



Togetherness Poetry Challenge

Digital Anthology

2024





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1. The Togetherness Poetry Challenge

The Togetherness Poetry Challenge was created to foster connection and unity within and between communities, combating isolation and the divisive rhetoric that holds us back as individuals and as a society. With conflict, climate change, and loneliness affecting lives globally, we believe creativity and solidarity are more important than ever.

Launched in March 2024 by Civil Society Consulting, this annual national poetry challenge invited people across the UK to write poems on the theme of togetherness. The response was overwhelming: over 400 poems poured in from people of all ages and backgrounds, including those in prison, individuals experiencing chronic loneliness, healthcare workers, teachers, and others from diverse cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Why poetry?

Poetry is a unique and powerful way to process emotions, connect people from different walks of life, and express the universal need for community. For many, writing is therapeutic, offering a way to release pain and reflect on shared human experiences. The poems we received highlight the transformative role creativity plays in building bridges and fostering understanding.

Through this challenge, we've witnessed the profound ability of poetry to inspire connection, empathy, and hope.



2. About 32 Steps to Togetherness

Civil Society Consulting CIC (CSC) is a UK-based non-profit with strong connections in the North East, North West, East of England, and London, where we are based. Our mission is to promote health, equality and social cohesion. We believe that restoring a sense of community and developing communities is the key, and therefore that the voluntary community sector (VCS) is key! We aim to strengthen the VCS sector by being a reliable source of excellent support for VCS organisations, which is either affordable (to medium-sized and larger organisations) or free (to small, grassroots organisations led by and for marginalised communities).

Over the past two years, we have been rolling out 32 Steps to Togetherness, a civil society movement based on a manual of practical actions that we can all take to build connections within and between communities, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. The 32 Steps manual provides practical suggestions for how we, as individuals and community leaders, can build connections, setting out ideas for how to change our thinking habits, foster community connections, encourage workplace inclusivity, and recognise the political nature of building diverse social networks.

As part of our project, we have provided free support to grassroots organisations, delivered loneliness reduction training, offered free leadership development coaching to women leaders, organised events to foster a shared understanding on why togetherness matters and supported grassroots organisations and other community leaders to use 32 Steps to Togetherness in their work.

This poetry challenge is part of our 32 Steps to Togetherness initiative. By encouraging creativity and dialogue, this challenge raises awareness and combats intolerance, racism, and faith-based discrimination, helping to build a more inclusive society.



3. Meet our volunteer coordinator & the judging panel

The Togetherness Poetry Challenge was coordinated by our wonderful volunteer **Brad Young**, a retired educator, passionate radio broadcaster and community podcaster with a diverse professional background, sharing his expertise through music programs, podcasts and training

We had an extensive panel of professional and community-oriented female poets acting as our judging panel.



Pascale Petit

Pascale was born in Paris, grew up in France and Wales and lives in Cornwall. She is of French, Welsh and Indian heritage. Her eighth collection, *Tiger Girl*, from Bloodaxe in 2020, was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Collection, and for Wales Book of the Year. A poem from the book won the Keats-Shelley Poetry Prize. Her seventh poetry collection *Mama Amazonica*, published by Bloodaxe in 2017, won the inaugural Laurel Prize in 2020, won the RSL Ondaatje Prize in 2018, was shortlisted for the Roehampton Poetry Prize, and was a Poetry Book Society Choice.



Shasta Hanif Ali

Shasta is a writer and poet. Her writing delicately navigates the legacy of empire, race and heritage. Shasta was nominated and honoured in a mural as one of Edinburgh's 100 trailblazing women in 2022.

Shasta's writing has been published in the Scottish BPOC Writers Network, STV Scotland and *Our Time Is A Garden Anthology* (IASH), among others. Shasta has performed her poetry at Push The Boat Out Edinburgh, Fringe of Colour Scotland; as well as writing and performing her poetry for a collaborative play at the Edinburgh Lyceum.



Elizabeth Cook

Elizabeth Cook is a poet, fiction writer, and librettist, interested in the ways in which the past is continually being re-fashioned and re-known. She lives in East London, and practises as a Christian, drawn to Franciscanism. *Achilles* (Methuen 2001) moves from the Homeric Bronze Age to Keats in the nineteenth century while *Lux* (Scribe, 2019) takes a story from the Hebrew Scriptures through to the English Tudors. She has collaborated with composers and was librettist for Francis Grier's oratorio, *The Passion of Jesus of Nazareth* (Radio 3, 2006).



Aminah Rahman

Aminah is an award-winning poet and spoken word artist, born and raised in Cambridge. She has loved writing and performing on stage from a young age. Aminah has performed at many events.

Aminah performed at the BBC Make a Difference awards ceremony in 2023. She also performed at the England and Wales Cricket Board's (ECB) first-ever Iftar at Lord's Cricket Ground in 2022. Aminah was commissioned by BBC Asian Network to write and perform a poem celebrating 50 years of Bangladesh independence. She has also worked with the official International Women's Day team. Aminah represented Cambridgeshire at the BBC Upload Festival 2020, a festival showcasing talent from across England and the Channel Islands. Aminah won the Young Muslim Writers Awards Key Stage 2 Poetry category in 2015. In 2017, Aminah was the joint-winner of the Cambridge News and Media Education Awards: Pupil of the Year.

4. Our partnership with Hidden Literature

Founded by Ovyuki, author, poet, photographer, host, and music producer, Hidden Literature is a sanctuary for poetry enthusiasts and newcomers alike. Hidden Literature hosts vibrant monthly open mic events in East London in partnership with the National Trust and Grow, Hackney, and also offers workshops, corporate events, poetry commissions, and a monthly book club.

For our 2024 Togetherness Poetry Challenge, we partnered with Hidden Literature to deliver a poetry workshop in July and a final celebratory event in November.

“Language connects us to one another and poetry can make that connection even closer: the language of poetry draws on the rhythms and movements of our breath and bodies. It has a pulse, like our hearts. Even when the language that a poem is written in is unknown to us we are affected by the sound of it, the feel of it, its rhythm: we experience it in a bodily way before our minds begin to think about what the words mean. Whatever our religion, ethnicity, social status, or gender our bodies all work in the same way. Our heart beats and our lungs breathe in and out.”

– Elizabeth Cook



5. The short-listed poets of the 2024 Togetherness Poetry Challenge

Alison Milner 1st winner

Alison Milner lives on a steep wooded hillside at the edge of the Pennines in West Yorkshire. This moorland scenery, where horizons wave like a vast inland sea, provides the canvas for much of her poetry and prose.

Alison likes to explore internal landscapes through her writing. She is interested in the stories we tell to others and to ourselves, the narratives people create to better understand their lives. She is inspired by the power that words, written or spoken, can have to connect people together, to braid diverse experiences, to weave collaboration and respect.

Some of her writing has previously been published in four literary magazines and three anthologies.



“Migration”

She doesn't know the word for goose
me in a hoodie, her in a hijab
beside a canal clad in winter

Big duck
she says smiling
accepting the crust I offer

Her hands cold
quietly mobile
like fish in shimmering water

Casting crumbs
across the towpath
we laugh at the frenetic feeding

Birds honking
hissing, cackling
a crescendo of noise, of survival.

Goose, I say
my finger points.
Geese, my arm arches a bridge.

Yes, in my homeland, geese
I saw, before the war
Just luck she says, frowning

where the bread falls
where the bomb falls
who the shrapnel shatters.

She didn't know the word for goose
but she knew how to pluck pleasure
and meaning from a moment.

Aisha Mohamud

Aisha is Somali, and migrated to the UK when she was 5 years old. As she recently began a journey of processing and healing trauma, she started looking for a creative outlet to help, which is when she found poetry. While struggling to come to terms with her identity, she wrote the poem "Dissonance and Harmony" and entered the Togetherness challenge in hopes that someone like her would be able to relate to her poem and feel seen.



“Dissonance and Harmony”

I feel London in my soul
 And Somalia in my spirit
 But both don't claim me
 And so I feel forever unaccepted
 I ask myself who I am and from where I've come
 Because I don't have firm roots to where I belong
 They say "home is where the heart is"
 But my heart, like a child, longs to be wanted
 And it's neither here nor there no matter the citizenship I've been granted
 I am not British because I am not white
 And I am not Somali because I did not stay
 Because I do not speak fluently
 When I stumble the Habaryars* snicker and ask my mother
 "Does she not know how to speak her tongue"
 And I smile tightly even when I feel stung
 Because truly it does ring a chord
 At times I feel like a mismatched bowl made from different clay
 Various shades and colours in its fray
 The lilt and speak of a Brit
 Shouting "Hooyo"* at home because I am still Somali
 I suppose I've found the answer to who I am as I write
 I am Aisha and I have lived
 I am who I choose to be, not just a country of origin or a simple adjective
 So you may not accept me neither here nor there
 But I know who I am
 And so I forgive you without a care

Steve Lott

Steve has been a teacher for 30 years. He is married to Jen, and has three children. Steve has always been interested in writing. He has been writing poetry on and off, all of his adult life. His poetry stems from personal and everyday experiences, what he's read in a paper, an overheard conversation - that he then embellishes, his family's situations, or simply how he's feeling. The poem entered for this project stemmed from a chance situation.

“Community expression session”

We came together and threw vocabulary into the pot.
Ideas simmered and bubbled in this gumbo.
A fusion created by cultures from all compass points of the globe:

Sometimes crisp and fresh,
Sometimes soothing and cool.
Sometimes piquant and tripping from tongues on fire.
For a fleeting hour or two,
we were more united than nations.
Abraham would have enjoyed this trinity,
Jew, Christian and Muslim sitting as sister and brother.

It did not seem queer to me - or anyone - that LGBT,
plus friends, came to speak and write their truths.
There is a crock of gold at the end of this rainbow:

When we walked in, we were strangers,
disparate and disconnected as garlic and honey.
But in the pot, everything marinated -
emerging seasoned citizens of the world!



Mina Jaff

“The day after the far-right demo that never was”

the day after:
the streets opened up,
and the barricades tore down,
and it rained,
and rained like a purging.
I came out of the shop holding:
fresh dill, coriander,
spices, and a crate of tomatoes.
A kind woman walked me to my car,
under her umbrella,
said she was worried I'd get wet.
I asked her how she was,
she said you know and shrugged.
I went and saw my family
my dad made:
lentils, fresh baclava,
rice with split peas.
he made me watch how he made it;
said it was with love, all proud.
I arrived all wet
and it rained
and rained like a purging,
and in the morning
there was sun.





Gang Pan

Gang Pan was born in China, as the Miao nationality from Guizhou Province. He got a MPA from the University of Birmingham and lived in Birmingham for around 3 years. He is a new poet and started both writing Chinese and English poetry this year. He would like to write poems to fill the emptiness and needs of the soul, and he hopes to use poems as weapons against the unseen darkness. So he joined the 2024 Togetherness Poetry Challenge aimed at using poetry to notice the meaning of togetherness and impact the sense of human beings.

“Please Let’s Plant A Pomegranate Shrub For Us”

The dove brought a pomegranate seed to the earth,
 Irregular and tiny, like a life of diversity. We cared
 And planted it amongst us, the field of respect and love.
 Watering it with our passion and patience, and waiting
 For its growth and glory. We sat around this seed
 And whispered to each, about the life of the future
 As if the seed bursts out of the shell, and the earth
 Is shaken by our presence and perseverance. A sapling
 Growing up with siblings like us—close family members.
 The pests once got involved in our lives and left behind
 The trace of hurt on our sapling. But we, working together
 To make them disappear and save our health. And we
 Hold the scale of law and add more strength of balance
 To make sapling away from darkness. To be a shrub in the sun,
 Large and lush in our backyard, we are in its shadow or shelter
 Talking about politics and inviting the dove of peace to return.
 And let bees express our feelings to blossoms, bright & bold.
 And we shared the first mature pomegranate and handed
 Sweet, reddish & heart-shaped seeds to the generations.
 Replanted them in the earth. Many pomegranate shrubs
 Stretch from our ashes and yield more pomegranates, which
 gather our souls in each; we have the enthusiasm of seeds
 Embraced together in the body and scattered all around the globe.

Olga Dermott-Bond

Olga is originally from Northern Ireland, and lives in Warwickshire where she works as a Secondary school teacher. She has published two pamphlets: *apple, fallen* (Against the Grain Press, 2020) and *A Sky full of strange specimens* (Nine Arches Press, 2021). Her first full collection *Frieze*, published by Nine Arches Press, was recently featured in *The Guardian*. She has won competitions including the BBC Proms poetry competition, Welshpool and Poetry on Loan poetry competitions. She is currently a managing editor for Irish poetry journal *Dodging the Rain*. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and poet in residence for the Coffin Works Museum in Birmingham.



“On falling in love with the World of Washing Facebook group”

Yes, I have fallen in love with these women, who take delight
 in the curve of a washing line, who tell me about their peg bag

made from an old pair of jeans. There are doll’s clothes drying
 in a corner of Finland, and baby shawls in Massachusetts.

Martje in Belgium sends a blessing: I wish you joy, satisfaction
 and little sadness. Rita posts a painting, and somewhere in Poland

quilts that must smell like sage dry between high trees.
 Velvet in Nairobi shares vintage pegs she found in a thrift store,

their naked bodies plain saints ready to carve the day’s sunshine
 into fresh pillow slips. Yes, it is the humdrum, the every day,

the fall of time measured in damp linen and white shirts, a devotion
 of odd socks and long gardens and cramped bathrooms photos

of their own mothers, grandmothers bleached in time, old teddies
 hung up by the ears, bed sheets caught in sunsets that billows

into a wedding dress. Yes, I have fallen in love with these women
 who delight in pressing a still-warm towel to their face, breathing

in its smell, burying a day’s disappointment in reliable folds.
 Even now, Leigh in Wales shows steam rising from her frocks
 after an unexpected thunderstorm.

6. The poetry challenge in UK prisons

Errol McGlashan, Brixton-based spoken word artist, promoted the Togetherness Poetry Challenge to those currently in prison, as well as to those experiencing homelessness, through his "roadshow" about friendship and compassion. He gathered over 30 poems from men across different prisons in Scotland.

Name:

Vangeline

Title

Shared Room

Within these walls, a garden grows,
Where seeds of hope, each member sows.
Though storms may rage, and darkness looms,
We find our strength, in this shared room!
No longer shadows, lost and lone,
We gather here, our spirits known.
Each voice a story, bravely told,
Of battles fought and victories bold.

We are here, as a gentle guide,
a steadfast friend with empathy embrace,
we understand, the fragile steps,
Of healing hand!

For in connection, strength takes root,
We learn to trust and learn to share,
Binding, lifted by tender care!
Let us build with promise strong,
A community where we belong,
Form a circle, hand in hand,
we rise together, heal and grand.

Name:

J.K. @ The Castle

Title

Stop The World!..... I Want To Get Off.....

Isolation! Desolation!.....Living in my own head,
The more I crawl inside myself, I wish that I was dead!
Hitting rock bottom, coming down with a crash,
Dark thoughts, long sleepless nights,
I have an end in sight!

Looking deep inside I find some fight,
Give myself, one last chance, the chance to get it right!
Holding out my hand, I find someone,....
One who understands!
Sitting on bandaged knees, feeling lost sometimes,
I can see the light at the end of the tunnel,
Clearing the wreckage of the past,
I know the pain won't last!
Living a sober life..... it's mine to throw away,
I can do this!.....one day at a time.....
But only if I stay!

Name:

W. Greer

Long cloudy days and longer dark nights
 How did I get it all so wrong do nothing right
 I just never imagined no couldn't see
 That you would have to leave and not be with me

There I was alone in darkness and fears
 Living my living nightmare while recalling good years
 My sweetness, my darling, my one true love
 You left me like a light going out, flew away like
 a dove

But now here you are back where ~~you belong~~ ^{should be}
 Together happy again for the whole world to see
 So thank you darling for your forgiveness your love
 And forever give thanks to the good Lord above

W. GREER
 92446 FORTH A
 ADDIEWELL

Name:

W. Greer

Let me make amends to all, one way or another
 Let me be that nice guy, good mate, son, brother
 Let me clear away the wreckage of my past
 Let me prove to you the last time was the last

I used to be the funny one, happy, joyful one
 Now I live eternally sorry for doing what I've done
 To make amends for this mess, try to fix this hurt
 And let you grow in happy times a life to uncover

Maybe one day our neighbours will see,
 The new me, helpful me, how loving I'm trying to be,
 Mending the hearts will mend and the pain will end,
 And finally all will be free to feel the love I send

W. GREER
 92446 FORTH A
 ADDIEWELL

Name:

W. Greer

As a community oh, why cant they see,
 I've done my time, now i'm free,
 Looking for a job they didn't want to know,
 Won't give me the chance to let me show.

My dysfunctional family there's all left me
 No calls, no messages, no good to be,
 But I know my crime's, what I did wrong,
 Thought they'd welcome me back where I belong.

Now I'm left so lonely, so alone at night,
 How can I say I'm sorry, and do what is right,
 I will keep on trying, desperate to ~~make~~ amends
 To all my ex family, ex wife, kids, ex friends

W. GREER
 92446 FORTH A
 ADJIEWELL

Name:

Vincent Sleep

Title

Seeing the Light

163810
 Vincent Sleep.

SEEING THE LIGHT

When you see the light don't cower and hide.
 Hasten faster toward's it like a fast flowing tide.
 You have heard disappointing stories of people before.
 Who don't conquer the light , instead they end up
 washed ashore .
 So gather your thought 's and straighten your head,
 Follow the light press on ahead.
 When you go through it, it is supposedly said you will
 have reached heaven.
 As you won't be back and I can,t get in your head.
 I will have to see what's beyond the light of life when
 my spirit has fled .

VINCENT SLEEP

Name:

Vincent Sleep

Title

Addiction163810
Vincent Sleep?**ADDICTION**

I have an addiction, that happens to be myself.

It is the strongest addiction in the world, and I have had it bad.

But now that I have put my selfishness, and lies to one side,

I can once more walk upright and proud, with a spring in my stride.

No more cowering, and hiding, and living a lie, it feels good again to be able to look people in the eye.

You needn't listen to what I have said, but now I go home to a warm, comfy bed.

I would rather this than the path I was on before, because if I kept going I would not be here anymore.

Vincent
Sleep

Name:

Vincent SleepVincent
Sleep.
(FC-12)
163810.

Jail was a place i never knew ,and thought i never would.

But when the day came for it to be my turn ,the last thing on my mind was how much that i would learn .

When your a petty career criminal i have heard it said that the crime they commit ,is to get back to a warm safe bed.

Others say its to get away from the bird or the wife ,but this is not true nor is it real life,maybe the brave face they put on Fools their friends,how many of them will agree when the relationship ends.

All the big men ,even the next day will blame it on the fact they didn't get away.

None not even one of these that i call revolving door men try hard enough not to come back again .

but for me surely once will be enough, now i am past the first week the one i found tough.

There are classes education and even a job,for now i see clearly it can be said,that the old world outside to me is now dead.

I don't blame any woman burd or a wife ,because i had to be here to reprogram my life.

The things i couldn't admit outside because of this stupid thing men call pride,and looking a fool with nowhere to hide ,was the cause of the violence hat put me inside.

When dub up comes its time to be honest not caring about what is thought or said ,youhave to admit your old life is dead.

Vinnie

Name:

James Dunlop

Title

A new family

Wakin' up in a dark scary place,
Aw alone roon folk ah diny know,
Taken away fae ma freens n' family,
Nae idea when ah will see them again,
Noo am aw alone in this dark terrible place,

It must be mornin', the steel door opens,
Wae a man in uniform, tellin me am open,
Ah look outside, blinded wae the light,
The darkness gone until tonight,
Ah walk oot the door intae lots o' folk,

Full o' folk ah diny even know,
Prison oh my, it's a scary place,
Yin guy says hi, knowin' ah wis new,
He says no tae worry, nae yin will touch yae,
Everyin' here has been there once before yae,

Next am meetin' lots o' new folk,
All ages, all wae stories,
Tips an advice on hoo tae survive,
There is a few that become guid freens,
Like ah knew in another life,

Sae tight their like a family inside,
Ah never knew them outside,
But noo are part o' ma life,
Time flies by an next ma sentence is done,
Soon ah will be back oot there fightin', tae survive,

Ah will be back wae ma real family,
It winy be as hard as comin' in here,
Jist fin ma feet again an rebuild ma life,
When ma freens get oot ah will see them again,
Or mibbe visit them in here, be a visitor,

Ah cany wait tae ah see ma folks,
It's been sae long, ah feel like a stranger,
Ma home feels like ah've been dreamin'
Jist ah hae tae be careful,
Ah diny want tae end up back in prison,

It wisny as hard as ah first thought,
Bit it's no the place,
Ah want tae live ma life,
Even if it wis way ma new freens,
That were ma new family,

Ah will hod them aw dear,
We aw came tae-gether,
Then formed a connection,
An created a new community,
We were a family in prison, but noo it's time tae start again!

A poem by J. Dunlop

161154
James Dunlop.

Name:

James Dunlop

Title

A free spirit

A bird of prey,
Much like me,
Much like you,
Soaring high in the sky,
Free as an eagle,
Come together with another,
Once in a while,
To see each other,
Speak to one another,
Maybe enjoy some time together,
Watch a movie or TV,
Drink some wine,
Enjoy a meal,
A kiss or a cuddle,
A joke and a laugh at each other,
Or just have a blether,
It's nice to be together,
But there comes a time,
We need to be free,
Like an eagle,
High up in the sky,
Soaring, gliding, diving,
Down and back up again,
Watching from afar,
Observing all and what's around us,
Be apart for a while,
Get some space,
Enjoy some isolation,
Think about our life,
And where it's headed,
Time to miss one another,
That time we were together,
Will be remembered forever,

I won't be changed,
I won't be controlled,
I won't be demanded or forced,
I'll decide where my life goes,
I want to be around you,
Just respect my space,
Or you will find,
I'll be free once again,
Up in the sky,
Flying high,
Soaring, free as an eagle,
A bird of prey,
My life will be,
A free spirit,
Once again,
That's who I am,
That's me,
I like to be free,
As a free spirit,
Would Be!

A poem by J. Dunlop

161154
James Dunlop.

Name:

James Dunlop

Title

Today

Today... I feel like an alien,
There's no one like me in this world,
People bully me because I'm different,
I feel very alone in this place,

Today... I felt alone, a freak of nature,
I was in the men's changing rooms,
My body is different to everyone's,
I can't explain why, I have no idea why,

Today... I feel like an alien once more,
I know I am different, I need to know why,
I booked in to see my doctor,
Till then, I will just carry on as I have,

Today... I was diagnosed with a genetic disorder,
I was born with Klinefelters Syndrome,
So I am different, at least now I know why,
All of the questions I had, have just been answered,

Today... I was introduced to others with KS,
Every single one has felt alone or an alien before,
We talk, we feel connected somehow, we all help each other forward,
Today is the first day of my life, I'm not alone anymore,

Today... becomes tomorrow, the next and day after,
I learn more about KS and find out we have an extra X chromosome,
Which makes us different, we call ourselves X-men,
We are human, we may be different, we are unique,


Today... for the first time ever,
I feel like someone, a part of, together, with other people,
And there's thousands of us just like me,
All over the world there's X-men,
Their just like me! Finally I feel like someone!!

*A poem by J. Dunlop*161154
James Dunlop

Name:

James O'Callaghan

Title

Broken man*Broken Man.*


*Thou taken from thee closest that was known. And still, light that shine so bright,
Lest in isolation to dwell all alone. As darkness comes in the night,
Longing for that which was lost in a moment. Hopeless, but not lost as light shines thru,
Living locked in a cold room of torment. Remembering hardships don't break thee so remain true,
No connection to what was once home. Following the path that brings us back,
Losing one's life beating broken and worn. Remaining content on that long life track,
We knew what was once held close. Although long and tough and always unknown,
We'd fall like that petal of a rose. Filled with desire to better thee and make it on thee own,
Fallen to darkness lifeless and drained. So alone is time to reflect and make what's best,
All that was held close and left in vain. As a man broken is a man on a quest,
A man broken after much time that had grown. Rebuilding that lost although not gone,
Lest it all in a blink of an eye again all alone. Weeping a tear that man alone.*

By James O'Callaghan HMSP Addiewell.

Name:

William Dunn

Title

Togetherness

Family not always,
Friends again the same.
Community is harder still,
But we try not to wane.

We will say yes,
When we should say no.
But not to offend,
To let our lives flow.

Honesty with ourselves,
A lot less selfishness.
Will help us all fulfil,
Some true togetherness.

36106
William Dunn.

Name:

Leo Elliot Brown

Title

Imagine

Imagine ...
the feel of sunshine
on your face.
the feel of fresh air
on your skin.
the feel of grass
between your toes.

Name:

William Dunn

Title

Togetherness

Family not always,
Friends again the same.
Community is harder still,
But we try not to wane.

We will say yes,
When we should say no.
But not to offend,
To let our lives flow.

Honesty with ourselves,
A lot less selfishness.
Will help us all fulfil,
Some true togetherness.

36106
William Dunn.

Name:

Leo Elliot Brown

Title

Imagine

Imagine ...
the feel of sunshine
on your face.
the feel of fresh air
on your skin.
the feel of grass
between your toes.

Name:

Leo Elliot Brown

Title

Imagine

Imagine...

fresh toast
with runny butter.

a can of Pepsi
straight from the fridge.

a bowl of Fresties
with ice, cold milk.

sinking your teeth
into a gecey chocolate cake.

Macey D's nuggets
dunked in their signature ketchup.

Name:

Cameron Anderson

Title

The online community

Isolation and loneliness yet were surrounded by people,
100 Facebook fiends you don't really know,
Posting the best of you, hiding the real you,
Taking selfies and posting photos that don't look like you.

Going out to real groups meeting people who can see you,
Flesh and skin is better than the binary 101101 people,
Seeing life through your eyes not a phones camera lens,
Instagram, Twitter no-one really cares,
True friends they want to know and support the real you.

In your Neighbourhood you're one of the team,
Kinship and Unity is part of your identity,
It takes a Village to raise a family,
It takes a family to drag a village down.

Name:

Nichloas Briggs

Title

Together

TOGETHER

UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL
 THATS ALL SIMPLE ISNT IT,
 YET HUMANITY IS PUSHING WAY TO THE LIMIT,
 WORLD WAR THREE, LOT OF THE NUKES & WE'RE FINISHED,
 RELIGIOUS CONFLICT YET ALL RELIGIOUS CLAIM VIOLENCE
 IS A SIN RIGHT - HYPOCRITES,
 THE REGULAR PEOPLE JUST WANT PEACE
 WHAT A GIFT LETADPERS COME ON & GIVE IT,
 LETS RAISE OUR CONSCIOUSNESS- LETS LIFT IT,
 REBELS WRITE FOR LOVE FOCUS ON THE HEART
 NOT THE HEAD FLOOD IT & FILL IT,
 IF WE WANT REAL CHANGE & PEACE WE NEED TO PIVOT,
 TOGETHERNESS IS THE HEAL CORE OF HUMAN NATURE
 ITS MORE THAN ASKING TO RAISE OUR SPIRITS,
 SOUNDS SIMPLE WELL IT IS IF WE MEDITATE ON LOVE
 THEN WE'LL FEEL IT,
 IN A WORLD OF WAR, DESTRUCTION & DECAY
 ONLY LOVE & TOGETHERNESS CAN REBUILD IT,
 SPREAD THE WORD ~~CRISTIAN~~ BELIEVES FROM CYNICS,
 BUT WE ALL NEED TO WANT IT & WILL IT,
 TURN EMBARGOS INTO TRADE DEALS & PEACE TREATIES,
 THE WORLDS ABUNDANT YET SOME ELITE ARE GREEDY,
 IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER WE CAN FEED THE NEEDY
 1000 HOLD 90% OF WEALTH THERE ARE FACTS & STATISTICS,
 IF ONLY LEADERS SPENT LESS ON DEFENCE BUDGETS
 TOGETHER WE COULD FEED THE WORLD WITH A BIT OF LOGISTICS,
 WORLD PEACE, LOVE, UNITY & FRIENDSHIPS
 THIS IS MY VISION
 SOUNDS GOOD RIGHT, TO THE WORLD THIS IS MY ^{LOVE} LETTER,
 THIS IS A BLUEPRINT OF MY PERFECT WORLD
 IS THERE ANY DONTING ITS MUCH BETTER,
 BUT IT CAN ONLY WORK WITH A WORLD THATS TOGETHER.

Nichloas Briggs

Name:

Anonymous

Title

The old worn book

THE old worn Book

Sometimes I feel like an old worn
 Book
 with torn and tattered covers
 someone will take me down to
 read
 But just pass me to another
 my pages they will never turn
 so I have will they EVER see
 all the chapters in my life
 thats buried deep in me
 if they dont read my story
 how will they understand
 all the twists & turns in life
 thats made me what I am
 next time you take me out to read
 dont pass me to another
 take time to look inside
 and dont judge me by my cover

Via/Conf/Dios

NO one seems interested no-one has a
 moment just to listen' shan they came
 after 2 month & 25 years in prison im released
 & a rehab no rehabilitation no help Nadda there
 I do all requested & try there but even more
 but my son disappearing had me wandering
 out there brant over
 pesare there horror & shock the surprise
 in theme voice the disgust in theme tone
 I dont need to see faces to face I could
 hear it over the phone
 not once did I act aggressive, talk back
 or even raise my voice or swear
 yet for over 2 weeks stress & worry had
 me back visiting insomnia pulling at my hair
 Greenock Jail chaplain was banned from
 visiting me & service ~~was~~ Allowed to
 attend
 all night long on & off I prayed I went
 with my heart in the end
 I know if I didnt act I would turn
 to drink or drugs I ~~could~~ go round the bend
 straight to my social workers office I

went & inside 2 hours I got told
 my son was alive & breathing
 thats all we can see you scab
 but hey thats all I desperately needed
 to know he was alive & well
 now through love & concern know-bowl for
 one year by parole this story I not must
 tell

it is about a system set up
 & are designed to fail
 I give you my word this truth
 will be told but

I only when im out of Jail
 just wanted to share about my
 new life with Jesus above
 I am a new creation in him' he's
 shown unconditional love
 so not when im damn feeling like blue
 heaven how I deal with it' here's what I do
 I find a quiet ~~place~~ moment I shut
~~myself~~ ~~out~~ the door to my cell

Sometimes I will weep or even cry
 Pour my heart out to Jesus my life to tell
 me in always listening he will eye care
 the question I am today is 'why it's
 for my head as I ^{love} are my hair'
 TO The lovely amazing folk who
 come here talking time out all day
 I know I speak for all when I say
 god bless & a big thank you ~~to~~

Dear Sir/Madam

my entry in to yet
 competition I believe the Lord himself
 inspired me to write this & any the
 winnings be given to the prison
 chaplains (Paul & Julia) to support the
 pro towards 'Prisoners' donation for
 local food bank VIA: CON: DIOS

Times a struggle Times a new great
 but I get by with my Pal Jesus my ^{love} mate

Name:

Josh Parkinson

Title

Altogether

um ~~Altogether~~ Altogether

Above, I find myself with Destiny's despair,
 Craving and solace in its arms.
 Fate's guidance costs everything,
 Yet the utility of resistance
 Must be sustained.
 For its meagre comfort and consolation
 Removes autonomy, choice.
 And in this paradoxical downward spiral,
 I knew all along
 That self and solace could never have been,
 Just Destiny and I, matrimonious,
 Fate watching over me both.

Josh Parkinson
 1643910 Grampian

Name:

Aaron Morrison

Title

2 Getha

2 "Getha"

To Be together is to be -there for people
 that's under the weather, your Connection
 is about each other's reflection, and
 our Community is about coming together
 and Connect in perfect unity
 I had my Recovery after grasping my
 discovery, to decide is to find, what
 once gripped me inside, so you start to
 discard on how you Recover.

1) The days were short, the nights were
 long! I regretted ever been born.
 So I started the Recovery Coffee and
 a table in Church, sharing stories of
 much "past glays" We had smiles and
 Cries and looked out for the guys
 like brothers from different markets.
 So I shared the gospel of truth
 that I had learned from a youth.
 Some left, some stayed, most learned
 and acknowledged and even prayed!
 Now were all one, loved by the
 Father and Son and the Spirit was with
 We still often meet! Some out on the
 street telling their stories of truth!
 Some shout out from the court air prison
 Booth.
 2) yes later our Dark eyes gone, our eyes
 Shining bright like all before! So that's
 My story of "our Father's glory" So lets take
 heed of this too Road! Maybe you will come
 together for other people under the weather?
 And Be A Reflection to Be a Connection
 Truly your Community will come together

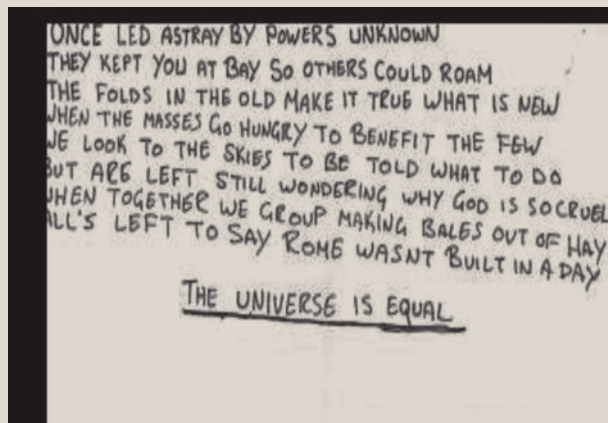
and Connect in perfect Harmony "Peace"
 Love and unity "2 sem"

AARON MORRISON

Name:

Anonymous

Title

The Universe is Equal

Name:

Anonymous

Title

What Unites Us All

What Unites Us All - Poem

Calm your mind, still the sea
 Walk with me through evergreens.
 Close your eyes, breathe the stars -
 Come now home with open hearts.

And in this place, just for now
 Let's silence all, every sound.
 Let's take a beat to rouse the soul
 Discover constellations yet unknown.

Allow me now, to contact you
 In archaic ways the spirits do.
 Beyond the body, beyond the mind
 A connection shared through humankind.

Come on the journey, back through time -
 Let me guide you there through simple rhyme
 Deep in the past, before we were born -
 A difficult trip, this I must warn.

Think of your mother, during those years.
 Imagine her joy, imagine her fears.
 Imagine her laugh, imagine her cry,
 See that time through your mother's eyes.

Think of her troubles, think of her pain
 Imagine the times she stood in the rain.
 Think of her hopes, dashed on the floor
 Imagine her feet, calloused and sore.

Think of her shame when she made a mistake.
 Imagine her sleepless, lying awake.
 Tossing and turning, anxious and scared
 Hoping somebody loved her, somebody cared.

Now think of the mistakes you have made
 And the scars we leave which never fade:
 The beautiful words we cannot unspeak -
 Our regrets are heavy, hear us creak.

Then discover a truth that resonates
 In the strings of our soul it reverberates:
 Our mothers are human - like you and I
 They were born on the Earth, under the sky.

We all make mistakes when we don't understand
 The harm of our words, the harm of our hands.
 Yet united together we can release a spark
 That ignites a fire which banishes the dark.

Empathy is a force which brings in the light -
 Guiding us on through the darkest of nights.
 Our humanity means we all came from a mother:
 Together let's say we are sister, brother.

Name:

Derek Adams

Title

Reintegration

Reintegration

Love my close companion,
 Envelopes all of me.
 He keeps memories safe from harm
 And reassures me.
 That out there, with a love of life,
 A future still for me.
 Where companions will regard
 What they see in me.
 Hope, another cherished friend
 Lives endlessly in me.
 If I can bring these two to bear
 There is still hope for me.
 Solace and hope will bear my cross
 And help deliver me
 Back to community I once lead
 And neither pity me.
 And if my sins are let slide
 Or forbearance given me,
 To comprehend and make amends
 Would likely help me.

Name:

C Menzies

Title

You're not together when alone

YOUR NOT ALONE WHEN TOGETHER

*WHEN MEN ARE ALONE WE BOTTLE THINGS UP
 DONT TALK TO FRIENDS OVER A COFFEE IN A CUP
 BOTTLING SO MUCH UP MAKES US VERY FRUSTRATED
 AND YOU FEEL SO ALONE AND AT TIMES DEFLATED
 BUT WHEN IT'S TIME AND YOU DECIDE TO TALK
 BE IT INSIDE A PUB OR DURING A WALK
 WHEN THE FRUSTRATIONS ARE LIFTED AND THE BURDENS START FALLING
 AND YOU WON'T FEEL ALONE WHEN YOUR FRIENDS KEEP ON CALLING
 WHEN YOU TALK TO TRUE FRIENDS YOU NEVER A BORE
 SO DONT HIDE BEHIND WALLS, CHAT AND TALK MORE
 YOU NEVER ALONE WITH A PROBLEM YOU WILL SEE
 WHEN A PROBLEM IS SHARED MORE TOGETHER WE WILL BE*

C MENZIES

7. Commended poems

Title	Name
Bar Mitzah	Jessica Clarke
Absolutely Massive Things	Sian Cameron
deep connection	Luna Dhir
salt and steam and coal	Vanessa Mcara
blessings from the sky	Anne Elicano- Shields
Confessions of a Housekeeper	Freya Irvine
Ipomoea aquatica	Liz Kendall
If You Were a Frisbee Id Never Throw You Near Trees	Vanessa Lampert
When I Ask Ammā To Sponsor Me For Pride Run 10K	Gayathiri Kamalakanthan
Graduation	Iona Mandal
Not a Clash of Cultures	Bill Lythgoe
Terraced	Alexander Graham
Together	Johnathan Wilkins
Eulogy	Alice Foxhall
Synchronicity	Vanessa Horn
One of Them	Lena Hadley
THE LIGHT	Saad Hassan
Togetherness in Diversity	Darryl de Carteret-Pochin
Togetherness	Aminatta Kamara
A Heart's Love	Alba Roper (8 Years Old)

Name:

Aminatta Kamara (8)

Title of the poem:

Togetherness

When disaster strikes we see together that we are one,
under the sun, sea and sky. We may fleet against each
other like passers by but when trapped together in rubble,
in trouble we sea eye to eye.

Name:

Darryl De Carteret-Pochin (23)

Title of the poem:

Togetherness In Diversity

Poem: In the tapestry of life, we weave our threads,
A myriad of colors, a dance of diverse spreads.
Together we stand, united in grace,
Embracing each hue, each unique face.

Hand in hand, we traverse this earth,
Celebrating differences, recognizing each birth.
For in our diversity, lies our strength,
A symphony of voices, each note lent.

From every corner, every land,
We come together, hand in hand.
Bound by love, by hope, by dreams,
Our unity, a radiant beam.

Let prejudice wither, let hatred cease,
In the arms of togetherness, we find our peace.
For in the tapestry of humanity, diversity reigns,
And in our unity, our true beauty remains.

Name:

Saad Hassan

Title of the poem:

The Light

In sacred lands where painful sounds last.
 The ummah* of our beloved prophet, a collection of shells.
 Sadness woven into every tear in it .
 A call to prayer for unity, for rapprochement.
 From Palestine to Sudan, Afghanistan and Kashmir,
 They face cruel and sympathetic suffering every year.
 May God make us realise that it is our duty to help them,
 Because the seed of faith can grow from root to tree.
 The dark shadows of night torn by war.
 In a silent and terrifying war of famine.
 A petition rises like a minaret*, a call to universal prayer.
 Let lovers of compassion share sweet humanity.
 Let us wisely bridge the widening dividing lines.
 Our strength must lie in our unity.
 The people of the world will be a shining light,
 He reaches out and holds his brother's hand to bring back the light.
 For in suffering the heart often communicates in a collective struggle .
 A call to prayer, to action, God's grand plan.
 We stand side by side together arm in arm as a group.
 Verses of hope will soothe us and compassion will be our guide.

NOTES.

* Ummah- refers to the sense of collectiveness of the Muslim community.

* Minaret- A tower in Islamic architecture, usually in palaces and mosques.

Name:

Miss Vanessa Mcara

Title of the poem:

Salt and Steam and Coal

Split down the middle,
 To make us easier to swallow.
 They learnt lessons of divide and conquer,
 Expecting us to be hollow.

But we are stronger than they know,
 Because when we built their walls
 It taught us how to stand united,
 Against storms, axes and falls.

We falter, but pick each other up,
 Our cheery northern faces and wit
 Should disarm you.
 But we are made of steel and grit.

Salt and steam and coal run through us.
 Unbreakable, wild and free.
 The view looks grim when you are up so high,
 But please, do not pity me.

Do not look down and scowl,
 At our calloused hands.
 Because together we are glorious,
 And together is how we will stand.

Name:

Lena Hadley

Title of the poem:

One Of Them

What if I was one of them
 One of those people you won't stop insulting
 What if those careless words you throw out
 Are marinating in my brain and feeding my doubt
 When you carry the conversation wildly out of tune
 I wonder, do you think about who else is in the room
 I think about what you'd do
 If you knew
 All the rage that would spew
 From your serpentine tongue
 Or the dark blush of a bruise
 Well, I didn't mean you
 You'd jump to your own defence
 You're different, you're not
 One of them
 But what if I am, huh?
 What then?

Name:

Alexander Graham

Title of the poem:

Terraced

What's so good about a gap?
 Three homes linked like rouged gossips,
 hips hidden by proximity,
 smile wide-eyed in mock surprise.
 I don't bother with the heating
 except to dry clothes; the warmth
 either side is enough for comfort.
 The older lady at number 3
 couldn't turn her rusted lock,
 not maintained since her husband died;
 my wife brought her round
 to watch The Chase. We sat
 in terraced complaint
 until the locksmith tooled reentry.
 I'll nip next door tomorrow.

Name:

Jonathan Wilkins

Title of the poem:

Together

Breathe.
 Air enveloped by vapes and fags.
 Coughing, hacking.
 People lay in doorways.
 Alone.
 Secluded.
 A man, thumb in mouth.
 Asleep?
 Drug induced
 Should I judge?
 Who am I to judge?
 Walking down High Street.
 Alone.
 Together.
 As one, should we try
 to help?
 Does he want my help?
 To assist?
 Does she need my assistance?
 To give?
 What can I give them?
 Money?
 My love?
 Should I?
 Why should I?
 A just thing.
 The right thing?
 We are together,
 but so far apart.
 A world apart.
 She shouts abuse
 at the world.
 Her mind darkened by drugs
 By drink
 By life?
 What shadows her world
 A world given to her
 By my society
 No longer caring
 No longer giving
 No longer sharing
 Alone, apart on the street.
 Alone, apart in her world.
 A world we created for her.
 A world she does not deserve,
 But still we judge.
 Still we look and see
 Nothing.
 It's easier that way.

Name:

Iona Mandal

Title of the poem:

Graduation

I place my graduation cap on my mother's head,
her grey strands brush against the black tassel:
a reunion of roots.

At first, she is shy to wear my gown,
claiming it does not fit her,
or women like her.
that success is defined by a printed name
on screen, scroll or plaque.

I want to tell her that I have found success
in her smile lines and her coarse palms,
that aspiration was born
in the fingers which traced the curlicues
of the alphabets to an unknowing child.

I want her to know that
ambition was first defined
by a grainy newspaper cutting
of her in a sari.
One of the first South Asians in Vermont,
and the first to teach me,
what belonging meant.

She still believes my gown is too big for her,
that the swathes of fabric drown her out.
There is somewhere, I am sure,
where mothers and daughters
graduate side-by-side,
in gowns which envelop them equally.

Name:

Freya Irvine

Title of the poem:

Confessions of a Housekeeper

I work at a hotel.
Housekeeping.
Every room I clean. The same.
The layout. It's furniture. It's soul.
The same.

However, most rooms have one or two flaws.
A crack in the sink basin. A chip in the bathtub. A patch of mould on the ceiling.
Those tiny flaws, giving them their unique... feeling.

I could probably write something poetic here.
That our flaws. Our experiences. Our trauma.
Are what makes us... us.
That the things that have happened to us.
The things that will happen to us.
Makes us who we are.

But we really shouldn't compare ourselves to an overpriced hotel room.

As our positives. Our personalities. Our passions.
Our good features.
They are actually what makes us... us.

We are not material things.
We are not beds. We are not desks. We are not TVs.
We may like material things.
Possessions. "Stuff".
No. We are truly psychological. Sociological.

We put meaning into useless interactions.
Collect things that are meaningless to our survival.
We watch shows and movies and cry about characters that don't exist.
Played by actors that don't care.

In ways I wish I was a hotel room.
As a housekeeper I'm supposed to be invisible.
I'm not front of house like I once was.
I'm not a receptionist. A bar tender. A waiter.
I'm a cleaner.

But if I was a room I could be beautiful.
Cleaned and cared for daily.
Put on display.

I could be glorious.

Glorious.

Name:

Gayathiri Kamalakanthan

Title of the poem:

When I Ask Ammā To Sponsor Me For Pride Run 10K

Ammā doesn't have words like 'pride'
or 'bi' or 'coming out'. English is not her first

or second or third language,
but I send the link anyway, as requested.

I imagine the next day: Ammā is perched on the doormat,
greasing her heels with Tiger Balm Red.

She rolls two pairs of socks over her feet,
wiggling her toes to attention.

The new trainers she bought are unstuffed,
waiting. She steps into them, right, then left,

careful as a toddler on wet tile.
All week she peels and soaks and tēykkiātu,

anticipating my home-shaped hunger, her feet
sculpting the trainers' stubborn edges as she cooks.

When I arrive for dinner, she is massaging
her yellow-callused sole, little toe pink as a newborn.

She stands and hands me a ribboned box.
"This for you, kunju. Be careful. Run well."

Name:

Sian Cameron

Title of the poem:

Absolutely Massive 'Little Things'

You are like:

- drinking the first sip of tea that's the perfect temperature, no burnt mouth, just lips quenched in deliciousness
- discovering that sweet spot on the shoulder where my bag strap neither digs in, nor falls to the crook of my elbow
- locating just the right position to hold a child of kin on the hip when they want to be close, that somehow seems to half the weight that I hold and the giggle they make as they are wiggled to it
- remembering foreign treats from a recent trip, stashed away in a suitcase only ever half unpacked, things removed as needed, but luckily, it's not too late to gift them out
- being smiled at by a stranger, sunshine reflecting off their teeth, a dazzling reminder of what glorious weather in the UK can do, how it seems to thaw even the fastest walkers of London
- keeping bargain-bucket almost-dead supermarket basil alive for a whole year, as pastas and salads and home-made pizzas tuck into the offering of its flavour
- feeling rejuvenated after a nap by the side of a pool on holiday, when there is no rush to leave it; best of all is when the transition is superseded by a friend saying, "Good morning, lovely", even though it's the afternoon
- finding a pair of 35 Swedish Krona jeans (the equivalent of circa £2.54), that I found in the cool Vintage and Second-Hand store my friend Lisā worked at; they were in the 'last chance' crate of bits, destined next for landfill but fit so flatteringly, they strutted home with me
- hearing songs in heart and soul as well as ears; feeling them in my feet, feeling them into the future where I will play them on repeat a hundred times, and in ten years will hear them in a club and it will feel exactly like the first time again or better
- making it safely, without fall, across now-ice-rink-once-road, when unexpected snow has fallen, and the salt spreader has lost the race to get here before a group of teenagers, my grip to the floor more pride than soles
- listening to a story being told by a person who can't get anywhere near the point because they're too busy laughing; we're both wheezing and crying because hilarity is infectious, yet only one of us knows the crux of the tale
- catching glances with fellow commuter as they look up from their phone with a grin so distinctive I already know, they've just been sent a text from someone who makes them feel giddy, and they share a slice of that giddiness with me
- opening a jar that I was just about to pass to someone else, but that click, pop, perhaps tiny hiss depending on what's inside it, sounds victorious and I'm glad to have a witness to this undebatable strength
- unearthing forgotten cash inside a bag I hadn't used for a while, or a jacket pocket - a present from past-self for present-self to pocket

You are like the feeling of absolutely massive 'little things'.

You are not the every day, but you are my daily happiness.

You are the siblings my parents didn't make.

Name:

Vanessa Lampert

Title of the poem:

If You Were a Frisbee I'd Never Throw You Near Trees

You have a blind dog called Charlie
and too much ironing. I had a baby
when you couldn't.
You said I'm happy for you and sad
if you know what I mean.
I saw what you did there
for me.

I bought glycerine suppositories
after your appendectomy
You always send me
the same text. Dinner at six?
There's a plate
with your name on it.

You left a homemade
Scotch egg outside my office.
It was still warm.

I hope the mosses in your lab
do whatever it is
you need them to.

Walk down Kingston Road with me?
Can we do that soon? I just want
to be near you
for the whole afternoon.

Name:

Jessica Clark

Title of the poem:

I did not have a Bat Mitzvah

I did not have a Bat Mitzvah
but I would like to join you for Seder:
sink deep into the richness of ancestors' past
that I never studied in cheder.
Let me drink the bitterness of saltwater
used to mark slavery's tears,
bathe in the warmth of Channukkah candles lit
glowing across centuries' years.

I was not born a Muslim
but I want to give Zakat from my purse,
dedicating myself each payday
to aiding those who have it worse.

My family are not Christian,
but if God's words are love and forgive
then I will paint them on walls for people
who no longer want to live.

I did not have a Bat Mitzvah.
This mattered - until I learnt
it's only by shutting the doors of your heart
that candles leave you burnt.
And it's through sharing wisdom and love
with every perceived outsider
that the studied words on pages make sense in life
and our fragile world grows wider.

I was not born Muslim or Christian,
Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, or Sikh,
but will meet with all as siblings
and understand the truths you speak.

And I'll see you on the other side
(should we get a second chance)
but for now, let's thank what flowers,
link arms, and enjoy the dance.

Name:

Bill Lythgoe

Title of the poem:

Not a Clash of Cultures

He's a fairly strict Kurdish Muslim
and I'm a sceptical non-believer,
but we get on with one another.
It's what we call friendship.

I took him to an Italian restaurant
and recommended the tiramisu.
I should have known it's not halal
and that he would smell the alcohol.

I wanted to know
if he accepted
Darwin's views on evolution.
It wasn't easy
to pin down his opinion.

Let me put it this way, I said,
Do you believe
that Allah created
the world
in six days?

He smiled and said Well, no,
that's not essential to our faith.
He could have done it
in five minutes
if he'd wanted to.

Our only real battle was fought
across a chessboard.
I took him on and after a struggle,
checkmated him.

His excuse was that the bishops
should have been elephants.

Name:

Anne Elicano-Shields

Title of the poem:

Blessings from the Sky

Blessings From the Sky
*For the children of Gaza

Tiny, hot air balloons
are dropping from the sky
like little full moons
nudged by the wind's gentle sigh.

Gifts nestled in wicker baskets
are wrapped in silk and tied
with rainbow ribbons and friendship bracelets.
Terrific treats await inside.

The precious load falls on seafoam
then drifts to the beach's pebbly sand.
Treasures and trinkets to adorn one's home
and happy blessings for the land.

Tiny, hot air balloons are carrying what people need:
tents and blankets and walking sticks.
Bread and figs for the mouths to feed.
Add plasters and cough syrup to the mix.

Look inside and take what you want:
crayons, trains, and kites with long tails.
Cake, spaghetti, and a chocolate croissant.
Books and spades and castle pails.

There's a wooly scarf, warm like a tight hug.
A jar of jokes and laughs in a larder.
All the world's hopes overflowing from a jug.
Love and dreams, and a happily ever after.

Name:

Vanessa Horn

Title of the poem:

Synchronicity

Synchronicity

What if Noah saved the space, took one of every species?
 He'd still have a variety, more room, and far less faeces.
 Yet faced with world extinction, he might scratch his head and rue
 that one by one just wouldn't work as well as two by two.

If scissors didn't come in pairs, and all we had was scissor,
 instead of stylists cutting hair, they'd slice it - just consider!
 Formlessness would be the norm when trying to snip paper,
 and ripping fabric willy-nilly could prove quite a caper.

What if birds had single wings, like legendary Oozlum?
 We'd see them flapping in a circle, feckless, no momentum.
 Land bound, they would chirp and cheep, rotating round and round
 like tiny helicopters needing lift-off from the ground.

If Tom and Jerry hadn't met, there'd be a lot less chasing,
 and yet they've built their fitness up through many years of racing.
 Without each other, they'd get lazy - lost for things to do -
 and end up growing fat and bored with no-one to pursue.

What if zeros had no ones, and ones did not have zeros?
 Binary would not exist; addition would lack heroes.
 I wonder if technology would change to using widgets,
 or would we be resigned to always counting on our digits?

If sun and moon were not a thing and we had only one,
 would you prefer to live in darkness, or under constant sun?
 The choice seems simple, it would seem, yet maybe not so great
 when all the world is dying from a self-inflicted fate.

What if these were commonplace and we were none the wiser?
 I guess we'd cope, despite the fuss and lack of supervisor.
 Yet if humans didn't pair and couldn't be together,
 the world would be a lonely place; we'd feel the loss forever.

Name:

Alice Foxall

Title of the poem:

Eulogy

Here lies humanity

It is never easy to say goodbye and

Some might say this one was long overdue but

It is so wonderful to see so many familiar faces that

For years have been strangers

Humanity meant so much to us

I know every soul in this room, felt her impact

It is hard to put into words how much Humanity will be missed

By family, friends, colleagues,

Politicians, environmentalists, billionaires, arsonists, bakers, orthodontists, nomads,

Children

Humanity was a traveller; and could never quite pick one place to call home

She grew up a close companion with Nature and Time

But died alone.

She was known for her extraordinary variety of interests, her rapid shifts in mood and her
 impressive ability to self-sabotage

I know each of you are very saddened by Humanity's passing

Today we are able to grieve together

Or for some, celebrate.

Humanity could be kind, cruel, curious

Wicked, wasteful, charming

Whatever your assessment of her

We must admire the way Humanity lived and loved

The way she sought to right the wrongs around her, for people or things she did not know

The way she embodied the essence of resilience

The way each cell in her being had some sense of goodness.

May we continue to love deeply in her absence

Whatever that absence may bring

Name:

Liz Kendall

Title:

Ipomoea aquatica

Water spinach or water potato, related to sweet potato
 I'm a long leafy stem who claims one lumpy cousin;
 In families often you'll find
 A whole spectrum of folks who don't seem to resemble
 Each other - just bring yours to mind.

Do you have a tall sister or very short aunt?
 Two brothers, one slim and one stout?
 Sometimes you might feel like a wild catherine wheel
 When they whisper, but you like to SHOUT!

Am I water spinach or water potato?
 Take a look and then say what you see.
 While the first name describes me, potato's inside me;
 The proof's in my family tree.

In Asia's wet paddy fields where the rice grows
 You'll find my aquatic form lying,
 But in Asia or Africa, plant me in earth
 For green leaves rich in strengthening iron.

My relative lives several oceans away:
 South America, have you been there?
 The sweet potato is my cousin; it's so,
 Though we might seem an unlikely pair.

Why not eat us together? A family reunion,
 A party right there in your bowl.
 Though we live far away and don't meet up each day
 We're still kin, each a part of the whole.

Name:

Luna Dhir

Title:

'Deep Connection'

As I grow older,
 I feel the need to get closer to my roots.
 To visit my hometown,
 Reconnect with old friends and family.

I imagine long roots emerging from the soles of my feet,
 Extending down to the centre of the earth,
 And outwards from my torso,
 across the globe
 To all the people and histories that I'm connected with,
 Grounding me to Mother Earth

My eardrums resonate
 with the soulful lyrics and melodies of bygone days,
 yearning for the chanting of ancient sages,
 their centuries old intelligence,
 that keeps me close to
 home.

Name:

Alba Roper

Title of the poem:

A Heart's love

We thrive together
 we thrive forever
 A heart can break
 but heal again

People can hate and fight
 but together we'll fight
 for our rights

We live together
 we die together
 We live together
 with few fights

When we do fight
 we fight through it
 to come back together as one



ETERNITY DAUGHTER

*Your face turned towards the sun
Our minds ebb & flow as one
Every thought & mood aired
Heart of mother & daughter shared*

*Then the raging storms they came
Lives destroyed; chaos reigned
Your hands reached out to comfort me
I tried to keep solid ground beneath our feet*

*Again and again, you tried
Not now, later, I was occupied
Until one day, you let go
You floated away*

*And when I realised what I'd done
I could only lament the wrong
To once again be that close
With one who knows & loved the most*

*For a daughter and mother's abiding love
A foundation of what lies above
Now I see, time made for a little humanity
Would not have lost what is dear to me.*





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