

About the poets.....

Jim Bennett

Jim lives near Liverpool in the UK and is the author of 63 books, including books for children, books of poetry and many technical titles on transport and examinations.

His poetry collections include:

Drums at New Brighton (Lifestyle 1999)

Down in Liverpool (CD) (Long Neck 2001)

The Man Who Tried to Hug Clouds (Bluechrome 2004 reprinted 2006)

Larkhill (Searle Publishing 2009)

The Cartographer / Heswall (two poetry sequences) (Indigo Dreams 2012)

He has won many awards for his writing and performance including 3 DADAFest awards (2002-4), Berlin Festival Prize (2004). He has been nominated for the Pushcart Award on seven occasions and for the Ted Hughes Award twice. He is also managing editor of www.poetrykit.org one of the world's most successful internet sites for poets. Jim taught Creative Writing at the University of Liverpool and now tours throughout the year giving readings and performances of his work. See Jim Bennett's website at <http://www.poetrykit.org/jim/index.htm>

Nikki Bennett

www.nikkibennettpoems.com

Nikki has had six collections of poetry published and she has performed her poems at various poetry festivals and poetry group readings in the UK. She has also read her work in the USA and Europe, including at the conference of International Women Writers' Guild (New York State) and Geneva International Writers. She is a great believer in poetry as both communication and therapy, and in particular the highlighting of women's issues and circumstances. Her collection *Love Shines Beyond Grief* was nominated for the 'Ted Hughes Award for New Poetry' 2010. As well as the collections, her poems have appeared in various magazines including: *Crazy Lit, De Facto, Hearing Voices, Magma, Partners' Aspire, Ravenglass, Artemis and Roundyhouse*.

Nikki is a member of The Poetry Society and of The Society of Women Writers and Journalists, and founded 'uni-verse' poetry group in Bath, which promotes and celebrates international poets and poetry. She now lives in Wirral, is active in the poetry scene in Wirral, Liverpool and Chester, and is part of a team reading poetry in Care Homes and supports the work of *Lapidus* - Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes

Frances Boyle 2012

Frances is an artist originally from the North West who now lives with her children in rural South Warwickshire where she paints, writes, take photographs and makes and sells ceramics to keep the wolf from the door. Last Summer she was invited routinely, along with other younger women in my area, to attend a mobile breast-screening unit in a car park in a nearby town. As a result of this, she was recalled to the hospital for further investigation as a problem had been detected. The poem is her visceral response to what was a routine event in a city hospital; fifteen minutes of my life that felt like a lifetime. She asked if she could keep the scan and thought she might be able to use it in a painting or as it turned out, a poem. She was reminded of the scans she had kept for her three children. She was also, at the time of the scan, in the process of a painful separation from her partner of twenty-three years. The results were negative. Although she was greatly relieved, her joy was mixed with sadness and regret for the last twenty odd years and she just had to write it down.

Michael Brown

Michael, 29, is a published poet and has type 1 bipolar affective disorder, asthma and allergies. He lives in Cambridge and is reading English at Cambridge University. His next poetry collection will be *'the exhibit'* published by Pembroke Poetry Society (Cambridge University Press). *'Bipolar Britain'* was published in his second book *'Cutting Butterflies with Scissors'*. His focus is on increasingly worse mental health. He would diagnose the North as depressed (recession) and the South as manic (big events).

Caroline Burton

Shaving Granddad was runner-up in The Fathom Prize 2010, and was published in *'Fathom 10'* by Fathom Press in 2010. Caroline has been a member of Driftnet Poets (NE Lincs) for 12 years, and regularly performs her own work.

Anti-Depressants was runner-up in the 2010 writing competition (adult poetry section) organised and published by The Culture House, and was published in *'Home'*.

Anne Caldwell

Anne's latest collection is *'Talking To The Dead'* published by Cinnamon Press. Website <http://annecaldwell.net>. Anne lives in Hebden Bridge with her son and wrote this poem in response to an operation she had at Huddersfield hospital. It was the first time she had been in hospital for a long time and the experience felt surreal at times – probably due to taking morphine! So the imagery of the poem was inspired by the language of a circus. She made a full recovery.

Yvonne Eller

Yvonne is a model and ex-student of philosophy, literature and creative writing, currently working on a novel, *'The Disintegration of Esther Wolf'*

Sarah L Dolan

Sarah has come to know that sometimes no arrangement of carefully-crafted words will ever suffice. Sharing a smile is priceless.

Rosie Garland

From her collection *'Everything Must Go'* published by Holland Park Press. (*'Dignity'* was first published in *'Best of Manchester Poets, Vol. 2'* from Puppywolf Press in 2011). *'Everything Must Go'* is a poet's unflinching yet original way of describing her battle with cancer. Rosie Garland is a poet, writer and performance artist. Rosie is based in Manchester, and you can find more information about her performing career on the website named after her alter ego, Rosie Lugosi: www.rosielugosi.com

Gill Garrett

Gill worked as a lecturer in health and nursing studies. In retirement she writes poetry and short stories and two of her plays for voices have been broadcast on local radio. This poem was runner up in the poetry competition at the Cheltenham Literature Festival in 2011.

Joan Gooding

Then there was one - won a prize in a 'Falls Prevention' poetry competition in Cumbria in 2009.

Atar Hadari

This poem was originally published in *The American Journal of Nursing*.

Atar's latest poetry collection is *'Rembrandt's Bible'* published by Indigo Dreams – it is a delightful collection of sceptically religious poems, with monologues by, or about, many of the Bible's major characters. Atar Hadari was born in Israel, raised in England, trained as an actor and writer at the University of East Anglia before winning a scholarship to study poetry and playwriting with Derek Walcott at Boston University. His plays have won awards from the BBC, Arts Council of England, National Foundation of Jewish Culture (New York), European Association of Jewish Culture (Brussels) and the Royal Shakespeare Company, where he was Young Writer in Residence. Plays have been staged at the Finborough Theatre, Wimbledon Studio Theatre, Chichester Festival Theatre, the Mark Taper Forum (where he was a Mentor Playwright), Nat Horne Studio Theatre (New York) and Valdez, Alaska. His "Songs from Bialik: Selected Poems of H. N. Bialik" (Syracuse University Press) was a finalist for the American Literary Translators' Association Award and his poems have won the Daniel Varoujan award from New England Poetry Club, the Petra Kenney award, a Paumanok poetry award and many other prizes. His nineteen-page translation of Hanoch Levin's "Lives of the Dead" filled a third of Poetry magazine in 2009.

Miriam Halahmy

Miriam developed osteoarthritis in her forties and had both hips replaced by the age of 54. In the months before the first operation she began to think about the loss of an original part of her body for the first time. This sense of impending loss grew and that is why she wrote the poem. She is a published poet and author and has published three novels and two collections of poetry. She runs creative writing workshops in London. www.miriamhalahmy.com

Jan Harris

Jan Harris and her husband Dave, who has been living with MS for fifteen years, hail from Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire respectively. They fell in love with the Lake District more years ago than they care to remember. Although they can't reach the higher peaks any more, they have discovered there are many accessible tracks which still allow them to enjoy this beautiful part of the world.

<http://janharris.webs.com>

Caroline Hawkrige

Writer-in-Residence at NAC, Caroline submitted these four poems on behalf of the National Aspergillosis Centre (NAC) based at the Education & Research Centre, University Hospital of South Manchester (UHSM). The NAC is a research and treatment centre of national and international excellence for fungal diseases which typically infect the lungs or eyes, and can prove fatal in patients who have a suppressed immune system, e.g. due to AIDS or chemotherapy. Aspergillosis is all about Immunity and Infection. Also, respiratory problems can be associated with mould in housing, particularly damp housing which remains a public health issue in the North West. Of the four poems, *'Fungal friends'* and *'Mouldy woes'* were written by Chris Harris, the National Aspergillosis Centre Manager. These poems have been very well received by patients and carers visiting the Centre's Aspergillosis Support Group. *'Hope is...'* and *'Hospital car park'* are group poems written collectively by patients, carers and staff in the Aspergillosis Support Group itself; a process facilitated by Caroline Hawkrige.

Margaret Holbrook

Margaret wrote this after hearing a friend's stories of visits to her husband who suffers from dementia, but changed the sufferer to be a father figure as she could associate with that more easily. She writes poetry, plays and short stories and live in Cheshire.

Angi Holden

I'm an associate lecturer and post-grad student at MMU Cheshire. My current study focus is on fiction, but poetry is a major part of my writing life. My work has been published in anthologies published by OUP, Macmillan & Longman, as well as prize anthologies from Keele and Cheshire Literature Prizes.

Phil Howard is a local authority worker who would like to see poetry restored as an art form which can be appreciated by all through relevant and accessible work that tackles compelling subject matter. Some of his newer poetry has been published in recent editions of *Snakeskin*, *Streetcake*, *Decanto*, *The Recusant*, *Angle* and *Prole*. He has also published a new collection - *Inside, Out and Beyond* - for Kindle.

<http://philhowardpoet.tumblr.com/>

Phil Isherwood

I am a Research Student in Cultural and Creative Studies at the University of Bolton and the volunteer Poet at Bolton Hospice. My Hospice poems are inspired by patients' stories and their creative work (and talking to volunteers and staff). I have also written specifically medical poems and have run a writing group in an NHS low-secure mental illness unit. The three poems of mine that you have chosen for this project all link one idea that I use: that of 'embodiment' metaphors. That is, we often (always?) understand our emotional life (an abstract) with reference to our physical life (the concrete). This closeness is quite fascinating for the poet. What doctors may dismiss as psychosomatic is a rich source of poetry!

Andrew John

Andrew has been writing poems on and off since the 1970s, with a few published here and there. This poem made '[Poem of the Week](#)' on Poetry Kit, and has been published on a website called [Poetry Soup](#). It's something of a tribute, but is positive about this particular health issue. Jim died aged 80 in December 2011 and I'd known him for 40-odd years. I wrote this poem a year and some months after he died, not of the cancer of the throat depicted in the poem, but of pneumonia. Jim was positive about the cancer of the throat, and lived with the trachy tube, as he called it, making the best of the challenges a noisy world presented to his being heard.

Valerie Laws is a novelist, poet, playwright, performer and does sci-art installations & commissions. Valerie has had a series of funded residencies working with pathologists, anatomists, neuroscientists etc in London, Newcastle, Leeds, Egypt, Cambridge, etc, researching areas of biomedical science for her poetry projects.

Website: valerielaws.co.uk

Senior Last Moments - I helped care for my mother who had Alzheimer's Disease, and spent her last few days by and on her bed with her as she died. It was a great privilege to share that with her. This led me into researching the science of dying, working with scientists and patients to study and write about dementia. My knowledge of pathology informs even my most personal poems, as in this case.

Slices of Brain - I helped to care for my mother until she died of Alzheimer's Disease so have a special interest in dementia. I was given a guided tour of brain slices with dementia by eminent neuropathologist Professor Robert Perry, who features in the poem, and who together with neurochemical pathologist Professor Elaine Perry did pioneering work on Alzheimer's. I've done a lot of work with dementia patients since then, and learned a lot from them and about the condition. They invariably have far more awareness than they are credited with, if people take time to listen, sit with them, and

pay attention. The diseases that cause dementia are not mental illnesses, they are brain damage - they are terminal conditions but should be curable eventually.

Aneurysm Umbrella - “Less than a year after we watched my mother die of Alzheimer’s, my father suddenly died of an unsuspected abdominal aortic aneurysm. I witnessed his sudden death as well as her slow one. This is a very common cause of death in older men, especially with a history of heart disease. If it’s discovered before it bursts, it can be fixed with a stent. My father bled out in the ambulance and in A&E. It’s also common for men to die less than a year after their wives. He died almost literally of a broken heart.”

A question for neuroscientists - published in prizewinners’ anthology of Hippocrates Prize). “This poem will be in my new poetry collection, due out October 2014 from Red Squirrel Press. It is a question I keep asking neuroscientists! The more you learn about the brain, the more you learn about how much of it is unknown territory.”

Pumping Ions - “Part of my research into the science of dying was to find out exactly how brain cells die, and part of that was finding out how they live! I learned a lot about living from studying death and pathology. This poem owes a lot to eminent neuroscientist Professor Anthony Strong of Kings College, London, who generously gave me his time to teach me the workings of the brain.”

Rat Brain Waving not drowning - “I spent time with a neuroscientist who studies brain waves. I’m interested that new waves keep being discovered, which makes me wonder what else is happening in the brain that we don’t yet know about!”

The Circle of Willis - I spent time with a neuroscientist who studies brain waves. I’m interested that new waves keep being discovered, which makes me wonder what else is happening in the brain that we don’t yet know about!”

Stroking the brain - Less than a year after we watched my mother die of Alzheimer’s, my father suddenly died of an unsuspected abdominal aortic aneurysm. I witnessed his death as well as hers. He didn’t have a stroke but bled out, which has the same effect on brain cells which die, deprived of oxygen. I learned exactly how brain cells die. How they live, is in my poem PUMPING IONS which is in the Neuroscience section.

Cyclops Baby & Sirenomelia Baby – these are from a suite of poems I wrote about the collection of babies in jars in the Pathology Museum where I’m Writer-in-Residence. They have various bizarre conditions which meant they died at or before birth. I love them. They feature in my BBC Radio play (narrated by a disfigured head specimen) called [NOWT TO LOOK AT](#), which can be downloaded.”

From Fin to Fingers - “I studied embryology as part of my pathology research. Life and death are intimately connected – some of our cells commit suicide so we can live, like the cells between our foetal fingers. This process, apoptosis, goes on through life in many unseen ways. Rather like trees shedding their leaves.”

Sonic the Hedgehog Killed Your Baby - “I worked as a writer with medical students in human dissection classes – nowadays medics are encouraged to retain empathy with patients as people. A very good thing too!”

Valerie's poetry collection [ALL THAT LIVES](#) on Kindle or in [paperback](#). Valerie Laws is a novelist, poet, playwright, performer and does sci-art installations & commissions. Find her comedy novel [LYDIA BENNET'S BLOG](#) on Kindle. Find her crime novels, [THE ROTTING SPOT](#), and [THE OPERATOR](#) on Kindle or in [paperback](#).

Char March

Char was Writer-in-Residence for the North West NHS's R&D Team from Oct 2012 to July 2013. She is an award-winning poet, short fiction writer and playwright for radio and stage. Char's poetry collection *'The Thousand Natural Shocks'* explores all sorts of health issues. <http://www.indigodreamsbookshop.com/#/char-march/4548108987>

www.charmarch.co.uk

It was round, and on the wall above the piano - This poem is from Char's poetry collection: *'The Thousand Natural Shocks'*. Char wrote it as a result of being Writer-in-Residence for Leeds Hospitals Trust, and working with many elderly patients with dementia. Char really admired the way that many of the elderly people she worked with found creative ways to describing things and events, even though they'd lost many of the words they'd once known.

The Plainsong of Manchester's Health Profile Indicators - I researched all the statistics (Health Profile Indicators) for the Manchester area to create this chant – and was pretty horrified that the only indicator that was on the positive side was skin cancer, presumably because we're all too busy sheltering from the rain to receive harmful rays!

The Bean Bag Olympiad – is part of a poem series called *'The Crisis Collection'*. The whole series is based on my own experience of trying to get help from mental health services after becoming very depressed when my long-term relationship ended. I then adapted the poem series into a stage play for West Yorkshire Playhouse, and a version of it was toured nationally by Red Ladder Theatre Company. It was spotted by BBC Radio 4 and I adapted it for an afternoon play for them entitled *'People Come Here To Cry'* – this is still regularly broadcast on BBC digital radio. So, this poem just goes to prove that it pays to go off your head! The only thing that's got me through thus far is being able to have a good laugh at things!

Hippocampus - I think I was trying to be way too 'clever' in this poem, so here's a decoding of it! As we all know, remembering phone numbers is hard work – really taxing for our short-term memory. While I was working with neuroscientists on a set of poems, I fell for someone, and was desperate to remember her telephone number! Because of a severe illness a number of years ago, I find laying down new memories very difficult, so I use tactile tricks – such as using patterns on the palm of my hand to mimic a phone's keypad. Neuroscientists divide memory into various types – implicit memory is the type that allows you to remember how to tie your shoes without consciously thinking about it. The hippocampus is the processing plant for memory – and is shaped like a pair of ram's horns. And hippocampus is also the official name of the seahorse. So, this little word puzzle is simply me trying not to forget a phone number – for someone who turned out not to be interested anyway!

Hope in a jar - I spliced this poem together: intercutting titles of some of Professor Chris Griffiths dermatological papers in 2012, and skincream companies claims that I found on their websites.

Psoriasis Tightrope Walk - I was Writer-in-Residence for the NHS's North West Research and Development Team in 2012/2013. Part of my role was to go out and interview top

researchers across the region. I compiled this 'poem' after realising that much of the excellent research into serious skin diseases done by Prof Chris Griffiths, and staff at his ground-breaking Dermatopharmacology centre in Salford, is funded from the research they undertake for cosmetics companies. A symbiotic relationship in action.

Cheese And Potato Gun - is part of a poem series called *'The Crisis Collection'* which I then adapted into a stage play for West Yorkshire Playhouse, and a version of it was toured nationally by Red Ladder Theatre Company. It was spotted by BBC Radio 4 and I again adapted it for an Afternoon Play for them entitled *'People Come Here To Cry'* – this is still regularly broadcast on BBC digital radio. The whole experience is based on my own experience of trying to get help from mental health services after becoming very depressed when my long-term relationship ended. So, this poem just goes to prove that it pays to go off your head!

Julie McKiernan

I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease twenty-one years ago and have seen a lot of changes in the way treatment is given to patients. Once I used to see 'my' consultant regularly but since the introduction of the Gastro Nurse I haven't seen a consultant for over three years despite having a couple of flare-ups. This poem is not meant to be a criticism of my gastro nurse personally (because she is a very approachable, well trained and caring professional who does her best) and I can understand the need to prioritise new and seriously ill patients but sometimes - sometimes - I would like to be in the room when she and the consultant talk about me and be involved in the decisions that they make.

Eve Pickering

Communication is everything. When I wrote this poem my beloved Aunt Evelyn was in hospital following her 4th stroke, she shouldn't have survived it, the consultant called her 'a remarkable woman' and she was, in every possible way.

My first experience of a stroke patient was when my grandmother tried to wake me up at 5am, tapping me with her good arm. She had come to live with us after my mother and stillborn son died. When Nain Jones had her stroke I was thirteen years old attending Grammar School. Dad kept me off school to look after her. I did this for a month, then our GP said I was to return to school. Many years later Dad also had a stroke, the cruellest type which robs the patient of their speech, but no-one knew my Dad better than me and we were always able to 'converse'. It was a long and winding road and so frustrating for him but we always got there in the end. I always told my children to value all experiences – good or otherwise – in life because you learn from them. They are character-building. As a receptionist and subsequently a Practice Manager I found myself able to help not only stroke patients, but also patients with learning difficulties, to communicate. It takes patience but is so rewarding for the patient. It's the little things that we can do as carers that make life a bit more comfortable for them. Like helping them put the affected arm into the coat sleeve first – the good arm will bend! Little things mean a lot. Spread the word!

Note from Char:

Eve also said: "I didn't think my pome (what I call me rubbish) worthy of entry but Dee Rivaz did and emailed me your address. I am no Seamus Heaney." I am sure you'll agree that Eve's 'pome' is every bit as moving as Seamus's!

Winston Plowes 2010

www.winstonplowes.co.uk

Owl Feathers (MRI Scan) received a commendation in the International Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine 2010 and was published in the anthology of the event. Its writing was guided by my three friends, all of whom had MRI scans over a short period. It is influenced by their combined experiences.

Gareth Glyn-Roberts

<http://garethglynroberts.blogspot.co.uk/>

Graham Robinson

Note to all readers who Smoke – Please give up – You will thank me in 50 years!

'Smoking' has been published in my own book entitled *'Observations On Life'* by

www.countywise.co.uk

Jenny Robottom

These poems are taken from my fourteen sonnet sequence, *'Psychotic Cycle'*. I would like to de-stigmatise the word 'psychotic' and convey an experience that, while it can be frightening, may also, in many ways, be rich and beautiful. The 'over inclusion' I experience during psychotic episodes, in which all things seem to be linked, leaves behind it, after the episode, a sense of connectedness between things which I feel driven to try to capture and explore in poetry and prose. Alongside these 'peak' experiences I seek to convey the stark reality of hospital and the dynamic process of integrating the self back into the 'everyday world' after experiencing psychosis.

Lesley Saunders

The Beauty we see - from *Cloud Camera*, published by Two Rivers Press 2012

<http://tworiverspress.com/wp/cloud-camera/>

www.lesleysaunders.org.uk

Heberden's nodes - are the hard bony enlargements of the joints closest to the ends of the fingers and toes characteristic of osteoarthritis. William Heberden was an 18th century physician who took detailed notes on the basis of close observations of his patients, as distinct from relying on traditional theories.

Odyssey - when my son and his partner were expecting their first child (my first biological grandchild) they sent me the ultrasound 'photographs' – I ended up writing a small book of poems based on those extraordinary images as they showed the baby growing invisibly. 'Odyssey' is in a little book I self-published, called *'Ordinary Treasure'* – it has a very limited print-run because it was beautifully hand-printed for me on an old letterpress.

Pamela Scobie

I have published poems with Ver Poets and *Endymion* magazine and six novels for young people. The most recent, *'Boggets in the Greasepaint'*, is currently available on Kindle.

Helen Shay

www.helenshay.originationinsite.com

It's In the Genes - this poem came out of a 'Cafe Scientifique' talk about depression or mental illness/creativity and whether there was a genetic link.

Note from Char March:

There is a lot of controversy in mental health circles – both from survivors of the mental health system, and professionals who work within it – as to whether there is any sort of genetic link between mental illness and creativity. For my part, I feel it is rather like saying “*All wheelchair users are brave*”. It sounds like it might be a compliment, but is, in fact, another stereotype – something that mental health can certainly do without methinks! Fellow survivor-poet Terry Simpson wrote to me on this issue: “*I recently read Stephen Fry’s novel ‘The Stars’ Tennis Balls’ where Fry suggests that nature and nurture are not the only alternatives – there’s human will as an agent too, so the choice really is nature, nurture or Nietzsche...*”

Distillers of Death - Thalidomide is a great shadow on my life, as my only sibling was lost to it. I still don't believe we know the full truth about how it came to be licensed here.

Terry Simpson

A diagnosis of ‘acute paranoid schizophrenic episodes’ in my early twenties was a big blow. One of the vehicles of my healing has been learning how words can express and clarify, create meaning and convey emotion. ‘*Stigma*’ was written near the start of that journey, when I was just beginning to explore the impact. ‘*Weather Change*’ is a more recent poem. I wanted to describe how suddenly the familiar can become strange. Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote that “*the mind has mountains*”, but it also has deserts, forests, jungles, or indeed wet Yorkshire moorlands where beauty and danger walk hand in hand.

I'm developing a blog for my writing at: <http://theviewfrombeulah.wordpress.com/>

Catherine Scott

Mr Nic O'Tine - this poem is a result of my work with the NHS Smoking Cessation Service where I worked as a specialist for several years. The poem is quite sinister in tone but it mirrors the cruel nature of nicotine addiction. Working with people to help them quit their habit was very rewarding.

Madeline Stewart

I am 27 years old, a Registered Nurse at Alberta Children’s Hospital in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. This poem was written at a very challenging time in my life. I was going through a never-ending miscarriage that lasted over 3 months. I had come back to work, a week into this loss, and was given my assignment – this baby. Though it was my most difficult shift to date I will never regret the experience. I believe that we came together at that time, this little one and myself, because each of us needed what the other had to offer. I needed a real life baby to grieve for and say goodbye to. This baby needed a mother to hold him in his last hours, to say goodbye to him. Writing about this experience allowed me to process my grief and recognize it as something meaningful. The process of writing is teaching me how to be a better nurse to my patients. It is helping me to be honest and in touch with emotions – both mine and the families that I care for. It is a coping strategy I could not live without.

Mandy Sutter

Mandy Sutter was Writer-in-Residence at Leeds General Infirmary in the early noughties. “*Coping with unfamiliar surroundings can be tough when you have dementia. But perhaps the strange uniformity of supermarket chains is disorientating too, in a different way.*”

Elaine Trevitt

New Words - relates to investigations and treatment for ovarian cancer between Lancaster and Preston, and comes from Elaine’s collection-in-progress: *Cystablista*

Dr G meets Mrs T - relates to cancer research at Lancaster University, and comes from Elaine’s collection-in-progress: *Cystablista*

Anthony Ward

Oscillation - the inspiration behind this poem came from seeing how my much older relatives handwriting had declined over the years. The bold upright letters that highlighted their personalities becoming more and more scrawled and deflated as time wore on.

Jim White

I profess to being a local poet. Last year I was diagnosed and treated successfully for bowel cancer. I raised £350 for Bottoms Up bowel cancer charity with my book of poems and a few stand-up poetry nights, so am quite proud. All my poems are put into self-printed books and sold for local cancer charities.

Mary Williams

www.valentinewilliams.co.uk

The Little Word 'POP' has been published in *The Salopeot*. Mary, who also writes under the name Valentine Williams, was diagnosed with breast cancer seven years ago. She won the Hippocrates Prize for poetry this year (see her winning poem here:

<http://valentinewilliams.co.uk/home.html>) and has recently published *Losing It*, a study of a woman in a secure hospital, with Targearr Press:

http://www.tirgearrpublishing.com/authors/Williams_Valentine/index.htm

Merryn Williams

On The Tideline - has been published in *The First Wife’s Tale* (Shoestring Press) and on UNISON website. I wrote this poem about my much-loved father-in-law who died of myeloma in 2003. *The First Wife's Tale* is dedicated to him. I'm a poet and biographer and live in Oxford.

Sue Wilsea

Have A Nice Day! - is from *Grandmother’s Footsteps* – a sequence of nine poems I have written about Margery, my paternal grandmother, who was a very influential person in my childhood, not least because we spent several periods of time living with her. For a long time I thought she and The Queen Mother were the same person (they did look alike and Nanny, as we called her, affected a very regal manner!). Later, when she became less able to manage, she lived with my parents. Then, for the last 6 years of her life, she moved from Cornwall to Yorkshire to be with me and my young family. The decision to move her into a nursing home was one of the most difficult I have ever made and I regret the fact that there wasn’t the support available so she could have stayed at home. During her time in nursing care, I experienced both the best and worst of the health system. She died at the age of 94.

Care Assistant - is from *Grandmother's Footsteps* – a sequence of nine poems I have written about Margery, my paternal grandmother, who was a very influential person in my childhood, not least because we spent several periods of time living with her. For a long time I thought she and The Queen Mother were the same person (they did look alike and Nanny, as we called her, affected a very regal manner!). Later, when she became less able to manage, she lived with my parents. Then, for the last 6 years of her life, she moved from Cornwall to Yorkshire to be with me and my young family. The decision to move her into a nursing home was one of the most difficult I have ever made and I regret the fact that there wasn't the support available so she could have stayed at home. During her time in nursing care, I experienced both the best and worst of the health system. She died at the age of 94.

Sue's collection of short stories, *'Staying Afloat'* is published by Valley Press.
www.suewilsea.co.uk

Pat Winslow (from *Skin & Dust* – Blinking Eye, 2004)

As background: *MacMillan* is a response to deaths amongst my family and friends. The work of MacMillan nurses is tremendous and I have huge respect for them. I also think that death is not to be feared. It comes to us all. Everything – everyone – has a beginning and an end. I feel quite humble about that. It makes me know my place in the world, I suppose. If you think about how many human beings there are on this planet, how many have come and gone and how many will come and go, it puts things in perspective. Of course we're significant to each other as family, as lovers, as friends, but in the bigger picture, we're nothing. We're just specks. I find that quite comforting.

So Far - (from *The Girl in the Iron Lung* - Crocus, 2003)

<http://thepatwinslow.blogspot.co.uk/>

<http://www.patwinslow.co.uk/poetryandfiction/index.html>

Latest collection *Kissing Bones* – Templar Poetry, 2013

So Far - was written when I was working as a Writer-in-Residence attached to North Manchester Hospital. I was working with practitioners, patients and ex-patients and it suddenly struck me that it's a miracle any of us are alive really, because the human body is vulnerable. We're only flesh and blood. I then began to think about all the evidence we leave behind, not just when we die, but in the process of living. Being flesh and blood is a bit of a messy business. I don't know how many heartbeats I've got left, but I'm making the most of them. Carpe diem!

Stroke - was written in response to a Von Haagen plastination exhibition my sister and I went to. There was a hand mounted in a glass case. It showed all the tendons and ligaments and muscles. I was fascinated by this. As a writer, how much comes into play when I pick up a pen? We use our hands all the time without thinking about how they work. It would take an engineering genius to construct a human hand. I had recently been working with some older people in care homes and sheltered housing. One person was a retired doctor and several people had had strokes. Everything came together in the poem. So it's a celebration of the function of muscles and it's also a recognition that our bodies are not forever young. Things do start to break and wear out. If language means a lot to you – as it does to me – then an injury to Broca's region is a terrible thing. I've seen people weep with frustration, not being to name things that are important to them. These days, of course, we know so much more about stroke treatment and I have seen some amazing recoveries.

Autopsy My sister was killed one morning whilst walking her dog. Two drunk drivers were arguing over the steering wheel and ploughed into her. How do you deal with something like that? The only way I know is by facing it. I imagine she may well have reacted the same way had it been me who was killed. She was a medical transcriptionist and she'd read a lot of autopsy and biopsy reports. She was very knowledgeable. She

liked medical language, too. We used to trade words in our emails. It was inevitable that I'd read her autopsy. It was also inevitable that I'd make a poem about it. She would not have been amused to hear that her anus was unremarkable! But of course an autopsy can't measure a life or what that life meant to another person. I know I said we're just specks (see Pat's *MacMillan*' poem in the cancer section) – and so we are – but my sister was like the sun to me and I miss her dreadfully.

River Wolton

River's latest poetry collection is *Indoor Skydiving*
(Smith/Doorstop 2013)

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