Key criticisms:* poor care environments; insufficient information; little user involvement in treatment; inadequate staff contact, attention to ethnicity and gender; poor protection from harassment/abuse; few meaningful activities; weak outside links. Rosie later joined an Admissions Sub-Group, which produced a patients' information booklet, liaised with the regional health authority, and influenced the design and operational policies for a new hospital in Wiltshire.

**Heather Johnson Straughan**, a psychology graduate/user, feels the term 'user research' suggests lack of foundation, preferring 'researching from a user standpoint': "How then, as users, can we meet professionals on equal terms and ensure that our standpoint is not put aside . . . in the final summing-up?" (p.107) ". . . I was determined that my work would stand or fall on the quality of the work . . . I felt that it was a didactic . . . training

encompassing a more holistic . . . approach to a person's life that was needed, as it touched all areas of life." (p109)

**Insider's View Outward: Outsider's View Inward:** there are 'blind spots' in all research projects, among both researchers and participants. Heather wanted her 'own participant observations' (p.110) to fill the gaps. Luckily, her two supervisors came from different backgrounds: an academic, favouring *qualitative textual data*; a psychiatrist, favouring a *quantitative, experimental* approach. The research was user-led. One must be both 'within the wider research community and separate from it in our own standpoint group'. (p.117).

The programme succeeded; participants sharpened coping skills, distinguished better between feelings concomitant with their illnesses and 'normal' feelings. This helped professionals hone their therapies. Heather cooperated with existing power structures: ". . . this piece of research would have greater potential for change if it were perceived to be interdisciplinary or collaborative . . . I signed an honorary contract with the trust . . . my trust identity badge gave me membership of a closed circle that initially did not take to my presence comfortably . . .". She senses a 'pioneering grey zone', where barriers to communication still exist. But 'no man's land' became the 'perfect bridge and place of unique insight' (p.115). "I wanted to start, not from the 'user perspective', but from . . . a fresh one that I hoped would be more constructive." (p.118) Heather sees herself as 'translator tour guide'.

**Alison Faulkner** supports seeing individual experience in the wider context of social diversity. Research findings cannot automatically be applied to all social groupings. **Jan Wallcraft**, after graduating, had a breakdown. On recovery, she worked for Mind as a secretary, then did a PhD, researching people with experiences similar to her own. She applied critiques to science and technology policy, rarely questioned. Jan was inspired by Foucault: "His concept of discourse enables an analysis of how scientific knowledge is socially and politically constructed . . . he describes how sets of concepts such as psychiatric diagnoses become embedded . . . in . . . laws, institutions and professional practices until they are taken for granted . . . madness might largely be a creation of language and theory, developed to suit particular historical needs." (p.136) Thanks to Foucault "the survivor movement is creating a new discourse . . . we need a new knowledge base" (pp137/138). Jan now sits on Department of Health committees.

**David Armes** was approached in 2000 by Hartley

Dean to develop a user/survivor standpoint, synthesizing Foucault's approach with a feminist perspective. As yet, users/survivors cannot always speak with one voice. "There is no single explanation of social relations within the world" (p.142) "A discourse is simply all the possible ways in which statements on a particular issue can be framed/grouped in a set, which in itself decides what the rules are for a statement to be given legitimacy . . ." (p.143) *Dominant mental health discourses* have no absolute validity, though users/survivors generally live in relation to them. Challenging them is difficult "particularly when the media bring up discussion about them in the aftermath of a heinous crime." (p.144) 18th Century 'Enlightenment' elevation of 'reason' and its playing down of other mental capacities, engendered many prejudices. The dichotomy of reason and madness stigmatises users as 'incapable of contributing to or producing their own knowledge'. (p.25) It is vital to understand the internal logical structure of such depression, psychosis etc which, for David, are not 'madness'. He applied his theory to himself when coping with his own breakdown:

". . . if I allowed my mental life to be based on assumptions, faulty role models, second-hand knowledge . . . I would again be doomed." (p.147).

He favours holism and instinctual response: "Speaking and writing my subjective truth is absolutely essential for my own mental health." (p.150) When eliciting experiences of ECT, information emerges more freely when users/survivors talk to each other.

### Evaluation of Survivor-Led Crisis Service

**Judy Beckett**, when working with Dial House Crisis Service in Leeds, honed her interviewing techniques. She was then a research assistant at the University of Leeds. "I gained the confidence to view the fifteen years of contact with mental health services as a useful and important part of my life experiences" (p.154). **Matt Sands** was a user of the Canterbury and District Mental Health Forum Service. Here users did evaluations for planners. The goals were **Five Accomplishments of Normalisation: Competence; Choice; Respect; Community Presence; Community Participation**. Discussions engendered standards applicable to questionnaires. There were visits to care homes, housing projects, a sub-acute ward and a rehabilitation project. House managers were interviewed, and allowed to see the interview notes. In networking and management committee meetings, professionals dominated discussions, though there was often a majority of users. **Stuart Valentine** was based in North-East Scotland: "We

were able, with quality help and guidance, to achieve a positive outcome." (p.157). **Philip Hill** progressed from user/survivor to postgraduate. He aimed to "identify the main characteristics of paid work that could enable fellow mental health service users to find, retain and thrive in employment" (p.158), correlating mental health levels with working environments. Patients had suicidal feelings when trying to regulate their own mental health – which related to Stuart's first nervous breakdown. This experience helped Stuart research and interviewing skills, and to gain an MPhil.

**Sue Goddard** worked in Slough and East Berkshire. Researchers there were contacted through day centres. One participant's comment strikes home: "My confidence was very low in the NHS and mental health services. The group is very positive and structured; when research started it was a way forward – a way to 'put back' into the system for future clients." (p.161)

"From these projects we have developed our own skills and have a strong group. We are still 'training' . . . there is always something to learn!" (p.162)

**Chapter 16** outlines Survivor-researchers' experiences, which might be excluded from academic study: 'mainstream researchers believe that they must keep their subjectivity out of their research' – whereas "we did not want to reduce or analyse the richness of why we do research". **Alison Faulkner** researched Section 136 of the Mental Health Act, interviewing detainees, police officers and psychiatrists, learning about ethical practice. Later, she was herself in hospital. Alison strives to 'equalise the relationship between researcher and researched'. (p.164) "I am fortunate in that I achieved a professional life through doing research alongside using mental health services." (p.164)

**Angela Sweeney**, once 'a deeply political working-class teenager' campaigned for her mother, who was given unwanted ECT and stigmatised for discussing childhood sex abuse. She benefited from graduating in Social Sciences. **Anne-Laure Donskoy** was firstly a user-worker in a User-Focused Monitoring Project, then a user-researcher: ". . . as user-researchers, we are definitely a new breed". Her credibility increased on returning to university. **Brigid Morris** trains and supports users in their own research and evaluation. "Service user researchers highly value the opinions of their fellow service users." (p.167) . . . "User-led research projects appear to provide a supportive and flexible place within which people with mental health problems can challenge their own beliefs, and perhaps also the beliefs of others around them,

about what they can and cannot achieve.” (p.168)

**Cath Roper** prioritises adaptability and originality in designing and following programmes: “Our way of working is to allow the commentary we hear absolutely to influence the direction of research . . . We do not start with the agenda tied up. We do not ignore findings that contradict our studies: we use them to inform the next steps.” (p.169). **David Webb**, disillusioned with psycho-medications and talking therapies, exercised ‘spiritual self-enquiry’ to counter suicidal feelings, and then did a doctorate concerning first person perspectives on suicidality. He finds his feelings of personal well-being depend on ‘the spirit of ruthless enquiry’. He opposes the idea that suicides have defective brains.

**Diana Rose’s** academic career and psychiatric experience coincided; she took her first degree in hospital. When medically retired from her profession, she became a ‘community mental patient’ attending day hospital. She later got a doctorate, then became co-director of the Service User Research Enterprise (SURE). **Heather Johnson Straughan** was a patient who also graduated. She had reservations: “It is my fear that user research may just be a flash in the pan. But I had a deep-seated belief that what I was doing, my perspective of having lived mental health and recovery, was more valid than what textbook researchers without this vital insider knowledge might bring to the subject.” (p.173). She sees herself as a ‘trans-cultural tour guide . . . to bridge both the experience and the research methods’, and as working in uncharted, ‘virgin’ territory.

**Jasna Russo** criticises clinical research and psychiatry: “I see psychiatric treatment as an attempt to deny, suppress and control what it is not capable of reaching and responding to . . . I research because of my belief in a different science, in one that is not scared of its topics and its subjects . . . one that does not step back from people’s lives, and does not construct closed, simple categories to reduce their realities.” (p.174)

On leaving secure hospital, **Keith Halsall**, finding state rehabilitation services ineffectual, devised his own recovery programme, including Reiki and spiritually-based psychotherapy. He then became a forensic user worker, later to lead Department of Health funded research at a secure unit: “there is enormous confusion and disinformation surrounding forensic mental health – I like to think I can dispel some of that.” (p.175) **Mary Nettle** was a paid researcher, short-stay observer in an old-style asylum. Because of contractual obligations, her work there is unpublished. She feels that participants are willing to confide in people who have also

been patients. She thinks the approaches she used successfully in her commercial marketing career, should be applied to psychiatry. Mary mentions that it is still rare for users to be commissioned for research, but is now happily part of INVOLVE.

**Pete Fleischman** is researching ECT: “. . . traditional psychiatric research tends to gloss over ECT’s potential for long-term memory damage” (p.177) Committees such as he attended tend to overlook patients’ personal testimonies, but to his delight, in that instance proper attention was paid, leading to significant reduction in administration of ECT. Patients now know more of their right to refuse the treatment. **Peter Beresford** notices that, though many still doubt users’ rationality, survivor research, “. . . bit by bit, is gaining its own credibility and legitimacy.” (p.179) **Philip Hill**, academically successful, had a breakdown. He observed that “. . . rather than my brain being destroyed by the illness and the medication, I realized that my intellect was not destroyed, it was merely in deep freeze.” (p.180). He feels he can now be a good social worker.

**Ruth Sayers**, in the Mental Health Foundation’s Strategies for Living Project, on the basis of her own experiences, researched people who lost jobs through mental health problems. **Sarah Carr** emphasises that patients must speak, and be heard to speak, for themselves. “Perhaps this can be likened to the difference between a visitor to a foreign country reading a tourist guidebook, and actually speaking with people who have lived there.” (p.182) Sarah experienced the controversial drug *paroxetine*, so could relate to fellow sufferers. Via personal testimonies, user-centred research has persuaded pharmaceutical companies and the psychiatry profession to restrict this drug’s use.

**Tina Coldham** finds survivor-led research is a voyage into the unknown. “You may think you know where you are going, but be prepared to be surprised.” (p.183) For her, it creates opportunities to further her higher education with. “. . . we plough a furrow through the deep ocean. Risking drowning, but ultimately seeking new lands. Lands where people are treated as equals, treated with respect and dignity, treated so they can repair their lives and move on.” (p.184)

**Dave Russell**

## “EXPRESS YOURSELF – A SUITCASE OF TALENT” by Simon Jenner

**Sponsored by Arts Council Final Frontiers Festival – creativity and wellness, and CMHT - SW Talent Festival on 19th May, 2009**

**The Hub, Canning Town E16**

Survivors' groups have many virtues. Being clubbable isn't one of them. That might be set to change, certainly in East London, as it became clear at The Hub, stars of this were first of all the people who weren't starring – Tina Meegan, Kim Wood from CMHT and Karen Taylor, seconded from the Arts Council's (ACE) umbrella group Well-London. They've together been promoting these kinds of events at, appropriately, Star Lane, Canning Town (bordering Stratford). Then we saw the performing stars too. It was a terrific evening, cocooned in what seems an old corrugated hangar extension, resembling pre-fabs they've slapped a preservation order on. I've never seen anything like it since my flying days.

Stalls were set out for stallholders to inhabit after signing in from around 4.30. From 5.30 the performances began with Agnes Lekoma sounding an upbeat opening, Debir Lennon reading some expressive poetry and Shane Atkinson also supplying song. The latter came on again later – he's a distinguished voice coach and you could tell his professionalism. Again some powerfully contrasted readings by John Salado and Mohammed Jafar, the latter given a 10 minute slot in keeping with his strong expansive material. The Soul Survivors Band surprised me with the variety of song material they could tackle, and all so well.

After another talk, this time from East Potential – I didn't catch the speaker's name – we bolted for food but didn't bolt it, as it was planned for a relaxed 45 minutes: all veggie curry, lamb dishes, and saffron and raisin rice with salad options. I spoke to Kim Wood (whose gently fizzing energy originates from New Zealand I believe) several times; she tended to pop up with a cheerful comment and then a form for you to fill in. Karen Taylor was telling me how long the Well London project was running for – she's leaving in December 2010 after ten years in the arts sector. 'I've done my bit' she added cordially, suggesting a long trip abroad. Karen is one of those ACE people who make you feel glad you've entered its Pear Tree Court London HQ, and she'll be missed. She cheerfully vows never to set foot in the newly amalgamated London and National offices all situated in the National Office of Great Peter Street – a fantastically blown up version of a Victorian Gothic School. But all Pear Tree Court people say that. We'll see.

Well-London is an Arts Council umbrella organisation promoting health and well-being, one that has to ask questions about itself, since the mental health component isn't as yet as integrated as they'd like. Survivors need to play a part, and this event in one way was a chance for Karen to see what Kim and Tina Meegan are trying to accomplish on limited resources, embracing the whole of East London.

A Canning Town Library service was anxiously purring around with a clipboard and asking if you were very local. Clearly this was part of some borough-targeted info-swoop, designed to see if locals were benefitting from this service use and possibly hire of The Hub itself. Alas, no-one was. 'Well, there's only 5,000 people in this particular parish sector, so I suppose that's understandable' they said, putting a brave evening face on it.

The Talent Organisations as we were billed after the curries, furnished an answer to Karen's quest. Chipmunka

led off with Steve Westwood, whose book was the Chipmunka promotion of choice. He was eloquent and after the Newham writers in Residence talk – a young woman who did a fine job of signposting what they did - I came on for SP. Apart from telling our story in my lateral fashion, I did feel it important to talk up our colleagues in Chipmunka. Steve whose book *Suicide Junkie* is characteristically well-designed and here very well-written and edited, has produced a devastatingly frank and incredibly readable account of his suicidal depression; and how he has exorcised it, as much as he can, with the closing chapter of getting married. I publicly urged everyone to buy it – and found I'd left my cheque book at home. It's an engrossing read and the kind of thing Chipmunka does supremely well. I'd liked to have told Director Jason Pegler this but he's like many of us not hugely clubbable, and likes his authors to gain kudos for their own sakes at these events. Steve has a new volume of short stories out from Chipmunka – the pilot volume was there too, but I didn't get a chance to see it. My one plea would be for a greater range of Chipmunka books than the one title to be available at such events. SP had a smorgasbord and it was truly snorted up – we got rid of 30 books, magazines, pamphlets.

Black Chilli Video Productions led in with a great talk and what video would we like? – and the video went black with no chilli. Something wrong with projection, but Rosetta Arts showed some blow-ups and photography, Stratford Circus gave a peppy talk (we were flagging by now; it was hot too) and the Luis Lema dancing group promised to fire everything at the end. And they did.

This came after Shane and Agnes retuned with even stronger poems, followed by Hawa Banya and the 'The Journey so far' - really a psycho-geographic range in miniature – the focus here is on fashion and jewellery, no less. And the slam where Pauline Brown (a very good writer), was followed by Agnes again, Ciaran Dempsey's take on that tune we know from Top Gear, Sandy Plum's take on Shakespeare, Ciaran with another song, and Elaine Baker (a quite superb poet) played us out. But not before Luis Lema made everyone salsa in the aisles. Quite a sexy thing to do with the people on hand.

Some of the poets came to me with Kim or Tina for further contact, pamphlets, and general info. You might guess who they were, but this in itself is what SP should be able to do, cubed – promote itself to the most visible community at a friendly event where everyone feels included. And if you're feeling bashful, someone like Tina or Kim will rather more than make up for it. I recalled a Chenin-clouded evening at the different but similarly curvy and cavernous Australia House 10 years ago (the place used for Gringotts Bank in Harry Potter). The poet and polymath Peter Porter said of his compatriot poet Les Murray: 'He's electroplated the whole of Australasia to himself.' (I reminded him of his quip recently, just to make him shudder). That's what SP should be doing with survivor poets, and sometimes it seems we are. Or perhaps it's the tungsten-tipped pen I used to take down contacts. Our Administrator Blanche has been right for years. Time to get cards printed. And now we have.

This was naturally a two-way process for service users to get to know service organisations and visa versa; and for The Hub to introduce us to each other and to the umbrella people who take all this back to ACE and beyond, to the DCMS. We need advocates, and not the faceless, and we need each other's affirmation and networking. The Hub has proved itself. Kim went on asking questions for half an hour afterwards, and Tina was still introducing one or two last people to me. I only left at 9.20. Karen's a fine ambassador and now an infinitely better-informed one, as she pointed out. Umbrellas are souled in spiky metal skeletons. But the fabric of getting us together and vocal enough for governments to support us needs to be fought for - if we're going to shelter from the really heavy summer rains we've been having this year. We won't always have The Hub's camber to run for.

## Open to all Feedback Session about SP Events

Survivors' Poetry Meeting, Thursday 10th September, 2009  
@ The Poetry Café @ 5.00pm -5.30pm start



Please come early for refreshments  
The Poetry Cafe  
22 Betterton Street  
London WC2H 9BX  
Tel +44 (0)20 7420 9880

**The meeting will be a celebration and review of Survivors' Poetry's Events. All are welcome especially participants including featured artists to come and talk to us about our events at the Poetry Café. Please contact us if you wish to attend.**

### Agenda

1. Look at the feedback forms from past events
2. Talk about events and future events to find out more about what you want.
3. Look at ways of getting more involved.
4. Look at using FaceBook and MyCharityPage.com
5. Survivors' Poetry would like to celebrate National Poetry Day on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> October, so in the second part of the meeting we want to discuss activities you may want to get involved with to celebrate you and the poetry you do. This year's theme is 'Heroes and Heroines'.



**If you cannot attend and wish to give us some feedback or get involved please contact us.  
Spread the word...**

## Leeds Survivors

Dates	Features
1st and 3rd Friday of each month	<b>Workshop</b> <b>@Rm2, Civic Hall, Leeds</b> <b>6-8pm</b>
17th July, 2009	<b>Next Workshop</b> <b>with Poet &amp; Playwriter:</b> <b>Rommi Smith</b>
1st August 2009	<b>Unity Day - £10 performers' fee restricted to 'special list'</b> <b>@Woodhouse Moor Theatre</b>

Contact Tom Halloran:  
Tel: 01924 820 779  
Email: tgh52@talktalk.net

## Bristol Survivors

Dates	Features
23rd June - 19th July, 2009	Play: Moonshadow @ The White Bear Pub Theatre, 138 Kennington Pk Rd, London SE11 4DJ Tues-Sat 7:30pm. Sun 5:00pm free - mental health community £10/£12 to public

Contact Steve Hennessy  
email: steve.hy@blueyonder.co.uk  
www.stepsoutingtheatre.co.uk

## Manchester Survivors

Dates	Features
Every Mon 4-6pm	Workshop Common Word, 6. Mount St, Manchester M2 5NS

Contact Jackie Hagan  
email: jaclynhagan@hotmail.com

## The Poetry Cafe

**The Poetry Cafe**  
**22 Betterton Street**  
**London WC2H 9BX**  
**tel +44 (0)20 7420 9880**  
**fax +44 (0)20 7240 4818**  
**http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk**

Dates	Features
9th July 2009	<b>Cristina Viti and Stephen Watts</b>
10th Sept 2009	<b>Cybil Madrigal &amp; Alex Ward</b>
8th Oct 2009	<b>National Poetry Day -</b> <b>David Kessel and Alan Morrison</b>
12th Nov 2009	<b>Open Mic</b>
10th Dec 2009	<b>Founders' Night</b>

Open Mic is a wonderful opportunity for new and more experienced poets and musicians to have their work heard in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. If you want to read or perform your work you need to arrive between 7.00pm-7.30pm in order to book your floorspot. The doors will open to other audience members from 7.00pm and the performance will start at 7.30pm 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. There will be a break half way through. These events are organised by Xochitl Tuck, volunteer Events Coordinator.

contact: email: xmtuck@hotmail.com

**Tel: 07796 831 935**

http://www.survivorspoetry.com/pages/home/event-calendar.php

## Nr. London Survivors

399 High Road  
Tottenham  
London  
N17 6QN

Tel: 0208 365 0653

http://www.multimap.com/s/y6qTi6v8



27th August @ 8 P M  
24th September @ 8 p m  
22th October @ 8 p m  
26th November @ 8 p m

contact: email: xmtuck@hotmail.com

**Tel: 07796 831 935**

**\*Founders' Night on the 10th December and will feature performances from some of our original founders - check our website for updates**

National Poetry Day  
Heroes and Heroines

Thursday 8th October, 2009

Call for volunteers to help  
with promoting Survivors'  
Poetry

Please contact:

blanche@survivorspoetry.org.uk or  
philr@survivorspoetry.org.uk

Thursday 10th September @5.00pm  
Poetry Cafe, 22 Betterton  
Street, London.

Events Feedback meeting open to  
all interested parties - RSVP  
- please contact us if you wish  
to attend.

Thank you to all our volunteers and  
supporters.

if you wish to

make contact and respond to anything you have read or if  
you wish to contribute please either email  
info@survivorspoetry.org.uk or write to  
Survivors' Poetry  
Studio 11 Bickerton House  
25-27 Bickerton Road  
London N19 5JT  
Tel: 020 7281 4654  
www.survivorspoetry.com

If you've found insight and understanding of survivors within these pages, please tell us about it.

**DONATIONS:**

**IF YOU WISH TO DONATE  
PLEASE SEND A CHEQUE PAYABLE TO S  
URVIVORS' POETRY.  
SAE'S ASSIST WITH THE COST OF POSTAGE**

**CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS**

SP is looking for assistance from an academic with experience of translating from *Spanish* to English. To assist with a prose project. If you are interested please email Dave Russell for further information:

dave@survivorspoetry.org.uk

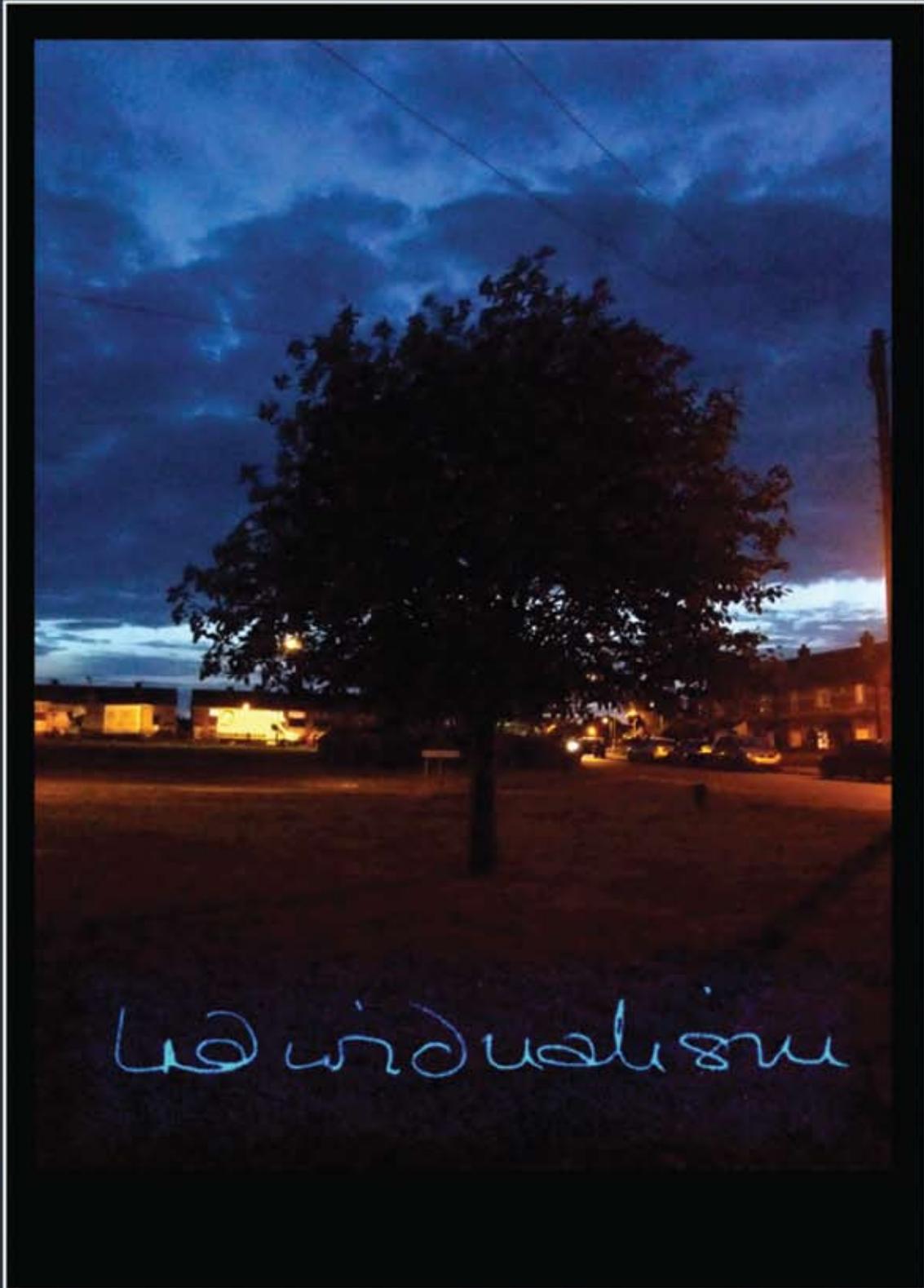
SP is looking for technical help with our website, we are interested to hear from a developer able to assist with some IT issues for the current site and help support the construction of a new website in conjunction with staff and volunteers. May suit recent graduate looking for work experience. Please email: blanche@survivorspoetry.org.uk



Survivors' Poetry is looking for new trustees to get involved. If you have 4 hours a week and have an understanding of the NHS Mental Health sector we would be very interested to hear from you.

# Individual Within

EXHIBITION



TRACEY BROWN

Tracey Brown displays visual art, private correspondence and personal accounts from her six year journey through paranoid psychosis exploring life, labels and relationships in a suburban town and examines the relevance to wider UK society.

## VENUE

Our Space Gallery @ Together: Working for Wellbeing - 12 Old Street - London EC1V 9BE



LOTTERY FUNDED



FREE EXHIBITION:  
9am – 5am weekdays  
1st – 31st July  
PRIVATE VIEW:  
1st July, 5.30 – 7.30

