

MOSAIC



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

CONTENTS

Title	Author	Page
Returning	Tricia Brown	2
Dreams	Richard King	3
Haiku - Absent Ones (1), (2), (3)	June Hawkins	4, 12, 29
Reflections	Tricia Brown	5
The Feast	Mikki Wilde	6
Haiku – Temperature (1), (2)	Mikki Wilde	7, 25
Being There	Ruth Westley	8
Where Have All the Colours Gone?	Elaine Calvert	10
Christmas Lockout	Christine Claricoates	11
Eight Mirrors	Patsy Paterson	13
Lost	June Hawkins	14
Open Doors	Graham Surman	16
Quince Blossom	Jacqueline Barker	18
Last Week	Jacqueline Barker	19
Blossom	June Hawkins	20
The Week Before	Christine Claricoates	21
IT	Patsy Paterson	22
Embroidery – an Inspiring Story	Anne Tester	23
On Reflection	Anonymous	24
Choices	Tricia Brown	26
Seven Deadly Sins	Graham Surman	27
Absent Friends	Jacqueline Barker	28
Food for Thought	Ruth Westley	30
A Brief Encounter	Anne Tester	31
A Christmas Sketch	Shirley Wilding	33
Dream Play	Chad Barnsley	35
Choice	Richard King	36
Flexible Haiku	Jacqueline Barker	37
Two China Cups	Elaine Calvert	38
The Pleasures of Retirement	Shirley Wilding	39

SPECIAL NOTE:

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

We hope that you will enjoy reading our efforts as much as we have enjoyed producing them. If so, why not come and join us? We meet on the third Monday of the month between 2 and 4 pm in the residents' lounge at Brook Court.

RETURNING

The house looks the same, but no-one lives there anymore.

The family gathers as before, but not to celebrate a birthday, an anniversary, Christmas or just to share a cup of tea and cake with Betty.

Betty's four great grand-children are for once fairly subdued; no exuberant, rushing, whooping, backdoor entry. This time waiting for the front door to be unlocked, then following parents and grandparents apprehensively into the house. Nothing inside the house has been moved, but it feels different.

We explore cupboards, drawers, wardrobes, exclaiming as physical objects triggered ephemeral memories, some long forgotten. We discover personal, almost hidden caches of old photos, school reports, love letters. Mementos are taken, jewellery divided, furniture appropriated. And still more discoveries, more "I remember when . . .", "Look at this . . .", and even "What on earth . . ." But six year old Meg still won't go upstairs unaccompanied.

Our children and their little ones leave, accompanied by a stone tortoise, two cups and saucers, a glass bird, a brass shell-case, silver-plated 1950's football trophies, grandpa's bottle opener and great great grandma's glasses. Little things that mean a lot. We gather together a picture, a clock, a statuette, a plate, a paperweight and a butterfly brooch that we know are dear to other family members. We fumble with unfamiliar keys as we lock up behind us.

Two weeks later my husband and I come back. The house has subtly changed, too many bare places. We re-arrange ornaments and fish out old stored ones to fill the gaps, to make it homely for the estate agent's photographs. It still feels empty.

This isn't the house that my parents had built, the home that I grew up in, left for college, my marriage, visited with my babies and their babies, and yet it still stands in manicured lawns, just as it always did.

The house is sold, no longer ours. We come to clear away anything left. This is hard, her empty chair was bad enough, the empty house surreal.

I will never return again.

© *Tricia Brown*

DREAMS

Dreams
Sleep
The journey
Into the labyrinthine depths.

Childlike
Gold coins litter the floor
Reach out to feel
It's only a dream.

Far off places
Windswept beaches
Please don't end
I awake.

And so to bed
Hidden thoughts niggle
Dreams never come
I wrestle.

Calm and warm
Nestle down
Search takes over.

She was real
Would this be the one?
Dawn breaks
Emptiness

Search
Reach deep down
Never find
Curious.

Stillness
I fly
Wings take me to unknowns.

Dream
Resting in tranquillity
Bathed in adventure.

Day full of storm
Transfixed I lay
Peace evades
I ponder.

Dreaming
Journeying
I ride the waves
Stillness.

© *Richard King*



ABSENT ONES (1)

The hurt created
By a misconstrued word brings
A lifetime of pain

Tortured symphony
Reverberates through caverns
Of cold emptiness

Warm smiles of friendship
Thaw frozen cascade of pain
At loss of close ones.

© *June Hawkins*

REFLECTIONS

All the work's done, so I'm inspecting the new bathroom; new vanity unit, new shower, new down-lighters, new mirror - good lord, is that really me!

"Mike, there's something wrong with these lights."

Beloved belts upstairs . . . to see nothing amiss.

"What's the panic?"

"LOOK!" I point to the mirrored bathroom cabinet.

"I thought it was the lights," he says while nearly blinding himself looking skywards.

"Look at the mirror - my face looks odd. It must be these blue daylight LED thingies"

"It's not," he shakes his head, "your face is like that."

"What? . . . All these wrinkles - they can't have just appeared overnight."

"They didn't."

"They what?" I glare at him, but he's inspecting the shower tray.

"You've had them for years," he said nonchalantly, straightening up. Then he turned and saw my face. "Yes, well, think of them as laughter lines," he chortled.

"Laughter lines???? And what's so funny?"

"Well, you've obviously had an exceptionally hilarious life!"

He ran for his!



© Tricia Brown

THE FEAST

The Seven Deadly Sins convened for their annual feast - a sumptuous affair as always, because so many of them had had such a busy year. They needed this respite.

The cooks in Beelzebub's kitchens had been working both night and day shifts prior to the occasion.

Magnificence, opulence and splendour dazzled the eyes of those present. A million candles burned brightly, ignited from the fires of hell. With a deft wrist flick, the head chef had commanded the dishes be brought to the table. Not a sprout in sight though; he abhorred them. Much fish, meat, roasted poultry and game in abundance. The desserts, both mouth-salivating and toe-tingling. Gout of course notwithstanding, wine and port flowed from fountains.

Even before Pride made it to the table, top setting of course, he had tripped and fallen. So full of arrogance and hubris was he, that with his nose in the air, he had collided with a finely carved stool, strategically placed by a new kitchen wench. Envy's delight at this misfortune was barely suppressed.

Lust as ever had been eyeing up the servers. Male or female, no one was beyond his appetite. And, talking of appetite, Gluttony was in his element, although his liver these days was a problem as was his reaction to wheat. He now needed a gluten free diet. Not easy on such a night. The triple chocolate cake had him drooling. He and Lust were often in competition in the drooling stakes.

Taking on the guise of a banker, Greed, aka Avarice, annoyed Envy all evening. So possessed were they both with material wealth and gain, that at each feast night they would present a beautifully illuminated sheet of the past year's transactions and balances. Losses of course never featured in these disclosures.

With annual increases in pride, gluttony – just look at the statistics on obesity, envy of others' situations and disappointment with one's own, greed, greed and more greed, Sloth did wonder, if he could be bothered even to do that, why there was so much hectic activity. Surely Sloth on a sofa was the desirable path to take.

Soft sofas were also the chosen place of seduction and conquest of Lust, fuelled by celebrity worship, permissive attitudes and scantily clad bodies.

Cavalier approaches to safer sex were widespread. There were of course advantages to an increased birth rate. Higher numbers for the Seven Deadly Sins to influence in the future.

On this occasion, after the drawing of lots, Wrath was placed at the bottom of the table; he was most unhappy. His anger had already been exacerbated by the late arrival of Feast Ferry, transport always arranged for the participants from their latest location of activity. Did the others not realise how consumed individuals had become with intense wrath? He was convinced that he had been busier than anyone else. One only had to look at the state of society and the world. Good food and wine did nothing to ameliorate his demeanour.

And so the evening progressed. However, unbeknown to the Seven, the kitchen ranks had been infiltrated this time by seven others, so appalled at the reports they had received about these feasts, that they had decided change should be effected. As main servers, in disguise, they had witnessed the excesses and bad behaviour before them. The rectangular table would be replaced by a circular one. More democratic.

In forthcoming years, they would no longer tolerate the above transgressions fatal to spiritual progress.

Chastity, Temperance, Charity, Diligence, Patience, Kindness and Humility would feast instead, banishing the wretched others by using all their power. They were certain that they could have just as much fun.

© *Mikki Wilde*

HAIKU – TEMPERATURE (1)

Blades of northern wind
Dart through narrow city gaps –
With chill precision.

Nature embroiders
Individuality
On encrusted panes.

In darkest corners
Slivers of snow, long frozen,
Grip the sleeping land.

© *Mikki Wilde*

BEING THERE

I've been to quite a few funerals lately. Well, I suppose it's not surprising at my age. The local crematorium has been booked for an hour so I suppose there is bound to be a eulogy or two and at least three hymns to prolong it. No flowers the local press insisted but everyone is invited to come to The Crown Inn afterwards. That will bring the village out. It will be quite a big do. I'm going there.

I'm not a great one for funerals, so I'll not dwell on the service, so will just mention that some of the jolly tales I'm hearing bear only a passing resemblance to how I remember the events - but then happy spins are often put on in order to make what I would judge to be an ordinarily useful life a bit more special. Folk are laughing and a few are crying, which is perhaps expected.

Now everyone and more are making their way to The Crown. It is nearly three o'clock and I'm here early. There is plenty of room in the car park, always a worry of mine. The Inn has had a makeover. The conservatory on the side is new and fortunately very large. The people arriving are welcomed. Heavy coats, gloves, scarves and a few hats are taken to a cloakroom. I'm glad that coloured blouses, skirts, ties and waistcoats now emerging, brighten the ambiance. Black outdoor clothes dominated earlier.

I wander to the drinks table. Good, there is a wide choice. The elderflower cordial smells nice. Finger food is being put on the side serving table. I'll inspect that in a minute, I want to go over to my brother who is talking to my daughter and son-in-law. She looks pale. I intend to be joining various little groups of people, listening as they catch up on news, adding to it when and where I can. Village folk have congregated at one end of the room from where a burst of laughter breaks out and the laughter-makers are looking round guiltily, trying to judge if it's all right. It is all right. This is the part of a funeral that I enjoy. People are relaxing. The mood is changing from sombre to celebratory.

Tables are filling. We seat ourselves to eat. The food is great. The Crown caterers have excelled themselves. I like the hot kebabs and

warm samosas, inevitable sandwiches (dainty) but some unusual flans attract me as do lots of salad bits. Joy of joys, there is fresh fruit on wooden cocktail sticks, wedges of melon to eat without cutlery and home-made cake with gateau forks available. A veritable feast. No one need go hungry and I suspect some will have a long journey home tonight. They will be fortified.

The room has quietened but I spot a waiter going round with wine, filling glasses, elderflower too. More laughter. I join in.

Quite a few of my family are here. My son is talking to the electronics bloke who lives just down the road from my house. I go and butt in but they more or less ignore me. I am not a computer buff. The young ones, sixth form and university age, are all together. Their conversation is about A-levels, choices, application forms, grants and accommodation. I tell them to make the most of their three or whatever years, it will be a character-enhancing time that can influence the rest of their lives. I doubt they have taken any notice. They are so engrossed in the here and now.

The room is becoming noisy again. Most of the delicious food has been eaten. Tea and coffee are being served. I sit myself down by a tall frondy plant and watch. Yes, this is how it should be.

I smile to myself and absentmindedly stroke the dust off a leaf with my fingers, making the plant quiver. People have turned round to look at it. They need not worry, I will not let it topple over.

Three or four mobile phones are surreptitiously appearing, mostly among the younger element, but not exclusively so.

Two of my friends are quietly making their exit. They are looking my way as they pass. I ask if I may join them, leaving while everyone is chatting and everything is going well. The healing process will begin tomorrow for the bereaved, knowing that this was a good send off.

And I don't care where they scatter my ashes.

© *Ruth Westley*

WHERE HAVE ALL THE COLOURS GONE?

It occurred to me the other day while sitting in the town centre waiting for a friend that my surroundings seemed to lack colour. I don't mean that I had suddenly lost my ability to see colour. No. What I mean is that shop windows looked dull and uninspiring and people around me all seemed to be dressed in black or grey.

There were young mums dressed in black leggings with black boots and sort of greyish t-shirts or khaki coats; young men in grey tracksuit bottoms and matching hoodies that looked two sizes too big for them and small children looking like miniature teenagers, their clothes matching those of their parents. Even older shoppers seemed to be wearing black trousers



of one sort or another or, even worse, black leggings that really should only be worn by young, slim women.

Looking in the big department stores my friend and I remarked on the lack of colours in the clothes section. Rail upon rail of black trousers, dark skirts and, heaven forbid, mustard coloured t-shirts.

When my friend and I were young, yes, we sometimes wore denim jeans but were seldom if ever seen out and about the town in them. We saw Saturday afternoon shopping as a chance to dress up in our colourful

skirts and dresses so we could promenade through the town centre in our stiletto heels and bouffant hairstyles.

So, we sat in a coffee shop, my friend and I, discussing the downfall of fashion and the dowdy clothes the young were wearing. "Where have all the colours gone?" She asked. "I think we left them back in time when we were young" I replied. Of course, we knew all about fashion in those days. I reminded her of the black and white dress that was made out of a sort of felt/paper material that had braces and big gold buckles. She

reminded me of the mini-dress in a sort of yellowish green that was so short my mother had a fit when she saw me in it. We burst out laughing thinking of all the weird and wonderful clothes we used to wear.

“Perhaps”, my friend said, “colour, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. To us the young may appear to be dressed in dark, shapeless clothes but their hair colours are great. Wouldn't it be fantastic if you and I could get away with dyeing our hair purple with red streaks?”

© *Elaine Calvert*



CHRISTMAS LOCKOUT

The night was cold and dark but the pub was warm and convivial. It was the last day of term and a little celebration was called for. One drink led to another until eventually the two walked back to David's flat where the young PE teacher, Scot, was to shake down for the night. No sooner were they in than David collapsed on his bed and fell into a deep sleep whilst Scot crashed out on the sofa, pausing only to take off everything but his boxer shorts.

All was peace and quiet until at about 2.00 am Scot was awoken by an urgent call of nature. Struggling up he went into the narrow corridor and through into the toilet. Unfortunately it was the front door of the flat and not the toilet and it banged behind him, leaving him still half bemused by sleep and wondering where he was. He began to knock on the door but the occupant was dead to the world and there was no reply. He dared not knock any louder for fear of waking the whole complex. A sudden light-bulb moment. "I'll run downstairs to the communal front door and ring the bell for David's flat. That'll wake him, without rousing anyone else."

Barefoot and by now chilled, Scot ran down the communal stairs and went outside to ring the bell. The door gave a sepulchral groan and closed behind him. Pressing the bell urgently he waited for David's voice on the intercom. There was no response. The beer had done its work and the Gestapo would have had trouble waking him from his slumbers.

Pushing the door to go back in and have another try upstairs he was horrified to realise that, of course, the door could not be opened from the outside unless the flat owner pressed the release switch.

Now feeling desperate, he ran round into the communal garden to answer the call which had woken him in the first place and then came back to the front door to try once more. He rang again and again but it was futile. The cold air had sobered him. Various scenarios came to his mind. He could not just wander down the Hinckley Road in the dead of night, dressed only in his boxer shorts, barefoot, hoping to see . . . whom? The Police? No!

As he'd not long started his teaching career, the repercussions could be devastating. What if he were to ring the bells of the other flats at random? Who would let in a practically naked man? They might call the Police. Again, no!

He was frozen. He looked about in despair and his eyes fell upon a side door. He tried it. It opened! It was the communal refuse-bin room. One of the great bins was packed with cardboard. In a display of pitiful yet admirable resourcefulness he climbed into it and crouched there, fitfully dozing until morning.

It was at about eight o'clock when, as a wintery dawn crept over Leicester, he was at last, able to arouse the startled sleeper.

© *Christine Claricoates*

ABSENT ONES (2)

Absent ones in mind,
Treasured memories now find
Eyes forever blind

© *June Hawkins*

EIGHT MIRRORS

Mirror reflecting facial details
Emphasising worry lines,
But highlighting smile creases

Mirror reflecting one's whole appearance
Make up, clothing, stature, overall effect.



Mirror reflecting my Granny's parlour
From square above the fireplace
Vivid image of that era.

Mirror reflecting curious baby -
Tantalising the little soul
Until she understands.

Mirror reflecting creative achievements
Crafted ceiling or beautiful embroidery,
Highlighting works of art.

Mirror reflecting Christmas wreath closely,
Symbolising seasonal warmth.

Mirror reflecting medical images
Detailed for intricate surgery.
Assisting the surgeon's work.

Mirror reflecting telescope images,
Astronauts high above us
Extending our knowledge.



© Patsy Paterson

LOST

She sat quietly and unseeing in her usual chair facing the window. Only her hands moved, as she fidgeted constantly, first wringing them together then stroking her thumbs in turn. Dressed in a burgundy-coloured skirt with a grey cardigan over a pale pink blouse, she looked relatively neat and tidy. Although her white hair was clean, it lacked style and was in need of a trim. She wore no jewellery except for an ancient gold-plated wristwatch with a worn leather strap, which fitted loosely on her skinny wrist. Her spectacles were rimless, and slightly smeared with finger marks. Thick wrinkled stockings added to the aura of genteel disregard, completed by her worn and slightly grubby-looking sheepskin slippers.

She had lost her precious independence and had been living in the care home for almost a year now. With no family close by, she was dependent upon local friends and the activities arranged by the staff for entertainment. Of course, the television was always on, but she had little or no control over what programme was showing, even if she cared or took notice of it. She was generally lost in her own world, now – a confusing place where time slipped and changed from moment to moment.

She lived in a bubble of her own thoughts; crazy, mixed-up thoughts but generally pleasant ones. Only occasionally did she become disturbed and create a fuss – when she couldn't make herself understood. Why didn't these people understand her, she wondered? They seemed constantly to pester her to do things; time for coffee; did she need the toilet; time for lunch; afternoon nap time – it went on and on in a ceaseless list of demands, when all she wanted to do was sit and dream her own thoughts.

Once *she* had been the one in control – the driving force in the care home she had once managed. Her energy and enthusiasm had infected all the staff, and made the home a happy place for the residents who were well cared for, well-fed and entertained. Now, she had lost control. Lost control of what she did, what she wore, what she ate, what she drank. Did she realise this? Did she mourn the loss of independence and control, wondered those who knew how she had been in former times.

She sat hour after hour, day after day in the same place, gazing out through the window, hearing little, seeing little, dreaming her dreams of lost times. Dreaming of people she'd known, tunes she had hummed, cakes she had made, dresses she had sewn, gardens she had tended.

Or had she? Were these all figments of her imagination, her jumbled thoughts, or were they real memories? She had even lost the sureness of thought she once had, along with the physical abilities she'd enjoyed. All through her life she had been healthy and active, until the quite sudden onset of dementia. It had progressed rapidly in her case, taking away bits of her personality, taking away her lucidity, taking away her ability to make decisions and to care for herself, until finally it took her independence.



She sat now, lost in her own world – one where no-one could really follow, no-one could fathom her thought processes. An occasional picture or a snatch of music might start her from her reverie and for a moment, a glimpse of the person she'd once been was visible.

But all too soon she lapsed back into the stillness. An observer might conclude that she was content, having lost the mundane worries of living, the routine trials and tribulations of work, the ceaseless pressure to make decisions – even if only what to get for the next meal. The same observer might assume that she was perfectly at ease in her now limited existence, with all needs met – warm, dry, safe, fed, cared-for.

Or had she lost even the ability to feel happiness? Was this another loss, along with her dignity? Was she aware of feeling happy, sad, or was each day a grey continuum? That is the ongoing conundrum of dementia – we won't know until we get there ourselves, and then we may have lost the power of reasoning, so it will remain forever an enigma. We can only hope that she had indeed lost the 'bad bits' of life and lived in a contented bubble where she would stay until she lost the only thing remaining – her life.

© June Hawkins

OPEN DOORS

It hadn't been the introduction she had intended. The boxes she needed for the demonstration were rather more bulky than she thought and, carrying with her the briefcase, it meant that dealing with doors was going to be a bit tricky. Any consideration of impediments to her progress were deferred by the automatic doors at reception which silently glided apart as she approached the glass and chromium building that housed her target. Once in, she peered over the boxes and smiled with what she thought was a business-like smile, offered the receptionist a sincere but condescending visual greeting and said, "Matt Baxter is expecting me. I know my way."

Kylie, on reception smiled the corporate smile and replied, "Mind the step," and appraised another opponent in the dating stakes and didn't like what she saw. But noted that she may have an ally in the shoes that she spied. Heels like that whether genuine, or more likely fake, Louboutin were unreliable props in the executive block where, even without the encumbrance of parcels, the high heel clad ladies were offered a daily challenge to remain upright. The smile she smiled was less corporate, more self-satisfaction. She was one to watch alright and this was an occasion for 'operation monitor'.

Knowing that carpets on polished wood could be hazardous, she placed her feet carefully and walked steadily forward to where she knew his office was. They had not yet met, but she had done her research, oh yes, this was going to go well on the business and personal fronts.

On reaching the door she turned off the carpet and approached the access point. She recognised the partitioning; it was the same as The Gamble Corporation further on in the Business Park but with mahogany print finish. That meant door handles and you had to push hard against the door closer.

Then she began the pre-prepared moves, balancing the boxes on her knee. For this she had to somewhat stretch her tailored skirt when she bent her leg to create the necessary ledge. Holding on to her boxes with one hand, letting go with other, she undid the top button of her blouse and then went to grab the handle of the door. Instead of feeling the cold metal surface of the handle she felt a warm soft object. This startled her and set in motion actions which were to become legend.

The priority of making a dignified entrance with impact was firmly rooted in her mind. She immediately understood that it may not be the door handle she was holding, but continued probing the object. Gradually she became aware that it was a hand; a male hand judging by the amount of hair. With the aim of 'dignity with sassiness' still uppermost, she recoiled. One of the more unfortunate features of evolution is the fixed location of the human eye. While being able to swivel from side to side and with the added help of moving the head in a similar trajectory, it is still not possible to see behind you. With the added impediment of boxes and the stimulation of a hairy hand, she withdrew rapidly, forgetting about the carpet and unaware that the receptionist had followed her down the corridor. The change of surface from polished floor to the carpet began the unbalancing - her body increased velocity more rapidly than her feet and consequently she met the receptionist with a full body blow. The receptionist had a split second's premonition that this was about to happen and, being unable to take evasive action, did what any girl would do and screamed. The occupant of the office opposite opened the door to identify the culprit of such unseemly behaviour and was greeted by the receptionist reversing into her at great speed, causing them both to sprawl on the floor, knocking over several chairs and a vase of Sainsbury's flowers sent by the Director, who was chancing his arm.

The boxes shot into the air, disgorging their contents over the carpet, including the smoked salmon and avocado sandwich so dutifully bought to eat in the car as an after-meeting celebratory lunch. By this time she was on the floor, half on the carpet, half on the polished floor and made a wild grab at the nearest object to hand to steady herself. Unfortunately this was the stand for the Queen's Award for Industry awarded to the company in 1985 for innovation in safety practices. The stand was unfortunately not a fixture; at first it rocked then tilted and finally fell, smiting the visitor on the chest and trapping her on the floor, the Queen's award being propelled in a perfect arc up the corridor towards the offices occupied by the more senior executives.

And this was where anecdotes become legend. The chairman was just leaving the office of his son, an incompetent but nevertheless influential executive and Matt Baxter's boss. As he emerged he met the Queen's Award, which admittedly was decelerating at this point, but still had enough energy to give him a hefty clout at the side of his head.

The cries of "Oh, my god! It's killed him," brought him, the tanned and handsome Matt Baxter, striding out onto the corridor to view the carnage. He spied the prostrate chairman and turned to aid him and improve his career chances. Unfortunately for him salmon and avocado do not go

well with polished wood floors, especially when you are wearing a pair of Loakes' best brogues. As Matt Baxter turned, his feet slipped from under him and down he went, falling on top of his next visitor, propelling them both through the door of the opposite office, creating a 'ménage au quatre' on the office floor.

Matt Baxter had somehow got his hand tangled with her blouse and, as he rapidly withdrew it, removed several buttons. He got up apologising profusely saying, "At least we are all conscious!" and started up the corridor to aid his stricken chairman.

She was desperately disappointed that as Matt Baxter disappeared from the scene to rescue his boss, he had failed the role of tender hero she had ascribed to him. Perhaps it had all been for the best in the end.

© *Graham Surman*

QUINCE BLOSSOM

Compressed, enfolded,
Safe in their carapace
Of green, they wait.

They wait for warmth
And lingering light
To burst to life.

Yield willingly to
The sun's tender caress.
Small globes unfurl

Tissue paper petals
Of soft apricot.
Make perfect cups

Whose siren scent
And nectar sweet
Entice the bees.



© *Jacqueline Barker*

LAST WEEK

Last week I rode an elephant
On dusty jungle paths
And stalked a golden tiger
Through whisp'ring waving grass.
I floated in a gondola
Beneath the Bridge of Sighs
Then in the Sinai desert
Saw star-strewn velvet skies.

Last week I climbed a thousand steps
Along great China's wall
Grand Canyon's depths descended
Drenched by Niagara's fall.
Then I became a child again
With shrimping net in hand
Watching the restless wavelets
Wash castles from the sand.

Last week I felt my lover's touch
Soft sensuous caress
Smelled my first-born's milky breath
Danced in a silken dress.
I dreamt of gentle summer rain
Falling on soft green grass
And cottages, rose-covered
Shed perfume as I pass.

All week I lay in fever's grip
Death beckoned from the door
But as I rose to follow
I heard your voice once more.
You whispered, "Do not leave me yet"
And stroked my aching head

Last week is over, finished
I chose to live instead.

© *Jacqueline Barker*

BLOSSOM

Finding a name is a minefield. How does one know what the grown-up version of this baby one will be like – in terms of appearance or personality? We can all think of people whose names don't appear to fit them very well. Do you ever wonder if it has been a handicap to be called something unusual? Names come and go with the fashion of the time, of course – with offspring often named after some celebrity or other.



So, when the newborn lay there peacefully next to Mother, the question arose. With little hesitation they settled on 'Blossom'.

Blossom was born in the cold, as winter was struggling to morph into spring. The name was intended to bring thoughts of spring transmuting into summer, of flowering trees with their pink and white petals making the world a happy, peaceful and sunny place. Quite something to live up to, then, for little Blossom.

Blossom grew rapidly, with long legs and shiny hair – admired by everyone who saw her. With seemingly boundless energy she would skip about in the fields, and was not a shy, retiring type, but always happy to make friends.

Blossom grew steadily, learning new things everyday as youngsters do, and succumbing with good grace to the essentials of life. A happy and sunny nature indeed. She continued to grow, becoming steadily bigger and stronger whilst still retaining her good looks and glossy hair, until the day when her destiny became apparent. She was taken into the farmyard and backed gently between the shafts of the cart, and harnessed in. She was then quietly led forward. Her sunny and placid nature meant that she was not discomforted with the notion of hauling the weight of the cart for the first time.

Over the years Blossom became a firm favourite with all the visitors to the farm park, hauling the gaily painted cart around the site, and truly living up to her name. Blossom isn't such a bad name for a cart horse, is it?

© June Hawkins

THE WEEK BEFORE

I'll never get the whole house done,
They'll be here in a week.
I've got to Hoover every room,
And iron every sheet.

The bathroom needs a thorough scrub,
New washer on the shower.
The shelves all need de-cluttering
It's going to take me hours.

The back room's stuffed with piles of books.
I really must stop buying.
I can't resist the latest ones
Although I keep on trying.

I can't get on at all today,
It's "Keep Fit" and then "Dance".
And in the evening W.I.
The chores don't stand a chance.

And outside in the garden,
The leaves all need a rake.
They need to see it looking nice
While taking tea and cake.

The day before there's food to buy
And stuff to put away.
The cupboards look a right old mess
I'll tidy them today.

At last they're coming down the path
The casserole is cooking,
The house is under firm control.
They say, "How well you're looking!"

IT?

Instantly, IT took over my life and continued for six weeks.

For my brother, IT meant going to the Japan match 'just for the sake of it' and loving every minute of what was reported as one of the best matches of the tournament!

Chez Paterson IT divided loyalties very dramatically!

Interestingly, IT meant our viewing of television adverts shot up though it didn't seem to improve our appreciation of them

In our house, IT meant a lot of meals in front of the tele – but NOT slumped there, as it was very positive watching.

In the birthplace of the game, IT was possible at a Fanzone in Rugby

In Leicester IT could mean using the Fanzone in Victoria Park to watch big screen coverage of matches, for the week of local action.

Radio Leicester recognised IT by running a rugby programme in public with ticket proceeds going to a very local rugby charity.

For one royal person, IT seems to have started long ago as Prince Harry was very involved in the organising committee.

Possibly IT helped those who don't know what day of the week it is, as we try to follow mid-week matches.

Presumably IT encouraged lots of folk to learn geography of the UK – if only through match pitches.

Hopefully, IT enhanced my understanding of that incomprehensible event - the scrum.

Another plus, IT encouraged me to twiddle more knobs and find out how to look back on matches I missed — or the highlights programmes!

Ironically IT seemed to be easy following results in the Bargain Booze chart.

On the other hand, IT drastically affected my following Davis Cup tennis — but I do love my rugby!

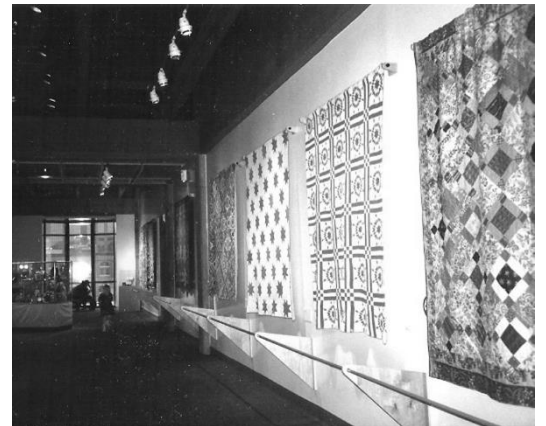
IT is, of course, FOLLOWING THE RUGBY WORLD CUP!

© *Patsy Paterson*

‘EMBROIDERY’ – AN INSPIRING STORY!

While I was staying with the family to the north of Detroit we journeyed across the state of Michigan to a town named Grand Rapids on the shores of Lake Michigan. The town was renowned for its display of traditional patchwork and embroidered quilts which were housed in the museum. At the end of our visit we called into the gift shop and I spotted a beautifully illustrated story book which I bought for the children.

The story told of the bravery of a group of North American Indians who were living as slaves in the north of the state of Michigan, quite near to the Canadian border. Their miserable lives were only made bearable by the thought of escaping to freedom across the border into Canada. From time to time word of the journey of those who had escaped filtered back to those left behind and this gave the slaves courage to hold onto their dream of freedom.



They heard of the difficulties encountered on the journey over the hostile terrain and the route they took over and around hills, rivers and lakes. There were secret whispers of raging waters, snow covered mountain peaks, dense coniferous forests, deep frozen lakes and miles of barren wilderness to cross. However there were also stories of men and women who were now building a new life, free from the slavery many had known all their lives.

With their dreams of this new, free life forever on their minds and fired by the tales that they heard a group of women slaves began to gather all that information together. What was needed was a means of conveying that information to those who were brave enough to attempt the journey to freedom. Communication between the slaves was very restricted. Any means of escaping was almost impossible to plan.

Women had for generations followed the tradition of quilt making. It was an occupation that was tolerated by the slave owners. Furnished with

details of the routes taken by those who had already escaped, this group of women began to stitch and sew into their patchwork quilts the mountains and rivers and lakes of their area stretching to the Canadian border. This was seen as a harmless and quite acceptable theme for their quilt making.

What was not detected by any of the slave owners was a carefully chosen route to freedom that was woven into the intricate map of the area. There were embroidered signs indicating shallow water, ways through the deep forest, negotiable mountain paths and safe crossings along the Canadian border.

I do not know how many escaped but the story has inspired me ever since I read it to my grandchildren

© *Anne Tester*



ON REFLECTION

It was a normal winter's day when Angela got up to enjoy a relaxing breakfast and read the paper. She had planned to go out for the day with friends but over the past couple of months she had felt generally under the weather; she had been very busy preparing for Christmas over the past couple of months so she just thought she was a bit run down. However this particular morning she felt much worse and had started to ache all over. "Oh no, not the flu", she thought. "Just what I need at this time of year." She called her friends to cancel and went back to bed with a hot water bottle. When her husband returned from work several hours later she was still in bed looking very ill indeed.

Her husband called an ambulance and she was taken into hospital. Over the next few hours several tests were done. Unfortunately during this

time Angela was steadily deteriorating and her family were called in. Fortunately, later that day the diagnosis was made and Angela was taken to Intensive care where she was given lifesaving medication. After a considerable fight over several weeks Angela was discharged home with a large bag of pills and the certain knowledge that her life would never be quite the same again.

There would be many decisions that Angela would need to make over the next few weeks and months and she realised that now she would need to reflect on what she had previously and what she would now have. She could just sit around all day feeling sorry for herself or she could use her fighting spirit to get used to her new situation. Angela spent a lot of time trying to get her life back on track and this gave her lots of time for reflecting what was important in her life and what was not. It also gave her a chance to embark on new projects that she would not have considered before her illness.

Angela is still chronically ill, but being a fighter with a positive mental attitude has enabled her to reflect and reassess her life and manage to live with her illness. Unfortunately there is currently no cure but, on reflection, Angela has found a way of controlling the illness and not allowing it to control her.

Anonymous

(For information on vasculitis, visit www.vasculitis.org.uk)

HAIKU – TEMPERATURE (2)

Rothko banded sky
Silhouettes bare, black branches -
Winter's modern art.

Diffused light, distant
Atmospheric ice crystals -
Eerie veiled beauty.

© *Mikki Wilde*

CHOICES

She hadn't got much choice.

She was involved with three men, but soon she would be seeing none of them. Not one.

It was totally beyond her control. She harboured dreams of their return, sometime in the future. For two of them this was a somewhat futile hope, but for one, she was assured he would come back.

Meanwhile, she had one last chance, one last rendezvous with each of them. As far as she knew, each was unaware of the others. They travelled in different worlds, different times, but each shared an equal place in her heart. Everything stopped when she saw either one of the three. All were tall, dark, strong and handsome - nothing to choose between them, unless you preferred a man in uniform that is. She did, but unfortunately he was the one least available, now and probably in the future too.

Her dilemma was when to see them. Spread these final assignations over the forthcoming evenings or make a clean break and get it over with now, in the space of one, long, gloriously indulgent night. While her husband was out.



That sounded like a plan. Make a coffee, finish off those After Eights, hit the remote for BBC i-player and watch the final episodes of Poldark, Atlantis and Banished*.

When was the new Sherlock on? Fickle or what?

* *Poldark* - Captain Ross Poldark (Aiden Turner)
Atlantis - Jason (Jack Donnelly)
Banished - Major Robert Ross (Joseph Millson)

© Tricia Brown

SEVEN DEADLY SINS

To peek at the lady's bulging bust
Is to display unbridled lust
But think of this, if think you can,
Without lust, then - where is man?

With gluttony, you add the tele,
And finish with an enlarged belly.
Don't eat it all just leave a morsel,
For some other needy mortal

A very special sin is greed
It's based on avarice, not need
How to comply with cementation,
When you can resist all but temptation?

Sloth, that vital lack of drive
That keeps a human being alive.
It drags, it makes your mind all hazy,
Let's not mince words, you're bloody lazy!

Life is calm when on the path
That does not ever encounter wrath
But hark, the path of life's rough hewn
At points it needs some anger strewn

Envy has its many causes
Wealth and luck and birth are sources
It can eat away your soul
But also drive you to your goal

The human, when swelled with pride,
Can often presage collapsicide.
Take pride in what you have achieved
Pride of self leaves one deceived

These sins, that ancient Christian guide,
Are meant to make you good inside.
As humans though we're set to fail
Each generation its own mistakes must nail

But humans have another facet
For goodness that is also tacit.
For every act that's sinful seen
There are two more good for in-between!

ABSENT FRIENDS

Louise stood close to the wall in the small, shaded courtyard. Across the courtyard a group of men were talking quietly to each other. From time to time, one of them would cast a glance in her direction and look quickly away, embarrassed. Louise chose to look through, rather than at, them.

The tall man, who Louise had christened in her mind “The Major”, left the group and came towards Louise. As he reached her, he took a cigarette case from his pocket and offered her one. Louise took one and bent her head to the lighter he held out.

She was slightly amused to notice that while her hand was completely steady, his was trembling slightly.

“You know, Louise, all this could easily have been avoided if you'd been a little more co-operative. All I wanted was to know a little about your friends. Was that so impossible for you to do?”



Louise smiled. “I cannot tell you anything about them, because I do not know.” This was only partly true. Louise had received a postcard from Isobel and Thomas. The picture was of the Eiger, but there was no writing on it, just a pair of small, smiling faces, one with pigtails and one wearing a cap. She believed that Catherine had gone on a walking holiday in Brittany where she had an aunt who ran a farm, who she planned to visit. Louise did not know where the farm was.

David and Helen had just gone off one day, but Louise knew they had taken their sailing gear and were heading for the south of the country. She felt sure that they would be sailing to somewhere . . . well, interesting.

However, she did not know where any of her friends were exactly, so she couldn't tell “The Major” even if she'd wanted to.

He looked genuinely sorrowful.

“If circumstances had been different, my dear Louise, I think we could have been friends, perhaps more than friends.” He ran a finger along her arm, to her broken and bloody fingers at the end. And now, Louise did shiver.

“No, we could never be friends. I have a greater regard for my friends than you seem to think I should have. I could never let them down.”

“You are wrong, my dear. I have great respect for your loyalty to your absent friends, but I have a job to do and my personal feelings don't come in to it. Well, if you are still of the same mind, shall we get on?” He ground the stub of his cigarette out with his heel. Louise threw hers to the floor, half smoked.

He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and made to tie it round Louise's head, but she shook it in refusal. He shrugged and turned away, walking to join the other men. They had now formed a line facing Louise.

She straightened her shoulders and whispered to herself the names of her absent friends. *Isobel, Catherine, Helen, Thomas, David*. She prayed they were safe and that her sacrifice was not to be in vain.

“The Major” looked into her eyes as he brought his hand down and ordered “FIRE!”

© *Jacqueline Barker*



ABSENT ONES (3)

Happy times oft spent
We two in gentle pleasure.
Memories remain.

© *June Hawkins*

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



She was mowing the lawn when she first saw it. Black and shiny, small and torpedo-shaped; here was the proof she needed. The hedgehog had returned at last. It was early July; the evenings were long and warm. Her feeding programme could begin.

The tin of cat food – chicken and rabbit – was taken out of the cupboard, opened and diced. Two or three pieces were placed in an ashtray-sized dish, the rest put into a polythene bag ready for the

freezer. At 9.50 pm she put the tasty morsels outside on the patio, quite near the birds' bathing/drinking tray. She went inside, seating herself close to a large window, the dish in full view, and waited for the night to darken.

Nothing happened for twenty-five minutes. Then the flowers under the window shivered a little from one end to the other. A low, rounded shape crept out and wandered haphazardly across the paving, a just-visible pointy snout leading the way. He or she was small for an adult hedgehog, but probably not a young one from this year's brood. It reached the dish and lowering itself stayed nearly still, slight jiggles just discernible from its front. It was obviously eating. A good minute passed. She watched.

Silently from the left another movement diverted her eyes. A sleek black cat walked onto the patio. It saw the hedgehog and froze. The cat dropped, belly close to the ground. One paw at a time, it slunk towards the hedgehog. The hedgehog kept on eating, apparently unaware of the cat. The cat gently raised its body and slowly, hesitantly, moved towards the occupied eater. The cat reached the dish, lowered its body again and, head down, began to eat.

The dish was small. Two heads, all but touching, were sharing the food. It remained like this for perhaps half a minute. Next, the hedgehog moved back and sideways, took a quick drink from the birds' water tray and shuffled away under some phormiums, becoming invisible in the moonless night.

The cat remained by the dish, making it rattle as any last remnants of food were licked clean. Satisfied nothing was left, it walked calmly and nonchalantly along the path at the back of her house.

She continues to put soft bits of cat or dog food out in the little dish most nights. Every morning it has gone. She wonders who or what is eating it and if her two visitors have ever met again.

© *Ruth Westley*



A BRIEF ENCOUNTER!

The garden was quiet. There was no wind or outside noise to disturb the activity within.

A sleek black cat leapt silently onto the wooden fence and poised, his body low, his ears flattened. His eyes were fixed on the lone brown dunnock pecking fussily under the bird table. A grey and white cat crept slowly through the undergrowth and settled himself beside the pond. Watching from a safe distance on a lily leaf was a frog, his prominent eyes focussed on the cat.

Choosing his moment the black cat shot from his perch on the fence towards the dunnock. Nearby bushes provided a sanctuary and the dunnock escaped. Undaunted, the black cat turned away and sauntered off. The vigilant grey and white cat beside the pond remained motionless except for the white tip of his tail which flicked continuously amongst the greenery. The frog looked on!

Seeking out some other object for his attention, the black cat spied the white tip of the flicking tail. The movement interested him, quickened his thoughts, stiffened his back and spiked his short fur. He crept towards the flicking tail and pounced! The grey and white cat, his eyes well-tuned to movement, turned to face him. There they stood, three feet apart, face to face, bristling body to bristling body, their heads half turned with eyes trained on each other. Neither moved, no sound was heard, just hostility at its strongest. It was a meeting like no other.

Who moved first it is impossible to decide, but move they both did, towards each other; rapidly, fiercely and accompanied by bloodcurdling yowls and cries! Claws scratched at fur, teeth barred ready to attack. Bodily strength bowled each of them over into the mud, each scrambled to their feet only to repeat the action again.

In the quietness of the garden this sensation caused a stir. The dunnock returned hastily to the nearby bushes, the frog dived under the lily leaf and a border collie, resting beside the open door sprang to his feet. With lightning speed he charged towards the fighting cats. Such excitement was rare and he meant to enjoy the moment.

Both cats, absorbed in their conflict, were not aware of this bounding intruder until his black and white markings distracted them. They separated without ceremony and dashed for the safety of the adjoining gardens. The border collie, well pleased with his quick action, returned to his resting place, one eye open for any other exciting opportunity.

The dunnock resumed his feeding - ever watchful for invading cats. The frog climbed back onto the lily leaf and continued to wait patiently for food to float by. The black cat and the grey and white cat each returned to their warm, welcoming homes. They gave their ruffled coats a good wash and noted comfortingly that, for that day, their honour had been upheld!

The garden was quiet again.

© *Anne Tester*

A CHRISTMAS SKETCH

Scene:

A typical lounge with the detritus of Christmas scattered around the room. Father Christmas (FC) is lying prostrate in a large armchair. The Vicar (V) and Maurice, the funeral director (MFD) stand, looking down at him.

MFD Right! Now you're here, Vicar, you can help me measure him up for his coffin.

V *Er, er. I'm not sure that's part of my job description, Maurice.*

MFD Course it is, Vic! You're the one who does the hatching, matching and dispatching, aren't you?

V *I... I... suppose so, but I only came to offer some comfort and support to Mrs Christmas.*

MFD She's the one who sent for us, was she?

V *Well, yes. She said he always gets drunk after Christmas but this time she couldn't wake him up, so she assumed he must have passed away.*

MFD A blessed relief I should think, considering the state he gets into every Christmas. Goodness knows who'll do the job now he's gone.

V *I see, I see! So there'll be a vacancy to be filled will there? Don't YOU fancy applying for it Maurice?*

MFD Well, I reckon I could do a better job than him. Last year he gave my sixteen year old son a Barbie doll, my six month old granddaughter a copy of War and Peace, my ninety year old bedridden granny a skate board, and I got a voucher for a complete makeover including nail painting, hair restyling and a full facial. My missus nearly died laughing 'til she realised

that she'd got a beard trimmer! Now, grab hold of the other end of this tape measure and let's get the job done.

V *It ... it ... doesn't seem quite right when the old fellow is still warm.*

MFD Makes it easier before rigor mortis sets in. Right, Vic! Top to toe he's what, about a hundred and seventy?

V *A hundred and s..s..seventy what Maurice? I thought he was about six feet tall.*

MFD Stop chuntering and help me measure him round the middle.

(Maurice fumbles around Father Christmas's waist. Father Christmas suddenly sits bolt upright. Maurice and the Vicar leap back in shock.)

FC What the red-nosed reindeer do you two think you're doing? Can't a fellow get some shut eye in peace?

V *We ... we thought ... er ... er ... we ... we ... thought ... you were ...*

FC Don't care what you thought! Keep your hands off me and keep your thoughts to yourselves. Now clear off, the pair of you, and let a chap get some rest. Oh, and on your way out tell Mrs Christmas to bring me a cup of tea and a bacon sarnie. Cheerio!

© Shirley Wilding



DREAM PLAY

Did I just dream that?
I'm not really sure.
I was standing on the stage,
Hovering by a door.

I was waiting for my cue line,
I never heard it, though.
A strong hand pushed me on,
My signal then to go.

The leading lady stood quite still,
She coloured bright vermillion.
We froze for a few seconds;
It felt like just like a million.

She started singing in Italian,
The song went on forever.
I stood there, my mouth open,
Theatrically not clever.

I realized that this was wrong,
I didn't know this play.
Looking around for my exit,
To quickly slink away.

Slowly waking from my nightmare,
Not sure of anything,
With a mind full of confusion,
My ears began to ring.

The phone was ringing off the hook,
Demanding my attention,
The stage that I'd just been on,
Was in the fifth dimension!

© Chad Barnsley

CHOICE

In my early years, choices were made for me and that brought security. I look back on my own good and not so good choices that I made, and can hear that parental voice saying, “I told you so!” That purchase, that chance encounter, that friendship. Why are parents so often right? The rotten thing about wrong choices is that they often have long-term consequences. Why didn’t I think before I did what I did? Oh, poor me! Still, what did someone say – “You don’t learn without making mistakes.” Choice is part of life. Each day brings its choices, and I have to make a choice. So when Mikki asked for this month’s choice, I said, “Choice, or choices?”

Thursday, 7 May – the polling day for the General Election of a new government was looming large, and I felt this is a choice-making time, and my choice can make a difference.

Over these past months our nation has been engulfed with a plethora of words, a kaleidoscope of colours and an abundance of performances from different personalities – the aim being to influence how I will vote. Characters have challenged and argued to assault our senses and emotions. We have, by media, been transported into the party leaders’ homes, we have seen what they have had for breakfast and see how they live as a family. This has all been to colour our choice on 7 May.

I went and made my choice on polling day. I placed my cross and left. Well, so what? My vote went into the count at the end of the day and that was all I could do. It wasn’t a case of, “Did I make the right choice?” It was the freedom of making the choice and the next five years will see whether it was good or bad.

© *Richard King*

FLEXIBLE HAIKU

green willow withies

stripped, soaked, steamed, woven into
objects of desire

grasses gracefully

undulate as zephyrs pass
return to normal

wise, lissom yogi

folds lithe legs in the 'lotus'
hums and meditates

acrobat arching

spine curving backwards, places
feet beside face

sinuous serpent's

scaly, muscular squeezing
steals breath, then life

feline falling twists

miraculously mid-air
lands feet first – faultless

© *Jacqueline Barker*

TWO CHINA CUPS AND TWO CHINA SAUCERS

I have always liked to drink my tea out of a china cup and matching saucer. Not for me the large, thick mugs that the young seem to find so attractive. Even more depressing for me are the plastic or paper cups that are thrust at you in cafés and the like.

I blame my mum for my love of china cups. She was a collector and many a Saturday afternoon during my childhood she and I would roam the Leicester or Loughborough markets in search of these prized possessions that she so loved. If she found one with delicate flowers painted on the inside of a cup a slow smile would spread across her face and, after examining the item for any chips or cracks or indeed any faults, she would carefully count out her hard-earned money, hand it to the market stall holder and gently place her purchase into a special cloth bag that went with her every Saturday afternoon.

Of course, mum would say, there is china and there is china. Some china she told me stains and is therefore inferior to the white, delicate china that adorned the glass cabinet which my father made just for her to display her wares.

Today, over 60 years later, I now have two of my mum's beloved china cups and saucers in my cabinet. I must have been about 7 or 8 years old when she found them on a stall in Leicester Market. One is tan coloured and the other is black. Each has two roses painted on the inside of the cup with a matching saucer. I also remember how much she paid for them – 15/- (shillings) for the pair. At the time I thought this very extravagant and I suppose that's why I remember the price.

To my knowledge my mum never used them and now, of course, I am afraid to in case I drop one or, because of their age, they crack and break. From time to time I do wash them gently and just to hold them brings back many happy memories of a time when life seemed to be so simple. Catching the bus into Leicester with mum on a Saturday afternoon from our village was a real treat. We usually ended up at one of the teashops having tea and cakes before catching the bus home with our spoils.

These are the memories that holding two china cups and saucers evoke in me. Now, as the years have passed by, I think it's time to part with them and I shall give them to my daughter for safekeeping.

© *Elaine Calvert*

THOUGHTS ON THE PLEASURES OF RETIREMENT

Retirement brings a plethora of pleasure
As I choose how to spend my new found leisure.
Time is no longer so important a measure
These are the days we must carefully treasure.

I can get up at twelve and retire at two
That's not to say that I actually do!
But I could if I really wanted to
And who'd be the wiser, me or you?

I can read all day if my book is appealing,
Cook a new dish if it's hungry I'm feeling,
Watch films on TV till my senses are reeling,
Or just sit in my chair and gaze at the ceiling.

But there are places to visit, new towns to explore.
Castles, museums and so much more,
Watching the birds as they skyward soar.
There's really no time to find life a bore.

There are uplifting walks in our green countryside
Made even better with a friend at my side.
A map in my hand to act as a guide
And the sky up above so vast and so wide.

There's so much in the country I love to admire
Though the miles get longer and the hills get higher.
So when my legs eventually start to tire
I'll go home, put my feet up and sit by the fire.

I know my old bones are beginning to creak
And my stamina sometimes gets quite weak
More leisurely pastimes I'll soon have to seek
When the weather is windy and cold and bleak.

But life is for living and, as I've heard said,
Age is only a number in everyone's head!
So I'll go round the town till I'm nearly dead
And brighten my wardrobe with something in – purple!

© Shirley Wilding

If you have enjoyed our booklet as
one of the 'pleasures of YOUR
retirement', perhaps you might like to
join us?

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



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

Presented with renewal of annual Countesthorpe U3A
membership, with the compliments of the Committee
April/May 2016

All contributions remain the copyright of the authors.
Editing and layout by June Hawkins