

Carers Poetry Performance

Programme

Introduction

The Chair (Rosalind – with her poem)

The Facilitator (Rogan)

“The poems in this presentation come from a series of poetry workshops that took place through 2001 and 2002. I was facilitator. Mary Evans, Carer Support Worker, coordinated and helped me run each session.

The first series of workshops was funded by Carers Network and was held for Carers of people with mental health problems, living in Westminster. The second series was funded by the King’s Fund and was open to any carer interested. But still the majority who attended were carers of people with mental health problems.

We structured the workshops loosely as follows : we began each session by reading out to each other poems from books - old favourites or new discoveries. We looked at how some of their effects had been achieved – not always with rhyme. Then I offered a theme for the group to write on, and the group stayed silent for 40 minutes or so, while we all composed. Then, in the last third of the session, we read out to each other what we had written. And somewhere in all of that, we also found time to talk and listen to one another quite a lot as well.

You will hear from my colleagues how the workshops went and how it felt to take part. And you will hear how they were valued. Therefore, I can say to all carers that workshops of this kind, that give you the chance to put your experience into words or other artistic form, can be helpful. I think it helps you find meaning in what’s happened to you and also you feel less alone.

We are going to read you some of the poems that came out of the workshops. We’ll be taking turns. Some of the readings will be in prose, describing what the workshops came to mean to the participants. Some will be very short poems called haiku, a Japanese verse form which requires the writer to say something vivid and condensed in just 17 syllables.

We hope you enjoy our performance.

[I shall now read the first poem](#)

The Readings

Rogan

Introduction poem

Song of the carer

*Written after a day for carers
which ended with massage
and quiet music*

I've no front door,
she said,
and no back door.
Repose is denied me.

And I've no windows
no points of view -
just spaces where
my grief is revealed.

When I go home
at the day's end
my shadow unwinds itself from the wall
and rushes to greet me.

I'm keeper I'm captive
of my love ;
my love is heart-burn
my love is nails.

Let me breathe free today
and my words carry ;
let me know that -
for this one day -
my home is quiet music
and shrewd relieving hands.

The next poem will be read by Maria

Maria

The First Session of the Poetry Workshop

I was intrigued so I phoned.
And was told to come today.
A feeling of apprehension and tension
Was with me all the way.

A room full of strangers
Each with a purpose of their own
Were brought here by picking up
And dialing the numbers on that phone.

He asked for introductions.
That was easier said than done
I suppose I have to start somewhere
After all mystery is half the fun.

My name *is* Marysia, Polish I should say
I was born in London, lived here all my life
I have a son of 15 but I've never been a wife

Sickness has been part of my life
Mother always ill, Father had a stroke and died
Leaving debts as a bitter pill.

Today is the start of something new
Something that could change my point of view
I owe it all to the tone
Dialing the numbers on that phone.

Now it's Sunnila's turn

Sunnila

Arcadia

Arcadia is my place of refuge
where I feel deluged
with emotions of past memories
of Dad and Mum
who are now anon, anon.

I go down into the memory lane
of the quaintness of Delhi Cantonment,
where I spent the most treasured
and happy periods of my life.

The mango trees in the garden,
the bird eaten pomegranates,
the fluttering of the peacocks
would cheer us up after the rains.

Mum and Dad would sit in the winter's sun
eating carrots and moolies.
I would often join them too
with the dogs sprawled out in the sun.

I could open up heartily
to both Dad and Mum,
discussing my problems merrily.
For I knew - in my heart
I'll go from here merrily.

Both of them are in heaven today
oblivious of the problems I face.
But they gave me the courage
to face the problems with grace.

Now it's Mary

Mary Evans

At the beginning of the poetry workshops I felt a tension between my role as organizer of the sessions and my active participation in the workshops. It was agreed that Rogan, the facilitator, and myself would write our own poetry as well as facilitate the group. Previously, I had revealed little of myself to this group of carers, but I found that it was impossible to write poetry without revealing my emotions and concerns. Sometimes I surprised myself with the extent to which this happened. Far from being a problem, however, I found that it was appreciated. Carers said that they enjoyed the breaking down of boundaries between professionals and carers.

The workshops and the writing of the poems unfailingly enriched me. I found that whatever mood I was in at the beginning of the session, by the end of the three hours I was calm and soothed.

It was a fulfilling and gratifying experience for me and I treasure the closeness. I felt between the carers, the workshop facilitator and myself.

Now Julia is going to read a Haiku

Julia - Haiku

A Moment in the Country

Kingfisher-blue flash
the silver streak of water
feathers fly tonight.

Now a Poem from Ethel

Ethel

A Conversation with Pain

I am hurt by you pain
but are you my trial or my destiny?
Oh how could I suffer so.
Is there not an end to your selfishness, pain?

When will happiness start?
Tell me if you can, pain
because you are still here
hurting my heart.

I will search myself too
for there is a fight that I will impart.
This fight will be grace surely,
embracing my courage and strength.
And I know there's life's good hope
Deep within my soul.

Now it's Rosemary's turn

Rosemary

Thoughts on what the poetry workshops were for me

These workshops were not about writing 'poetry' in a critical atmosphere: they were about letting words flow from our hearts within a supportive group of fellow carers. As a group I feel we shared deep emotions, listened to souls struggling to survive in painful situations and offered each other the support of understanding similar feelings. It's been an enriching and liberating time for me.

Words, Words, Words! So much to say, so little time.
And will they drift away, murmuring in the breeze,
Meanings so clear to us, these poems of our lives ?
With friends and paper, cups of tea, with themes in mind and loving care
My thoughts I've penned - no rhymes for me but rhymes beat inside my head.
A quiet space we've found that's safe to write of pain so long denied
Sure that our support will keep us strong. I've found my voice
And I say 'Thank you' to you all for sharing moments deeply felt.

Here's Sunnila with another Haiku

Sunnila - Haiku

A carer
Deep in thought
Walking briskly
To attend a poetry class

Now it's Gill's turn

Gill

The poetry workshop

*'What a waste of time'...Many cry!
Expressing pent up, denied, angry, swinging, suppressed, crushed emotions,
...Has certainly not been a waste of time...or money... perhaps, it will
eventually be seen as cost effective!*

*Gradually in reading known poems/discussions and writing of own poetry....
The digestion of life in poetry revealed the paradox of family and culture....*

*During the past 8 months the intense pain/suffering/grief... beauty and joy is
recorded*

*In the workshop 'present moment' - a gift of time -
Where...there is a presence of safety, happiness, health enabling
A freeing of suffering, the flowing of long overdue tears,
That slowly enabled liberation... the acceptance of the paradox...an inner peace....*

Here's Julia with a Haiku

Julia - Haiku

Abreast of the news
Round and round Red Robin flies
Not a worm in sight

Now Maria

Maria

Refuge

Most people think of home as a foundation
A place to hide when life is full of trepidation
Somewhere to shelter from the storms of life
Home is where there is mother, father, sister, brother, husband, wife.

My refuge is not the home
My wish is to be alone
Not to have the phone or TV
My refuge is to be alone with me.

To be able to sit and look
To know I can read a good book
To share my own thoughts with me
That ideally is the refuge for me.

Or

Autumn

The summer holidays over
The children go back to school
Full of chatter at what they'd done
The sun has put its hat away
The cricket seasons ended.

The last smells of Summer jams and pies
leeks and fruit all judged at the Harvest Festival
The crops are stacked neatly in barns
As the bare fields rest and lie in waiting for the new seeds to be sown

The City feels it too
Park benches are empty
As leaves fall to the ground
Making no sound
As the days get shorter
That time has come again
To turn back the clocks
Waiting for the Autumn season to end

Here's Rogan

Rogan

The Joy of My Uncle

Nowadays, my uncle
wears white whiskers -
and seems actually benign.
His eyes twinkle in their new pouches
and he even makes jokes.
When we said goodbye last time
we hugged each other, we clung.
Love was at play. Love newly unashamed.

Perhaps it does get easier
once you're old. Twenty years ago,
aghast to be the age where I now flounder,
he was terrifying, hating
not being young any more,
his fine mind slicing at everyone round him
like a flying razor blade.

He could never rest. Letting go
meant losing time. He was at odds
with this pouring away
of time, coiled against it.
He was coiled against
everything. All at war.

But somehow the war is over now
and my uncle at peace
is waiting to be de-mobbed.
I don't understand this joy
of resignation in him.

I can't believe some new philosophy
has dropped answers in his aged lap
like Christmas presents out of the cold blue.
He is far too clever for neat answers.

Something has simply given way.
He has been exhausted into joy.

Let the same exhaustion, please,
inflict itself, in time, on me.

[Here's Rosemary with a Haiku](#)

Rosemary - Haiku

Deep soul, soaring bird
Carrying our thoughts, our hopes
Through all time.

Here's Julia

Julia

The Stranger Knocking at My Door

Death is the stranger who has knocked at my door.
Hidden, unknown and tantalising.
That flap of black wings, rustling
Trying to find a way in.

When I am alone
Like a horror film it haunts me
And in that haunting, that
recognition ; which creeps up at
any time ; I am always vulnerable.

Often when I least expect it
The memory ;
I am angry that you come a-
tapping, attacking.
If only I could wrench open that
door and say in a loud strong voice :

“WHAT DO YOU WANT ?
GO AWAY FROM HERE
GO AWAY FROM THIS PLACE
AND DON'T COME BACK !”

I think you are a coward
With your faceless face and Nosferatu fingers
Creeping, creeping, creeping.
A creep.
Yes, you are a creep
And you give me the creeps.

Keep away from me
Or I will advertise your disguise.
Yes, your minions tighten their tentacles around my chest
Obstructing my breath
Frightening me.

But I have ways of dealing with them and you.
I can take some deep breaths of living
And tell my tales to those who
are strong enough to listen.

You do not hold all the power cards, just the spades.
Remember the other suits.
I choose to handle the diamonds and the hearts.

Now Rosemary with a Haiku

Rosemary – haiku

City thronging close
Sounds contained, stories hidden:
Strength holding lives together.

Here's Gill

There is a Stranger at the Door

Bang! Bang!! Bang!!!
The front door bangs!
Hiding, snuggled up
Warmly in the cosy bed.

Bang! Bang!! Bang!!!
The front door bangs!
No movement is made
Feeling the full horror of this stranger at the door.

Bang! Bang!! Bang!!!
The front door bangs!
It feels like hours,
The fear of the continual banging.

Bang! Bang!! Bang!!!
The front door bangs!
Then, silence.

Peace?

The banging ceases.....

All is quiet.

No longer

Bang! Bang!! Bang!!!

The front door bangs!

No more.

In time.....perhaps.... hours, days, months or even years,
The stranger returns.

But now the sound is gentle-

A soft ring, ring, ring of the doorbell,

Or a friendly, rat-tat-tat of the doorknocker.

The door opens to welcome
The transformed stranger.
No longer is there a search for war,
No longer is there a want/ need for an enemy.

The listener hides in paralysed fear
No longer....

Now this stranger is
A sad, sorry, lonely companion of old.
A companion in need of old lost company.
An old companion who
Recognises the necessary wandering
From the pilgrim's path

Slowly, slowly, the stranger's
Bang! Bang!! Bang!!!
The front door bangs!
Changes to a companion's cry for compassion,

There is a need to find new language
To explore with words the energy of fear
That forcefully drove into the desert
To a time of lost love, life. and humanity.

**Yes, it is time for companions to chat,
The stranger and listener now together
Find words, new words
To express the long unspoken,
Time trapped emotions of love and fear,
To open, the unopened door.**

Only the past memory hears in the present,
Bang! Bang!! Bang!!!
The front door bangs!

The door is open.

Gill Fahey 3rd October 2002

[Here's Sunnila](#)

Sunnila :

Life is a Journey

From the time of our birth
till the time of our death
facing the countless ups and downs
encountering innumerable obstacles
life moves on like a river.
Just as the river encounters rocks
and smoothens them into pebbles
so we carers should not despair
but endeavour to overcome the problems with a cheer.

Now Ethel

Ethel

A growing thing

There I am surrounded by eggs
Safe and warm in a sack
But oh this will not last for long
There are movements now.
What has happened the world has changed
Because we are now grubs one and all
Let the light of day shine on us

Let us feel the feeding from the leaves, dewdrops, air and rain.
What have we grown into now, not a grub any more
Could be a caterpillar so to speak
But we are getting larger
And will become a chrysalis soon.
Soon We will go to sleep
It will not be a never ending sleep
There is going to be a rapturous awakening
Look, Oh look what we have become
Lovely bright butterflies ready to fly away.

Here's Gill with a Haiku

Gill – Haiku

A moment in the country

The country's silence,
For those who pause to listen,
Speaks untold volumes!

Here's Rosemary

Rosemary The New Day

Today I look at the sky
And feel the vast emptiness of air
The expanse of soul
The possibility of life
Starting anew.
A new day today but not a first
For I am shaped by yesterday's pain
And sadnesses that overwhelm my being.
I dare not hope for still I fear
I could not withstand more hopes destroyed
Yet today I do not mourn for I am alive.
I pause awhile and calmly pray
For help to strengthen my resolve
To live each day as if it were my last.
Tomorrow the future will be today:
And will the jangling nerves of pain be stilled
In forgiving if not forgetting,
Of forgetting if not forgiving?

Now Maria

Maria

What keeps me going is the fact
That once I'm gone, I know I'll come back.
For I believe we've been here many times before,
Each time learning, then learning some more.

I feel I've lived in ancient times
Maybe a poet writing rhymes
Or as a doctor helping the needy
Even a banker being greedy.

I know now that I've been here before
I walked through life and many open doors
And each time one closes a new chapter starts

For deep down in my heart
I know I'll remember these poetry sessions
A chance to complain and have self-expression

As for them finishing soon
I don't feel over the moon

I've met and shared as well as expressed
My feeling of sadness, joy and happiness

So don't feel sad that they're coming to an end.
You've had a chance to meet new friends.

When you look back at the past
You'll be able to say
I enjoyed Carers Network and my poetry day.

[Now, for the last poem of our performance, here's Ethel](#)

Ethel

The poetry workshop

Hats off to our poetry sessions
Money well spent we felt
But not even money can
Buy the peace and intellect produced.
This is what was brought to bear
The teaching to overcome the problems we shared
Caring was not washed over or swept under the mat
For one could say out loudly by the pen.
It also made me feel young again, pupil in school again
Even if it were only for two hours in each session
Feel the rejuvenating of one's whole being
Listen to me girls and boys
Its something to liven us carers one and all
And when caring stares me in the face
I'll remember words I have said
And also rely on strength and grace.

Finis

All stand and bow