

Positive Images Peace Festival

Unsung Heroines & Heroes

Poems from the
Positive Images Peace Festival
Poetry Competition



Introduction

Every year, we are amazed by the quality of the poems and the diverse ways people approach the topic. Thank you to everyone who contributed poems towards this wonderful booklet and attended our celebration event.

While we always choose a winner for the competition, it is important to note that this booklet is full of brilliant poems that made us smile, made us cry or taught us something about the world. We will continue to enjoy reading all of them. This year's theme of 'unsung heroines and heroes' felt especially celebratory and we hope readers continue to find joy in them.

If you liked these poems, you can read even more on our website from this year and previous year's:

www.positiveimagesfestival.co.uk

Design News

This is the last year the brilliant Melissa Cassily, designer of the Positive Images Festival Poetry Competition booklet of the past six years and for much of the Festival's publicity, will be able to work on our design needs, as her company Cascade Limited is closing down due to the economic situation. We will all miss your great designs and service. We thank you for all of your hard work and we wish you all the best for your future.

In Memory

We remember with gratitude - Leanne Bridgewater, Poet, Artist, Animal Rights Activist, joint founder of the Peace Festival Competition and friend of the Positive Images Festival.



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Winner

William Davies

Two Old Dears

Her manicured coffin-shaped nails, pointed daggers
On bejewelled fingers
She squeezes a visit to the tanning shop
Then in for a spot of lip-filler at the posh shop
Newly opened down the road
Checks out her six pack in the shop's reflection
Then changes direction

Walking home she hears two old dears
Their derision ringing loudly in her ears
"look at her" they whisper-shout
"all fake tan and is that a trout-pout?
Youngsters these days all vainglorious
Take themselves all too serious
These days they all wanna be Katie Price
They are all insubstantial and not very nice"

She walks up the driveway, opens the door
Shouts "Nanny I'm home"
Finds her Nan on the floor
Tenderly helps her into her seat
Makes her a cuppa and a small bite to eat

Nan won't hear of the doctor being called
Just to check all is well
Says "I'm just a bit shaken chick
And bruised where I fell
Take more than a tumble
To get the better of me
I'll be just grand with
My nice cup of tea"

She holds her nan's hand and tells her about
The od dears' unkind comments
And the "trout-pout"
Her nan puts her hand on her Granddaughter's knee
Says, "those old biddies know nothing
About you and me

You lost your mother, my daughter
And I took you in, They know NOTHING
By judging your lips, or your skin
You look after me as I once looked after you
We all have a hero and my hero is you".

Runners Up

Martin Brown

My Grandad

My grandad may look old and wrinkled
But crooks know he's quick and he's hard,
He nabs 'em when he's undercover
When he helps out at New Scotland Yard.

My grandad's a Hollywood stuntman,
He features in all the big hits
Being shot at or thrown out of airplanes
Run over or being blown to bits.

My grandad's a hero at football
With a hat-trick in every big game,
Relied on to head home the winner
He loves the crowd cheering his name.

My grandad's an MI5 agent
In countries and places afar
Gets caught up in all sorts of danger
And escapes in his top secret car.

My grandad likes swimming with crocodiles
He's usually safe from attack
They know that if one of them bites him
My grandad will always bite back!

My grandad is always so busy
There's nothing that he wouldn't dare.
No wonder, whenever we visit
He's always asleep in his chair.

Helen Mosley

Shout out to the Mums

The real unsung heroes - with love and thanks to my mum always X

Shout out to the mums- the mums of Coventry

the unsung heroes who keep the place going

the mums who love and mums who care

the mums-to-be and the mums that were,

mums in heaven and the mums elsewhere

the sandwich mums, the carer mums, the keep-it-together mums

the rainbow mums, empty nest mums, the merged family mums

the like-a-mum the couldn't be without you mums, the bonus mums

the foster mums, the adopting mums, mums who are there

the end of the phone mums, the daily hello mum

the clasp of the hand mums, the thinking of you mums

cooking mums, tucking-in mums, teacher mums, sharing mums,

enthusiastic mums, you can do it mums, dancing and playing mums

clever mums, writer and poet mums, the learning mums

the planting mums, the nurturing mums, the grower mums

the hospital bedside, the A&E mums, the coping mums

the busy mums, the grateful mums, the dreamer mums

the mums who mend and mums that sew,

mums who smile and mums that know

the painting mums, taking the photo mums, family history mums

birthday cake maker mums, the gift-buyer-present-wrapper mums

the a-b-c mums, rhyme time mums, first word mums, talking mums

mums that hold families together, that make all things right

the mums at the pitch and poolside, the rehearsal and the play
the getup sunshine mums and the dark of night nightingale mums,
the audience mums, the clapping mums, the consoling mums
the taxi mums picking-up mums, waiting at the school gate mums
mums that wash and iron, mums who make the uniform right
hopeful mums, mums that pray, mums that dance, mums that sing
homework mums, mums who read, last-minute project mums
mums who labour, mums who strive, mums that give, mums who try
mums who chat, mums that share, quiet mums, proud mums,
the volunteer mums, the do-everything mums, blood donor mums
the fixer mums, the first aider mums, sore head looking after mums
the missing thing finder mums,
Sky blue mums, sports day mums, sponsor me, keeping fit mums
The couldn't be without you mums
the unsung heroes of the city
The Coventry mums -
Shout out to the mums

Highly Commended

Joe Reynolds

The Lug Worm Diggers of Romney Marsh

The day starts as a silhouette,
black against eastern red,
between Dungeness' nuclear
towers and the beach at Lydd,
decorated with gumboot crushed
crustacean skins and claws, bleached pink
cracking razor shells.

Pulled, suck-stepping, sticking in galoshes
through brine rippled sand, a shovelled figure
bent over a bucket, cheating the wind,
leaving no footwells in the shifting grains,
the idling sea, the tide's remains.

Temporary pyramids
excreted obelisks,
brief signs of territory,
tell-tale burrow twists.

The spade sliced shaft,
the divot spit, the ugly black
invertebrate
slips, into the pail for tomorrows catch.

Back to shim shack shanties, the lean-to sheds
pebbled gardens kept and hung with fishnet
tapestries creaking on beachcombed driftwood
pyres. Hand painted grainy white boards nailed to
wind sculpted posts, weather crafted, coloured,
sea-soaked, and sand blasted. Fresh bait for sale.

Liz Geuken

Let's hear it for the stupid people

History is made by stupid people.

The one who looked at a cow suckling her calf and thought
"I fancy some of that!"

The one who dropped their meat in the fire and thought
"Sod it! I'll eat it anyway!"

The one who drank the sour milk
And discovered yoghurt.

The one who looked at a bear and thought
"She looks warm, I think I'll have that fur!"

They're all long dead and forgotten now, of course.
(Especially the one who wanted the bearskin coat.)

Alix Scott-Martin

The Messengers

The messengers hover in dark spaces,
corners of rooms and unlit stoves, flickering their lights.
They drift down side-streets and empty roads,
prostrate, palms pressed in prayer like stone saints
or raised by warm gusts, their blue tunics flapping.
In a closed room, an old woman
mourns missing years and the messengers hear her.
They wait behind fridge hum and white noise,
silent as smoke, rising to the sleepless, to the lost.
For those who are shadows, they whisper
in warehouses and hospital wards, feathered as hope,
airborne, clapping their wings.
Their fingers work quickly and lightly
on the temples of a man who can't breathe.
They know where to kneel - in operating theatres,
on wet tarmac, on bridges and bedrooms left empty.
They move like cool waves over a mother with clenched fists,
soothing her sighs through quiet, moonlit hours.

They have seen other worlds, rich and green
and perfect as clean, tucked sheets,
yet here they are,
slant-lit through storm clouds,
asking nothing of us.

Steve Denehan

Catherine Hettinger, Inventor of the Fidget Spinner

My daughter held it up to him
an offering of sorts
it spun, perfectly balanced
almost silently, on her index finger

my father looked at it, entranced
What is it?
my daughter explained it to him
that it was a fidget spinner
that children like them
that they are helpful for people
calming, soothing
a kind of magic

my father took it
put it on the coffee table
pushed it gently
it spun
and spun and spun

he said that it was a marvellous thing
was amazed when I told him how they had caught on
how every child had one and sometimes more
he shook his head
said that the inventor must be a millionaire

I checked it up on my phone
the fidget spinner was invented
by someone called Catherine Hettinger
she made nothing from it
as the patent had expired
just before the craze had hit

my father became furious

Typical! The rich get richer! The world is so unfair and always tilted towards those who need it least. It's all loopholes and cut corners and it always, always comes down to money.

my daughter pointed at the fidget spinner

still spinning on the table

Look Grandad, it's still spinning!

we looked at it, all of us

my father, my mother, my daughter, my wife, myself

it spun on

and on and on

until my father, still gazing at the fidget spinner, said, softly

You win some, you lose some I suppose.

Tamiko Dooley

Ashiato (Footsteps)

The woodland walk is as muddy and wet as I remember.

From when I was six, Papa would take me
As a Saturday treat to Koajiro Woods
Where we would leap over logs and duck under branches,
Gripping our wellies, slippery in the mire
And head to the lake
To peek at cygnets timidly taking to water, or
Wonder at tadpoles sprouting their tiny limbs
Before heading home to scoff *oyakodon* for tea.

I would always walk behind Papa.

His broad frame towered closely ahead,
Shielding me from kami-san whips of wind
And rain that lashed at my face.
Fawn-like, I would plant my knock-kneed pins in his giant tracks,
Great pools that reflected a stormy sky,
As we navigated streams and stiles. Together.
When my little legs tired,
I climbed aboard his back and pointed the path with
Sticks we had found.

In nineteen years, the woodland path has little changed her course.
Yet ahead of me, Papa's back travels slower now –
Curving forwards, shoulders stooped
And a *tsueh* keeps him steady.
I hover closely behind,
Still marking his footprints with mine,
With steps both wider and longer –
Marking, now, to catch any slip back or fall
As we slowly make our way home.

While measured of speed, he still leads the way:
So the shepherd, though weary, still tends to his lamb.

hitsuikai, tsukareni kakawarazu, kohitsuji no sewa o suru

The Best of the Rest

Adam Smith

She is a woman

she's the howl at the moon, they say: that tickle-chill of dawn air
running its fingers through your dew-damp hair and
the birdsong scarf around your neck, hung without a care.

she's electricity within the storm, they say: that burst and blur of light
that hangs on the cloud cover like a shimmering kite and
rustles, wraps, rolls left and right through the rain just before the gasp of night.

she's the petrichor of puddles, they say: that momentary, musical treat
that tiptoes on your tongue like whispered words, still sweet, and
hangs cautiously like young lovers' hands long before they meet.

she's the last light of day, they say: that murmur of magnificent hue
that is every smile, every dance, every life born anew and
every secret we shudder to speak and long to learn before we're through.

she's just a girl, they say: the petals and leaves of spring in their painted pink
that pastel-shades our promise of hopes and dreams as we sink and
swirl into our summer and, in the time it takes to blink:

She is a woman

Alice Di Sotio

Champion

Every morning he wakes, just a little late,
He wakes already exhausted.
Wearily puts on his uniform,
And heads back off to battle.

But his is not a war of guns and bombs,
From his war room, he fights a noble cause,
Most soldiers fight for their country,
Mine for the entire earth.

And this man fights not in trenches,
With an unseen enemy.
He fights the closed of hearts and minds of people,
Of Academics, politicians, you and me.

For Mother Earth is choking, burning, dying,
The problem so large and overwhelming,
Most of us just turn away,
Each day he grows more determined.

His calendar full to the brim,
Of battles going on forever,
He lectures, runs summits,
Sits down with leaders.

This little ant in the grand scheme,
He sorrows for the word,
In his small corner of the Universe,
He fights hard to make amends.

But he's not alone, battles are fought by armies,
His captain leads his troops.
To the west a rebellion is sparking,
To the east inspired change begins to brew.

Each day my soldier fights,
And wearily comes home to me.
Face and body torn and weathered,
Each day says it's too much, too much.

I hold him, tell him rest,
And yet find myself in awe,
As he rises again the next day,
My Sustainability Champion.

While the world seems dark and bleak,
And politicians seem keen for ruin,
And the earth chokes with a great fever,
Know people like him are fighting with everything they have,
To fix this broken situation.

So rise to battle, rise,
Tell the governments we will stand no more,
Fight half as much as he does,
And we can fix this broken world.

Alison Manning

Diligent

Most mornings he emerges
To little fanfare,
An unassuming older gentleman,
Flat cap, white hair, cheerful smile,
And a high vis vest for safety,
Armed with the implements
Of his voluntary vocation,
Bucket grasped in one hand
Grabber in the other
He roams the streets
Collecting other people's litter.
Packaging dropped thoughtlessly,
Rubbish dumped deliberately,
Cigarette ends,
Precariously placed glass bottles
(with just a few last dregs
Of the night before),
Lost items drifting
In the breeze,
He patiently picks it all
With his picker stick
and drops it in the bucket
For later safe disposal.
He works methodically,
Step by slow step,
Seeking no reward
For his selfless actions
Other than the satisfaction
Of a job well done
A knowledge that he's made the world,
At least his little bit of it,
A nicer place for now.

Alison Mukherjee

Supermarket Angel

My fingers went on strike that day
Would not cooperate
As I transferred my purchases
From handbasket to checkout point.
The cashier's fingers tapped the till.
Her eyes complained,
I haven't got all day!
My eyes were bloodshot,
I hadn't slept all night.

The customer in front adjusted her hijab
And set off towards the door;
Stopped as though she heard a call,
And turned back.
Leaving her bags on the floor,
She packed mine. Deftly, her hands
Did what they needed to.
A murmur travelled down the queue,
Someone asked a question,
She mouthed a soundless reply,
I tried to catch her eye.
The cashier demanded payment.
I scabbled in my purse.
She slipped away.

Alison Nosworthy

Will They Remember Them?

'We Will Remember Them', the heroes that kept our country free.
The lives that were lost, altered, spoiled;
mothers and wives that suffered and cried
for the boys that died.

A century or more has passed us by
and still the names are scribed somewhere on memorials of stone.
Pale thin faces in faded photographs on Grandma's mantel shelf.
But what of the boys of today?

Contemporary youth, fresh and lusty,
those for whom the sacrifice was made -
will they leave those heroes unsung and unthanked?
New generations have brought new heroes for them:
from music, from sport, and social media;
instant access, instant gratification, their pockets bursting
with money to spend and leisure to spend it in.
They take for granted the rich abandon of their own youth,
the 'come day, go day' disposable world they now inhabit.
Will they remember who paid the price for freedom?
How other young lives settled the debt?

Looking back along the years, I only wish they could see
the harsh goodbyes, the mud and blood,
the cold, unrelenting days and nights of youth that came before;
whose hands held guns, whose hearts held fear,
who fought for King and Country
and for them.

The words of Brooke, of Owen, Sassoon,
immortalised for posterity these dark times
when death and destruction was paid into Life's bank,
to be withdrawn, a century later,
never knowing how - or on whom - the profits would be spent.

Our boys, our carefree youth, our happy progeny,
PLEASE don't waste this bloody bounty.
Think of them.
Thank them.
And say.....
WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.

Amanda Checker

Hero's *do* Wear Fur

Stranded alone she sits by the window,
but her eye to the outside world
is now a gaping, unseeing hole.
Raw and bloodied by a virus.

The street is cold and empty.
Grey without life to colour it.
The children's laughter, whose joyful tendrils
once snaked through the cracks to
fill her home, is now strangely muffled.
Held in a bubble she cannot reach to burst.

Nameless shadows with half hidden faces
scurry and slither by without pause.
Eyes flicking desperately with aimless purpose.
Fearful to meet, terrified to not.

She gorges herself on these wraiths of life
until finally sickened by their rotten taint
she turns away, sighing long, and shudders.
The pile of ragged fur upon her knee
protests with muted yowl and crackling stretch,
creating spaces of cold in the cosy warmth of her lap.

Distracted she pats the loose bones within
and soothes as she smooths the tufted,
age coarsened fur until,
the whispered purr swells to a grumbling roar.

The sound reaches out to encircle her heart
And cradles it close, warming every part.
Rushing onwards and outwards, bringing life
flooded with unnamed colour.
And as love lays its balm on her poor wounded soul,
she smiles knowing that, she was never truly alone.

Amy Clennell

Family Bonds

He raises his palm to stifle his gaping jaw
while the groan in his throat is purposely suppressed.
Well practised, this has happened frequently before,
but today he struggles to cope with extra stress
as yet another yawn emerges.

When he lifts the lids of his dewy eyes again
he sees indistinct images convulse and shift,
like gazing through rain streaked windows on a fast train.
Despite all efforts his consciousness sails adrift
as finally he succumbs to sleep.

The sea, sand castles, ice-creams, Mum holding his hand,
he is dreaming how carefree their lives used to be.
Yet why roles have reversed he fully understands
when a shake of his shoulder wrecks reality

as he peers up at his teacher's face.
Mr Miller is definitely not amused
and sentences him to two hours in detention.
All protests and pleadings are totally refused.
He must pay the price for his lack of attention;
stay behind to finish his homework.

Every concern is completely compounded;
cook dinner, wash up, ablutions, help her to bed,
his usual routine abruptly confounded.
Panic and anxiety spin round in his head,
who will care for her if he's not there?

Ann Atkins

Here's to the ...

Not quite on the frontline.
Admin, packers, cleaners,
maintenance, the invisible
technicians behind the scenes.
Might not be risk takers
movers and shakers
but no organisation
could function without them.

And the homemakers,
the ones who know which bin
goes out when.
Who know how to work
the washing machine
and sort whites from colours.
When the Hoover needs emptying.
The shopping list writers, tea makers
unnoticed, until they stop.

And those whose names
might not be famous for designing a bridge
but where would it be without bolts in?
Unnamed faces in lazily labelled
history book photos
that say: 'Typical factory scene'.

Here's to all of them.
I raise a glass
to every *What's-her-name?*
Every *You-know,*
Sue *or-is-it* Jane?
If you're one,
or you know them too.
Tell them I said
Thank-you.

C Mullan

Ode to my Wife

Brain's Darting

Back's Smarting

Ideas are Coming

Mind's Churning

Sister in one Ear

Close to Tears

Mother on Another

All gripe and Bother

At their beck and Call

Giving her All

Me at the other End

Eager to Defend

Cat's Meowing

Insisting and Insisting

She's Cooking

Phone Scrolling

Youtube Watching

Netflix Checking

Gig-Going

Art Writing

Medical Medical

Dr's Doing

Life Planning

Patient Handling

Blood-work Chasing

Pulse Racing

LOCK. DOWN.

Work From Home's a Clown

Media's Baitin'
GPs are for Hatin'
Burnout's Beckoning
Reality Heckling

Sanity's Stretched
Self-confidence Tetched
Passions remain Unabated
Thrive to Live yet Sated

To Home she Goes
To new pastures she Rows

I admired her All
Above me she stands Tall

Caroline Davies

Tooth, Fur and Claw

There's the postman I will never bite
I use my nose to switch on the light

I won't be naughty, not ever at all
And I can bring you your phone
if you were to fall

I can take washing from the machine
Helping you keep your clothing clean

If you're prone to seizures
I can warn you of it.
Bring you your meds
If you suffer a fit.
Sense low blood sugar
Sound an alarm

I am more than a helper
I become your right arm.

Do you suffer from PTSD
I can help with your anxiety

I can detect a panic attack
Can't promise to cure you
But I will have your back

Are you allergic
You can trust me
I can smell allergens
In the air, you see

I am taken to hospitals
Care homes and such
Please feel free to pet me
I love to be touched
I know you'll feel calmer
and love me so much

Not all heroes have two legs
Some heroes have four
We're assistance dog heroes
Tooth, fur and claw.

Chris Burleigh

Our Neighbour

The man next door
Is one-hundred-and-more,
When I ask if he's well
He'll say 'Well, I'm here still',
And he still drives his car
To the shops, not far.
His family can't come every day
But I think he rather likes it that way,
He's been here forever
My kind, gentle neighbour.
I'll be sad when I can no more
Say hello to the man next door.

Chris Farn

Who Are You?

Yet again, the long night has lulled me to sleep.
I wake up stiff in the chair by the window.
As I look at the clock the blanket slips to the floor.
Monday 7am, I peer through the curtains' narrow gap.
The stranger has been again - and I missed them!
Two bottles of milk sit on the frosty doorstep
and beside them the same blue plastic crate.
Who are you?

I check on the kids upstairs, all peacefully asleep,
then go back downstairs and open the front door.
I bring in the milk, then the crate.
As usual there is a sliced loaf and two tins of baked beans.
Today, the stranger has included cheese, eggs and cereal,
plus three small chocolate bars for the children.
Such thoughtfulness, such kindness.
Who are you?

Every Monday and Friday you visit us.
How do you know I am struggling?
I keep things to myself, no husband to help.
I thought it would be a one-off gesture but no.
Eight blue crates later, I was knee-deep in plastic!
So I placed all eight on the doorstep at midnight.
On Monday morning one was full, seven were gone.
I'm so grateful but why us?

Three nights I've tried to stay awake in the chair,
hoping to catch a glimpse of you, hoping to thank you.
But each time heavy eyelids dash my intentions.
Are you a man or a woman? Young or old?
How do you know what to put in the crate?
You always get it right, never wrong.
One bottle full fat, one semi-skimmed.
Who are you?

This Thursday night, I will try again to stay awake,
to catch you in the act, your act of kindness.
I will rush to the front door to say thank you.
I will invite you in for a cup of tea and a chat.
I will no longer have to ask: "Who are you?"

Chris Johnson

How are you today?

Live in Kyiv we now have Inna Sovsun,
Deputy Head of the Holos Party,
How are you? 'Well... we get used to the new...
Reality of sirens and shelters.

At this third day of Russian invasion,
We're getting better organisation,
Some people talk to the media, some support,
And loads do the main job now and enlist.

And what is...again a personal note,
My dad took mum west, he's now coming back.
I said, "Daddy, Why? You are sixty-one,
You can hardly walk," he said, "I can crawl.

I am coming back to defend Kyiv."
What a man your dad sounds! Maybe we can...

Christine Miller

Unsung - Dandelions

There you are, there. Marginal. Unnoticed -
Unless a heedless hoe hampers your propensity
To prosper. Those buttery petals effortlessly outshine
Your haughty bedding plant brethren and that yolky core
Dispenses nectar and dew; a generous buffet and taproom
For butterflies, bees and nugatory bugs. Your uncelebrated
Glamour creates a glorious tapestry for walkers and rambles.
You re-invent yourself and your transformation is
Sensational, from busty brilliance to bald minimalism.
Whether blown by a curious child or an anonymous wind
Every summer, every sky is sprinkled with your seed.
Your fecundity is something to heed, cherish, and appreciate.

Christine Stafford

My Dad

He had the warmest smile I've seen
The softest bright blue eyes.
He was the best dad in the world

I'm proud that he was mine!
Whenever he was needed he was there without delay.
If anyone needed help they would only have to say.
He worked hard as a carpenter, even with an injured spine.
And every night he took us out he always found the time.

Into the country we would go, each bird or tree he'd name.
He made recognition fun and turned it to a game.
He was my mother's greatest friend an anchor in her life.
They were the perfect soulmates as well as man and wife.

Dad would walk away from conflict
Arguments or fights.
He didn't have to use his fists to prove that he had might.
His strength was in his hugs his tender loving care.
Reliant and devoted, my dad was always there.

He was an unsung hero.
No medal's on his chest.
But to me he'll live within my heart
And labelled ' just the best!'

Clive Collins

Walking Wounded

My mother's brother, Uncle Jim, had been a machine-gunner in, As was written on the medals, "The Great War for Civilization 1914-1918."

I knew him as a shy man starved of breath, hidden, much of the time, behind a smokescreen put up by fags, much like my dad, another 14-18 man.

Dad was hit three times: in the chest and bum, injuries sustained from one of Uncle Jim's opposite numbers, a German tasked with firing a machine-gun.

Jim and Dad were pals as much as relatives by marriage. They stepped out together, my uncle gasping, my father grasping tight the sticks that helped him limp along.

In the pub, they'd trade Woodbines back and forth, share pints of stout - "My round now, you know!" - play games of skittles, cribbage, darts and dominoes.

"Whatever did they find to talk about?" My sister wondered on the 'phone today. I said I wasn't sure but doubted very much it was the war.

When Jim was gone, just shortly after Dad, my mother said her brother's wounds, unlike my father's, were really in his head.

That he'd been a patient time and time again in our local loony bin was shocking news to me. "Your uncle Jim saw ghosts,

Hundreds of them, thousands," Mam said. He reckoned they stood in countless glowing ranks between the wardrobe and the bed he shared with Aunty Doll.

"He couldn't sleep for thinking of the ones he'd killed. I'd tell him that he'd had no choice, our lot would have shot him else, and anyway they were only Jerries."

"Not for me," Jim would shake his head. "They were men."

"But Jimmy, love, the war's been over fifty years and more by now."

Mam reckoned she'd spoken so to try and ease her brother's pain. It never did. "Not for me." Jim always said, then he'd shake, and shake his head again.

Colm Scully

The Old Soldiers of Killeens

They died in the ditches.
Not at the Somme
but in rural Cork,
a shell's arc from Shandon
and Collin's Barracks;
Dan the Man, Dinish Fleming, John Downey.

They knew of Gallipoli and the Ardennes
but lived to recount
tales to the farmer
in exchange for a few pennies
or a feed of potatoes and dripping;
three days work on the milk cart
or a week saving hay.

No army jobs for them
or posts in the civic guard.
No one to write or follow up
with the crown forces office in London.

They staved off hunger
with cheap stout in Caseys,
rambled the roads retelling stories
of the dead heat in Mesopotamia
or the souks of Basra
to the boys playing Pitch and Toss
at Killeen's crossroads.

They died in their britches
unknown and unloved
by Free State or King.
No poppies for them
at Windsor.

Corinne Muir

Fieldwork

Hours in the rain to audit the plants in a square,
Rising before the dawn to count the chorus,
Walking the same transect year after year,
Just to find out that what's there is there.

Staying up past sunset to tally the bats,
Counting poo, though they call it scat,
Traipsing through the undergrowth,
Getting sunburnt, tired and scratched.

Standing in streams kicking samples into a net,
Enumerating flowers that we don't forget,
Travelling to places far and wide,
Statistical work stuck behind a desk.

Scientists, botanists, researchers, ecologists,
Volunteers, zoologists, fieldworkers, biologists,
Without them we wouldn't know what we've got,
Or perhaps more important, know what we've lost.

David Copson

Me Mam's Mam

As if it wasn't enough that the front of the house was blown off and the Co-op tea service landed in pieces in the next street - people had relatively little then, and house-proud stood in for technology and social communication. The hours of cleaning and scrubbing could really be appreciated if someone called; and she'd be all the more proud if they weren't expected.

My mother told me how her mother had "queued in March along a windy street for oranges, fretting that my oldest brother was still in to look after us. Her coat was not sufficient for the five hour wait and would not have saved her if a bomb had landed. And when she arrived home with all the anguish of a hunted fox, she expected to be warmed by our delight in her hard-won prize. But when we grimaced and complained the oranges were sour, her eyes clouded with a grief we could not comprehend. The sugar ration went in ten minutes."

And as if it wasn't enough that she couldn't go to work because five rumbustious children needed an anchor, a playmate, an angel of hearth and home; a confider and a magician - which they expected as a matter of course. And those same children could not provide the warmth at night that such sacrifice deserves, but would instead cry and fight and need her to banish the monsters of their dreams, born of aerial bombardments and sooty winds wailing through the lips of shattered windows and the bare limbs of trees. And in such times she was a soothing storyteller,

a soft cradle to all the ills that fill a child's unfinished heart.

And it was some years beyond this before my mother properly explained how my grandfather had returned from a war beyond his imagination, and how he was so changed that he left one day with his few belongings and a belief that children don't really need a father, and set up a new life with a woman with no children whose husband had been stilled by a doodlebug. In those days the other side of the city was a long way away, and you could cry for hours without anybody knowing.

Society flourishes beyond your reach and the mores of ancestors are shed slower than a snake's skin. It was too late by the time she found the sanctuary of peace, and I can only imagine the resignation that had paved the miles of her life. But as her grandchild I would never realise this until she was gone, for she was always a ray of light, a counterpoint to my parents' severity. She bore no medals, had no street named after her, nor had any statue in her honour in the corner of the park. She had taken on a war beyond a war and she had fought alone: and I dare say she was worn out by it all. As if that wasn't quite enough.

Fiona Clark

Nastasiya

So glad you could attend this interview,
Mrs ...er... Sorry, can't pronounce your name...

Call me Nastasiya, please (it means 'reborn').

You came with family, yes, from the Ukraine?

*My husband, daughter, son (in a small boat,
On ink-black waters, opening their jaws).*

And have you found somewhere to live in town?

*We have good place (At home, the daffodils
Dance in the wind, near yellow-painted doors).*

Teaching assistant's an important job....

*This I can do (directing a museum,
I've lectured on our artefacts and all
About Ukraine-now I'd like to give a talk...)*

But in a school, your broken English might-

*Not hold me back, I will learn language, quick
(My poems, published now in several books,
I speak some Polish- and good Russian, too-
But won't: the words would wither on my lips).*

Some of the children here have "mental health"...

*I will look after them (Just like my own,
Woken at night from tortured dreams, of shells,
Exploding missiles, ripping lives to shreds-
Among the rubble, there's my father's hand...)*

We uphold Christian values at this school-

*I'm Catholic; I see your cross and pray-
(My tears must tell you, this is my soul's home).*

Er...thank you, Mrs...Er. We'll let you know.

Harry Matlay

Angels of Peace

If you only look,
you will find
angels of peace:
women, men, children,
who bring peace
to people and places.

If you only look,
you will find
a smile, hear kind,
caring words,
meet compassion,
and understanding.

If you only look,
inside yourself,
you will become
an angel of peace,
for a better world
of love and plenty.

Jasmine Gillard

Wilston Samuel Jackson: The trailblazing train driver

In 1952, you answered a call
Destination set,
Your determination unmet
Wind rush, wind rush, see landfall
The wheels of progress turning.

You chose to work, on the trains
Kept them running, on the track
Hard work, didn't break your back
Wind rush, wind rush, pain and small gains
The wheels of progress turning.

Shovelling tons, of coal all day
Studying for your Driver's examine, at night
But driving trains, they reserved for the whites
Wind rush, wind rush, change came your way
The wheels of progress turning.

Steaming along disaster struck
A signal green, when it should have been red
The train crash broke, both your legs
Wind rush, wind rush, sent Lady Luck,
The wheels of progress turning.

When your days, in Britain ended
To Zambia you went, and passed on your knowledge
Basked in the sun, with your stories of courage
Wind rush, wind rush, a life unprecedented
The wheels of progress, turn on.

So, when you ride the train, just think
Of Wilston Samuel Jackson
Great Britain's first, black train driver
May his legacy, never become extinct.

Jazmine Isha

Leaving Home

Maybe it was the way the sun hit the curtains differently
Or the way my coffee touched my lips not hot but gently
There was something about this world that was new
A place I'd created, always dreamt of running to
Like a face all painted to look best and bright
Because this is what I wanted, right?
A house of my own to decorate just right for me
But with an atmosphere of thick uncertainty...

And there's this feeling, almost grief
That sticks around showing its teeth
Bites and shouts in the quiet times
Or sits in the loudness and hums its whines

And there's this phrase, leaving home
Implying that I'm all alone
A nomad, homeless, a vagabond
Living in a place left feeling despond

I think I'd liked the way the sun was bright
When it touched my eyes in the morning light
Or when my coffee was boiling to the touch
But made with love (so so much)

So no I am not leaving home
But starting an adventure on my own
Moving out not moving on
From a place where I belong
When I found that home isn't a place
But a person with a familiar face

(This poem is about missing the small things my mum did since leaving home)

Jehanne McGrath

Unsung - Yours Truly, Tuesday

Let me tell you about this heroine,
truly she's unsung,
Loyal like a Scorpio but leaves you unstung,
Instead she soothes souls and disappears when she's done,
Walks with the moonlight clasping a fire of passion like the sun,
She does what she does because nobody can do it,
An ear she lends to any subject regardless of how 'stupid',
The facade of a broken heart, she sees completely through it,
Ploughing through the dirt, planting seeds that bloom and blossom like tulips,
An extraordinary lady, resilient with beauty,
A soft touch and tender gaze,
An affection felt truly,
Pure like a diamond and jagged like a ruby,
She helped me through the dark at night,
And left me never as she knew me.

John Collins

Stella

Stella, too good to be called a mere star.
Though like a still lake,
the deep calm unsung epicentre
of that noisy, happy, loving house.

Widow, mother, grandmother and carer,
never a raised voice, always a smile,
a fund of good example,
never trumpeted just there to share.

Roger, her son with Downs,
his gently rolling gait not unlike the Downs,
always greeting me with the same "How are you John",
"How is Anne", my wife, "How is Pete", my son.

I see Roger and Stella walking to the shops,
arm in arm, heads inclined,
saying who knows what,
though it's clear to all the world, he is loved.

A mob of young grandchildren
some living there, always some visiting,
the two chihuahuas running amongst them,
yapping away excited by the energy and noise.

A confidante to her adult daughters,
talking at the front gate before they leave,
leading her youngest proudly down the aisle.
A perfect model of that unsung heroine, a mother.

Judith E Roberts

Remembered

Those lads conceived between the wars when bobbies walked the beat.
Those boys who climbed the highest trees, broke legs, caught mumps,
long before the N.H.S became a glint in Aneurin's eye.
Those boys who ran for shelter when the bombs fell and lied about
how long they'd lived so they could serve their King and Country.

Those boys who cried like babies when for the first time they
left their home to go abroad to join their chosen force
marched on empty stomachs or broiled in tanks
protected crawling Convoys from the enemy below
trapped blind as rear-gunners in planes made on cycle tracks.

Those boys following in footsteps many gone before
their fathers, Grand-dads, cousins and may be several more.
Those boys grew to men before P.T.S.D. was on our lips
Those men who never mentioned what happened 'over there'
never speaking of their wounds lest they were thought to fear.

Those men who had 'Demob Suits' the ones that didn't rip
Those brothers sons and lovers saved us from Adolph's grip.
brave lads from not so long ago but mostly now forgot
Those boys so very young with mumps still a memory clear
Yes those mostly Unsung Heroes of Winston's final war.

Karuna Mistry

Kudos

Had a baby, he never says 'maybe'
Gets up at four to help with chores
Clock rush to work for a salary perk
Back home late for a romantic date
...Of microwaved lasagne on a plate

To most, he's most ordinary
But to me, he's most worthy

Kid can talk, they go out for walks
To offload our neighbour's day
He takes their child out to play
Back for supper – this time proper
...his favourite, freshly cooked pasta

Most will not be able to see
That he's more than ordinary

He'll cook so I can read that book
He'll iron while I tend to the garden
Won't complain, but entertain
He'll try to sew and have a go
...at advanced DIY until the fuse blows

It's clearly plain to me
That he's extra over ordinary

He's one man but I add a zero
His tenfold worth cannot be wrong
He's ordinarily my special hero
I hear my hero, I sing his song:

*"There goes my hero...
Watch him as he goes"*

Lyric from "My Hero" by Foo Fighters

Katherine Moss

Lost Arthurian Fragments

So they rode til they came to a lake

She rests beneath Château de Pierrefonds
a moment destined to become a fragment
of manuscript authored by another hand.
How can she, immortal, halt the next word
before the day has passed into myth.

So the Lady was there three days

Parchment lost on a bookbinder's floor
her story illuminated by dusty shafts of sun
warming the nape of his neck as he stitches
her into the binding of another man's story.

and when they hear of her adventures

Six hundred years she lay undiscoverable
a single generation away from the origin,
just one cycle of royal birth and death
between our imagination and the truth.

How she would jeopard her person

Sir Malory would have given away his fortune
just to blacken the whorls of his fingertips
on the iron gall ink of high-Gothic script,
to rest his hand upon the true amanuensis
and then were her wounds well amended.

giving wordless thanks to the scribe of Viviane.

(Lines in italics from Le Morte d'Arthur. Vol I. Ch. XXV. by Sir Thomas Malory)

Katie Simpson

Can you take them?

Would you take her?
Would you take just the baby,
if we can't place them together?
A small, imagined face,
of a small, imagined girl,
emerges.
It's not right,
they should be together.

And the crying,
what is the crying for?
Her mother, her father,
her siblings, her food?
How do you console,
the small ones like that?
When they've lost it,
everything.
All they had,
was the bad,
and now it's gone.

She picks up the pieces,
she holds, she cleans,
she feeds and soothes,
that crumpled, reddened,
salt-soaked face,
that tiny, lost body,
cast adrift until-
the pieces are put back,
to form some kind of image,
once more.
And she wipes a final tear.

And then the phone rings,
can you take them or,
maybe just the little one?

Keith Parson

The Poppy

What is a poppy you may ask? A flower that grows out of barren land
stalks of green flower head of red, petals so light of touch.

They sway in the breeze, left and right all seeking sunlight.

Why does a simple flower mean so much?

It is such a symbol of hope and peace
to those that have fallen it is the last thing seen
as eyes go dim, fading eyesight

a sea of red will be remembered,

a wreath of poppy red laid to honour the dead
wear the poppy on a lapel, so proud it shows.

White crosses stand in neat rows

a reminder to all the fallen heroes.

Kia Kennedy

Savior Oh Mother

Miss Riach

Changed my life

She put me on the right path

Gave me something to believe in

Her lessons helped me When in a way

My heart was bleeding

She made my brain jump

My blood Pump

I could truly never repay her for what she did for me

If there was a timeline of my life

Since meeting my heroine

The past is just a grey area

History

Kitty O'Shea

Carrying the Weight

Unleashed glowering clouds

Thrashing and lashing.

I stumble, grope, see a rising road

- Topple ...Fall

Against a wall ...stalled.

On that spot a bundle sprawled.

Now what's going on ...on ..?

A shift, lift, my pockets ripped

I throw my arms resisting a grip.

Too late, I've signed my fate

I'm gone ...gone.

Later, late when sunset fades

I wake ...but where?

In my chair, boots off, jacket removed,

Keys, prescription had laid the route;

I turn, twist, strain the brain.

Into the hall I bawl

No answer, no recall.

I reach the door and stare, no one there.

My hero gone

Gone to this day who carried my shame, my sodden frame

Brought forward this day

Where now I'm clear

There is another way.

Lisa Millard

Little Green Pigeon

Covered in poo and piss with
a handful of grit thrown in for good measure,
feral hair decorated with a rogue feather

Come rain or shine in inclement weather
She sparkles. As from pen to pen
she pirouettes, splashing droplets of tea
onto soft blades of grass as the birds sing sweetly

Her heart bursting with bird calls and seed
as she juggles her fat balls.
Content in her fluid wooded walls as carriages
swish past packed with people living their lives too fast

As the rats' race to forage for bounty
for one second, she sits quietly in the
bliss of completion and,
sips the remainder of her tea

Loraine Mponela

Ode to Loraine

you inspire, encourage and even lift
those whose shoulders have fallen
make a way where none existed
you are a trailblazer

you breathe courage
tackling big issues
you are not afraid
of losing friends either
for having uncomfortable conversations

you are the true African Lioness
giving hope and life
to those that feel faint

you touch hearts and minds
with your affectionate smile and love
you are blessed with a heart
bigger than Mount Kilimanjaro

you have made us all believe
that as long as the human spirit lives
life can be turned around
thank you for touching our Souls
this way.

Lorraine Carey

12 Holly Grove

Granddad John had silk-like hair
white as a dove, hands the size of shovels
and always said thank you for thanking me.

Sturdy as an oak, tortoiseshell frames
and striped braces ensured he stood out
like his border collie with three names.

His aviary's canaries trilled our cue to leave
shortly after tea, competing with each other
for a handful of seed or an apple quarter

as dusk put us into our coats, for the dander back
to Cedar's Avenue. I've never lived in a place
with more beautiful names even as acrid

smog coated my tongue and factories pumped grime
bestowing a skyline full of industrial chimney pots
as far as my eye could see.

Clenched in my hand, a fifty pence piece
when Sundays were ice cream van jingles:
pipe smoke and birdsong from a kettle of

swallows. Their scythed wings and forked tails
told of Saharan adventures over dessert sands
and the meander of jet stream winds.

Their acrobatics stayed with me,
a transient magic bordered by
the boundaries of the creosote fence

within the Coundon suburb
and my Granddad's gentle ways
soft as the summer breeze ruffling the hibiscus

Maria Protheroe

Heroes of Hope and Change

I'm a believer of freedom for all
All for one, one for all
My heroes fight for liberation
A word coined from colonial freedom

I admire their loyalties beyond all
Like Brave hearts shouted freedom
From Scottish lands
Can reach the motherland

Great heroes of history and now
Heroes for hope and change
Triggering minds
Glimpses of a reawakening world

Standing together opposing oppressors
Putting human rights on top of the pile
Campaigning against wrongs, endlessly radical
Heroes beyond doubt
Beyond necessity
Beyond their own prosperity
Don't seek fame, nor thanks
Believe we're all equal and deserve a fair shake
Even across the globe
Heroes advocate for the voiceless
Call out Puppet governments, overlords'
unfair policies and conditional aid
Multinationals, monopolies
land grabbing, water grabbing, export cash crops

On African land
Heroes fight for love not gold
Strive for change in Africa
In mines
In palm oil fields
Sugar cane and cotton fields
Heroes breaking shackles, cuffs and chains

Martin Mellett

In our City Walls

They're all around us
As we dwell in this place
They always were and always will
This protection
In our City Walls

The sentries are long gone
The walls no longer there
But there is a safety
Around all who enter
In our City Walls

The atmosphere that some can feel
Is still there
From mediaeval times
When they were a force
In our City Walls

They were built brick by brick
Taking years of labour
Much strain and effort
To keep our home safe
In our City Walls

They've helped many people
Over the years
Stopping imposters
And helping those inside
In our City Walls

The guards worked day and night
Patrolling
Keeping the place secure
And always on the lookout
In our City Walls

The gates were there
Letting people in
To sell their merchandise
Making a living
In our City Walls

People lived together
They needed each other
To survive
And kept on living
In our City Walls

They worked and toiled
Many weaving
Making textiles
Keeping the wheel turning
In our City Walls

They are Our Heroines and Heroes
Our ancestors
Who made this place
For each and everyone of us
In our City Walls

Milan Jagatia

Eighty Years Young

no qualifications, degree or medals,
her English a Kenyan, Indian twang, she
birthed me, saved me from bombings in Tanzania

her life was extraordinarily ordinary
traversing continents, by ship and plane:
leap of faith despite the knot of fear in belly,
it was a fight...Go back home, Paki. Be Gone.

homesick tears rolled down her cheeks as
she trundled up an icy Dennett Rd, Croydon
to reach a laundrette, alone, kids in tow.
dreaming of a life of luxury lost,
as a trembling, coloured new comer

who absorbed every hurtful word, look n sneer.
mountains of microaggressions, and macro
accepted through gritted teeth with downward eyes.
it's self sacrifice to keep my job, to feed the kids.
i must go on, keep running on the wheel.
my love for my little ones, to succeed, spurs me on.

we move again. the London overspill, and
home county brings short term relief. work
goes on, 4, 8, 12, and 16 hour shifts
producing latch key kids who eat
home made curries and microwave junk.
i strive to keep afloat, i duck down
and stay low as scapegoats are hunted.

sacrificing more, to give degrees, road trips, white collar jobs,
rejoicing even as her kids reached glass ceilings,
bumped and fell and stood once more. she aged and worked
in this cold hostile land until 60 knocked on her door and
she beat cancer's vile threats with a slice of radiotherapy
to finally rejoice, eat and walk with friends galore.

I am wild and tame, once resentful and now soothed.
Eternally grateful to my unsung hero, Ma, Mummy, Mum.

Natalie Downey

Even when she feels weak
She will smile and kiss you on the cheek
She is guided by her heart
And strives to give every child a good start

She goes out of her way
Each and every single day
There have been so many faces
That have come from all different places

She does more than just care
And she is always fair
Never looking for fame
Or even the mention of her name

She won't point the finger
Or let shame linger
She will wipe your tears
And unravel your fears

She isn't just a foster carer
She helps you to prepare
For the big wide world
When no one else is there

Those who know her well
get to call her Nell

Natalie Peterson

Remy Ma - The Bronx Finest

REMY MA HAS BEEN -IN THE U.S. RAP GAME FOR YEARS
SO WHY ISN'T SHE STILL NOT GETTING HER FLOWERS ?
LET'S ALL STAND AND CHEER
THAT WE STILL HAVE THOSE FEMALE RAPPERS OVER THERE
WITHOUT HER "GENUINE" PRESENCE
THE GAME WOULD'VE BURNT DOWN TO THE GROUND
THAT'S HOW ONE FEELS RIGHT NOW
THE GAME NEEDS MORE LYRICISTS WITH HER PRESENCE
RATHER THAN JUST THOSE CONCERNED WITH "SHOCKING-OUT"
REMY MA PUTS -IN SO MUCH WORK
AND THAT'S FROM THE YEAR 1999 TO THE PRESENT DAY
SO ALL THOSE NON- CONCERNING HEADS ,GO AND DO YOU RESEARCH
IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT THOSE NICKI MINAJ IMITATORS FLOODING THE GAME
REMY MA HAS GOT ALL THAT LYRICAL STRENGTH
NOBODY CAN NOT TOUCH
SHE'S STILL REPRESENTING THE SAME TYPE OF VENT
AS WITH THE "COME UP"
I'VE BEEN LOVING HER STYLE,SINCE THE DAYS OF " ANTE UP"
NOTHING CHANGED
I'VE WATCHED HER GROW UP
WITH EVEN MORE INTELLIGENCE
WHILST CHICKS ARE NOT EVEN IN THEIR OWN LANE
FALLING-INTO THE PALMS OF NEGLIGENCE
CHICKS BE FORGETTING WHAT THE GAME IS FOR
YOU HAVE TO PLAY IT WITHOUT SELLING YOUR SOUL
LOTS OF ARTISTS GET THROWN
IT'S THEIR OWN FORM OF PUTTING SHOES ON THEIR SOLES
REMY MA'S INTUITION IS EXTENSIVELY SHARP

NOT A LOT OF CHICKS GOT THIS
WHAT CHICK DO YOU KNOW WHO CAN REALLY POUR OUT THEIR HEARTS,
AND REFRAINING FROM ALL THAT BUTT SHAKING BUSINESS?
ONLY REMY MA COULD
SHE STAYS TRUE TO WHAT HIP HOP IS REALLY ABOUT
NOBODY AIN'T AFFILIATING THEMSELVES ANYMORE WITH SPRAY CANS
THE ONLY GRAFFITI YOU'RE GOING TO SEE IS WHAT YOU SEE UNDERGROUND
BIG BOLD LETTERS
WHICH DEPICTS A MEANING
IT'S THE MUSIC ARTISTS WHO SHOULD BE CORRECTING THIS ERROR
PRAISING REMY WHEN SHE "SPITS" HER SONGS
KEEPING THAT ESSENCE STRONG

Neil Newcombe

Song of My Mother

My mother of loyalty to her family.
Of the work ethic, of high morality,
of being a creature of habit.
Of her contribution to defeating the Nazis.
Of being very much of her generation.
Of anachronism, technophobia and a touch of misanthropy.
Here is an instance of her technophobia:
one day she dusted the CD player when it was on -
pressed buttons and off it went.
She explained to me, in all innocence,
that she pressed several buttons to try to get it back on.
I duly clarified, with a hint of sarcasm,
"Mum, each button has a specific function!"
Somehow my mother's mistake on that day
causes me to remember her with even more affection.
An innocent and amusing error from long ago
seems to open the portals
and reservoirs of my love for my mother
often, during sessions of sweet silent thought, come pouring out.
Strange how a distant memory
can launch a sea of respect and
a now diminished, but still painful, grief.
Just as a broken bottle launches a ship.
A bottle breaks - just as the moment of death -
at 1:43am, Thursday 6/10/2011 - broke our 54 years and 10 months relationship.
It breaks - never to be mended!
A loved-one dies and he/she is gone forever.
Maybe onto a second life - maybe not?
The finality of death is as ruthless as the death of yesterday.
And tomorrow has not yet been born.
My mother of being wise and healthily cynical.
My mum of being good at needlecraft and an expert cook.
My mum of being a keen reader and a good wordsmith.

My mum of deserving credit for being married for 67 ½ years - because marriage is no easy matter.

My mother of being a good mother!

My mother of being an unsung heroine,
whose work and duty on earth are now done.

Buried next to my dad - her epitaph and wreaths
tell the world of the living she no longer breathes.

Olivia Walwyn

Lockdown Food

Thanks to the courier who brought all our stuff
driving, cruising through the morning rush
when the schools were back, always just about on time
with a cheery smile and prepared to while away a while –
a few minutes of friendly door-step chat –
enough outside to bring refreshing change to that
house we'd spent the last weeks, years within,
only venturing out for our allotted exercise regime –
usually a walk from our door.
No, there wasn't a lot to look forward to
except the regular delivery of little, varied treats –
something perhaps a little different for us to eat.
Ginger marmalade or bacon, ice cream.
It perked us up, we made it part of our routine –
a way to mark time's passing – every weekend
we knew it had come by this happy end:
a feast on Saturday – curry, chips or once
when we made a mistake, the basket was filled
with a stack of lamb shanks. Yes, we dined in style;
the best home dinners for a country mile!
So thanks a lot, yes, thanks to him –
the man who kept the good stuff coming.

Paul Maddocks

Not all heroes wear a cape

Not all heroes wear a cape
some could not even crush a grape
or put pants over their tights
but they will fight for Civil Rites

Not all heroes have a gun
but love a current bun
or hide behind a shield
to protect freedom they will not yield

Not all heroes wear a cape
but they are people we should ape
they just look like you and me
they like cake with their cup of tea

Not all heroes have super strength
but they will go to any length
to be kind and supportive
but they don't mind it being very exhaustive

Not all heroes wear a cape
for a better world they do make
they are everyday people
who do good deed and banish evil

Not all heroes wear a cape
(repeat from the beginning until you drop)

Penny McCulloch

Dear Children

Do not think I'm just a man of straw.
I stand here guarding pumpkins, squash
and apples. I can not know who wore
my clothes before, so no way am I posh!
I have no shoes to fit me, but my feet
are merely stubs. My irises are sapphires
cut from a cereal box, pressed on to perfect
circles of pearlescent rubbish. I'll greet you:
Salam, Hallo, Jambo, Bonjour, Salaam
through the smiling lips Ann drew for me.

You children had such fun
working well together, but you did not
notice Sue creeping in to spin
my straw heart into gold.

Note: During half-term, Carriers of Hope (a Coventry charity that supports refugees and asylum seekers) held a Scarecrow Party for the children and their mothers. The children made a scarecrow for the Carriers of Hope allotment in Earlsdon.

The staff and volunteers including the founder (Sue Sampson, retiring CEO) are unsung heroes and heroines.

Peter Longden

The Hero as Poet

Chooses words carefully for their meaning,
in rhythm and rhyme—bravely offering their insights,
their spotlights highlight thoughts and opinions
that matter to them, for and against—
a show, of course, the tour de force
putting the devastation of war to the fore
of poverty, climate change, the way politic,
of love, humour and the human spirit.
Not in the same essence as Sassoon—though death was all around
in pandemic years that locked down tears, with fears
still to find their way in a fragmented world.
Poet places pieces together to make sense of
the immense picture—the jigsaw might prove
more fun than the world it portrays;
yet Poet plots with empathy, courage, outstanding achievements, noble qualities,
the ability to choose the right words to suit the mood
of country in turmoil, or life in grip of strife.
Poem becomes the flags to wave—now, blue and yellow,
talk of entrenched heroes only known by what
Poet has shown in their poetic mix,
for themselves the expression of emotion,
for others to rally behind as mantra or song
sung or unsung its bravery is taken as read,
in poetry that salves the soul-reaching into its positive imagination
reaching out as a journal of yesterday's reckoning
once written or spoken or shared Poet has given all to the task,
removed the masque for Poem to take on their iconic role
as Hero keeping spirits up
prevent the world from being turned to shit.

Rebeckah Beale

Sister's Brother

Dropping to the floor, white as
a ghost, breathing is shallow, feeling
for a pulse, it isn't there,
in a flash the mind is panicked,
looking around the place, eyes filled with
fear, stay calm, down on the knees, remembering that
one advert, the lyrics fresh in the head,
clasping hands together, placing them upon
their chest, singing the song quietly,
'Ah Ah Ah Ah, staying alive' one pump,
two pump, three and four, working up a
sweat, like I haven't done before, arms ache,
and the knees hurt, and wondering if the
effects given, would really work, ambulance
arrived, but keep on pumping, their voices
lingering, but the words never heard, then being
told to stop, watching as they are taken away,
exhausted, not knowing if the hard work paid,
running inside the mind, all day as I worked,
wondering, praying, trying to stay occupied, then
back home, the cell phone rang, number
unknown, but answer with nerves, I say hello,
the voice on the other end, soft and too quiet, I
could tell she had been crying, waiting, the heart
sank, the atmosphere dim, until she spoke her next
words, then it wasn't so grim,
"I want to thank you, for what you did today,
You saved my husband's life;
I don't know what to truly say"
I smile as I tell this story, I tell it over
and over, even if people have heard it before,
I hear huffs and puffs, and some are a resister,
I don't really care, repeating it again and again,
after all I am the proud sister.

*This poem is based a true event.
The young man who saved their life, is Autistic.*

Rhianna Levi

Child, There is a Hero in You

Heroes are mastered alive in fast light motioned frames of children,
Sighting all for what it actually is, rejecting shrewdness and discriminative rain.
Napping in wild grass, befriending the loveliness sought in flowering pollen.
A loveliness that not many adults follow.

Closely think about the stories children tell,
And the playground rhymes hum to ease growing pain.
They're philosophers that we never realised we always needed.
Until magick in continuous smiles drag us back from the sliding cliff drop,
Away from the fearful brink.
Child, you remain a lasting miracle.

Saradha Krisnamoorthy

Unsung Heroine

Going out of her way,
Helping those in need,
Providing food parcels,
Entertaining Children,
She has immense strength,
She scarifies herself,
Putting her needs last,
For those that need help,
A Beautiful Person,
Who always has a smile on her face,
Who works so hard,
A great contributor to the society,
We thank her for her efforts,
Caroline Taylor
From Hope Community projects
Is an unsung Heroine
Whose efforts should never be overlooked.

Shanu Barclay

A Unique Unsung Hero (JH)

I met my hero a few years back,
And I truly felt taken aback,
I knew I had found a friend,
One on whom I could always depend.

He is a very well-respected man,
Who has no lack of loyal fans,
Well-known for his beguiling smile,
Always going that extra mile.

Famous for his working ethos and speed,
Contacting him is not an essential need,
He is a man who keeps his word,
And not distracted by tricks of man-eating birds!

Although 70 is his current age,
Even when provoked he shows no rage,
Athletically built like SILVESTER STALLONE,
He shows no fear when working alone.

All summers and winter my hero dons shorts,
Making me wonder what are his FORTES,
He is surely an unbelievable superman,
Doing a hundred plus or more deliveries when he can.

He has received many praises,
From HR and his various customer bases,
Also gets fed with tasty treats,
From which he never retreats.

My hero, I truly believe you were sent to Earth,
To give us mere mortals joy and mirth,
I hope you always remain kind and loving,
In this harsh world which can be harsh and unforgiving.

Simon Harrison

The Homeless

Being homeless is so difficult for many
Living day to day without a penny
People mocking them about something that's not even funny

Some are begging for food some for drugs
Painful from one day to the next
Nothing in their stomach nothing to digest
So many stories that they have to tell
Childrens homes, neglect that has had enormous effect
Trapped in a world of fear

Sleeping in the street from one place to the next
With stories we can only imagine

A mixture of men, women as well
Many stealing from shops for something to sell
Which just adds to their resume of hell

The decline of their mental state
And the public who don't understand and just hate

No wonder their feelings about the future are not great
Thank God for the organizations and the volunteers

They help reduce the anxiety and wipe away the tears
Night shelters for somewhere to sleep and take away those fears
Its these people who should get the pay rise, claps and the cheers

ONE LOVE

Sophie Jo

5pm voicenote

5pm voicenote: *how was it today?*

I thought of you lots, pal. I hope you're OK.

A pause, then a flurry: *I hate being new!*

My manager scares me! I'm so glad for you!

Next door in the kitchen, at number sixteen:
a home-made lasagne, then pricey ice cream.
The birthday girl said that she'd like that the most.
They eat it together. She opens the post.

A newspaper clipping from Nanny to Dan.
(Cause he doesn't read them, but Nanny's a fan.)
She'll see something mentioned: a piece about sport.
She'll head for the scissors. *'He'll like that,' I thought.*

And thirteen, he drove himself home in the wet.
He picked up the loo roll; he knew she'd forget.
And her face as he walked through the door made him beam.
My day was horrendous. / I know. We're a team.

The cat (number thirty)? He needs to be fed.
His owners? In Cornwall. His neighbour? Old Ted.
And Ted hobbles over, twice daily, with keys,
despite the small fact that this cat makes him sneeze.

An ordinary road, here. An everyday street.
The houses that line it are red-brick repeat.
But behind all the windows and all of the doors
are stories of sweetness. Monopoly scores,
books read loud before bedtime, and hugs after showers.
Vases on windowsills filled up with flowers.
The world is ferocious. That's true – so are we.
When we wake up tomorrow, we'll prove it. You'll see.

Tim Cleal

Rosie

You're like the sun as it sashays through my grey great unwashed
net curtains. you're like Flora emanating around the room and
settling on the antimacassar like star dust
you sound like sunshine even when you're reporting on the rain in
Runcorn or the cats and dogs in Bucharest, the drowned cattery in
Cleckheaton, the natty curtains in Kiev
you've shone a light on the Only Fans stars of Afghanistan, the un-
vaxxed Ouighar in Wuhan, the kiddy winks in Sandy Hook,
the burning orphanage in Ingle Nook, the munchkins of Myanmar,
the marmosets of Madagas - car.
You've held a candle to Richard Branstone's pickled whiz bangs,
Elon's wonderful worn-out wrinkle, the merry twinkle in
Vlad Putin's eye, old Joe Biden's pregnant pauses Just
Stop Breathing's crackpot causes
you've delighted in the blown-out windows in the White House john,
the blown kisses of the black hand gangsters - going gone -
the going grey gangsters of grey Westminster,
the poisoned pie murders of Lower Ginster, the home run misses
of the Massachusetts Monsters
and the kiss goodbyes as the bomb doors open
You're there with the jazz hands, the pretty please, the wide blue
eyes and the alleluia views -
the chuckle in the mortuary, the goody goody tutti fruity chews
you've got the dead opposite of the blues
I want to be here when you report on the second coming of Jesus
Good News

Trish Page

Guernica

The Spanish civil war took a brutal turn
When Franco gave Hitler permission to bomb and burn
A marketplace with no strategic value.
That medieval town of Guernica

Picasso was incensed, picked up his brush
And in five weeks put the melee on canvas.
Screaming figures and mangled bodies in black and white
Those who once lived in that medieval town of Guernica.

So bleak, harsh, the cruelty, he expresses it well
Civilians dying, burning human flesh such an acrid smell.
Hundreds of innocent civilians killed on that fateful day
In that medieval town of Guernica

What does the bull symbolise with his dagger like tongue?
He will normally rampage with a crazed excitement
Is it fascism marching in towns and countries?
Starting with that medieval town of Guernica

Picasso's painting of Guernica's monstrosity,
Became a symbol of the horrifying atrocity,
An embittered cry against this vacancy of humanity

Positive Images is Coventry's Diversity Festival and has been running for 29 years.

Unsung Heroines and Heroes celebrates the 2022 Coventry Peace Festival and reflects the diversity and unity of the different communities in the city. The Poetry Competition was held during October 2022 and included the reading of the entries and the awarding of prizes to the winners at the Methodist Central Hall in Coventry on Saturday 19th November 2022. The competition was designed to find poems from across the United Kingdom and beyond that embodied the theme of Unsung Heroines and Heroes.

The Positive Images Festival will continue to promote peace, harmony and diversity in Coventry and will again organise a fantastic programme of Free events and activities from 13th June to the 8th July 2023.

We hope that readers of this booklet will enjoy and be inspired by these poems of hope and love.

www.positiveimagesfestival.co.uk

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