

**STAM!**  
shots in  
the dark

ferggus

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# Introduction

This is a book of original poetry, every one of which was performed during 2007/2008. All but one of them was performed in Sydney. I've also included several works by poets I admire.

I always want to make my poetry as accessible as possible. Like all poets, it usually made immediate and obvious sense to me, but I want the reader to really get it - follow not only what was written on the page, but also the more complex sentiment and emotion behind it. I felt the only way I could be sure was to perform them in front of an audience. That way I'd get an immediate and definite reaction. I might not like the response, but that wouldn't matter.

I already knew some of my stuff would not work in public. Some of it is very personal, or so complex, that it needs a few reads and plenty of time to digest. There's a place for that stuff too and I don't want to dumb it down. It's like kids; some are an open book, whilst others take a little more time to appreciate.

My idea was to, over a one year period, give a single performance of the most accessible poems I'd written. Whichever ones connected with an audience I'd include in the book. I thought it would be hard to be objective, but it soon became clear which ones worked and which sunk like a bomb. I knew I'd have to edit them as I went along to get the audience to engage more quickly with the ideas and create the strongest reaction I could. But it made them really tight and lean, so I enjoyed the rigour of that.

I'd never performed any of my poetry in public before. I'd never got up on a stage since high school. So it was with a mixture of excitement and fear that I contemplated what I was going to do. A friend had told me about a new phenomenon that had started in the US. Poetry slams, which started in Chicago, create a loose structure for poets to perform their work to an audience. This seemed like the perfect vehicle.

The usual venues for slams are in a back room of a hotel; it's never a front of house thing. Each competitor has a set period of time (usually 2 minutes) to recite by heart, or read, an original piece. An MC manages the event. Judges, around 5, are randomly picked from the audience. The first slam I went to, the MC threw coloured condoms and whoever caught one was elected. It's that random.

This randomness usually works quite well, though I rarely saw the judges accurately reflect the overall mood of the audience. And it didn't work too well if one of the performers had a lot of friends along. At least one friend, sometimes more, would manage to get elected judge. As I didn't care if I won the comp this didn't bother me – I was more interested in the immediate reaction of the audience. There were numerous times when I got a great spontaneous reaction from the audience but the judges didn't rate my performance or connect with the poem. And there were an equal number of times when neither of them liked my performance. There were many times I got a negative reaction but so long as I was pushing someone off the perch of complacence I was happy.

Of all the poems included there's only one which I know the audience really didn't get the night I performed it. I thought about leaving it out,

but a couple of weeks later, at another slam, one of the performers told me he'd really liked that poem, so I've kept it in. It's called "Rip It".

Once I'd started performing, I got to know some of the other poets. It also became apparent that not only a strong underground scene flourished, but, and it was only later on I realised, this year something special was happening. By chance I'd caught the pinnacle and last fling of a slam scene that had been going for a while in Sydney and was about to die an unobtrusive death, or at least go in to hibernation for a while.

Why this happened I don't know, but certainly by 2008 the mood was very different from when I'd started. Sure the audiences still wanted to see the headliners but they were no longer interested in hearing from the slammers; the gate crashers to the party - extroverts overly indulged as children; those with a hidden message, a secret wisdom they wanted to share or reveal; and the queue that stretched out the door of those whose soul could no longer remain silent. I stopped going by mid 2008 so I don't know if the scene's been revived. I run a google every so often and it doesn't seem like there's much happening (in 2010). I guess you have to be there to be sure.

After I appreciated what was going on, and meeting some of the out there characters this scene throws up, I decided to include a snapshot of the slam scene in Sydney, London and Auckland. I don't know much about the scene in UK and NZ as they were flying visits, but during that year in Sydney there was an energy, excitement and flowering of original poetry and performances. However brief, it was great to be a part of it, on the inside, and experience the generosity of many of the performers.

So along with my own stuff I've included verse by a few slam performers I came across. There's also some background about each of the performers, as they're all interesting people on and off the stage. There's many more I might have included, but I've only selected the ones that stood out for me, either as an example of a great performer, or for something in the poem itself.

Through the book you'll come across reference to a national poetry slam competition. It's not a central theme for this book, though it might have been if it have meant more to me than it did. However for many of the poets around the scene it was, or became, important for them. This is a great event which outlets the dreams of people of all ages from the remotest parts of Australia. The competition culminates in a final at the Sydney Opera House in November of each year.

The words are interspersed with visuals. Flyers along with photos of performers and venues. I hope it eases the eye, rests the brain and provides another layer to illustrate what was going on during that magical year.

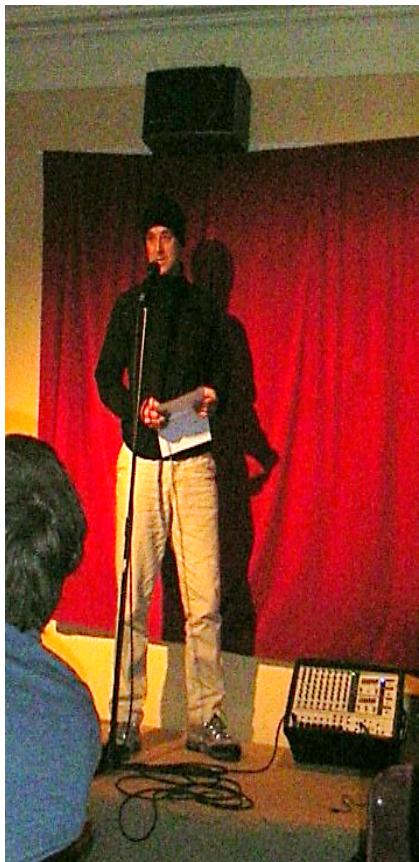
All of the poets kindly agreed to include their work for free, which as much as anything reminds me of their natural kindness and open heartedness.

## **How can we Lose?**

**Mars Hill Café 25 May 2007**

*Mars Hill Cafe is on the cafe strip in Parramatta. Downstairs is the cafe; upstairs a full on performance space which takes around a hundred people. They have a regular poetry night as well as bands and short film shows.*

*This was my first ever performance; a slam with I think a prize of \$250.00. An Arabic guy with his interpreter won. It wasn't so much the poem as the energy between the poet and the translation. They were in complete synch; somehow it added drama. I wasn't even thinking about winning the prize; I'd already won by getting up on the stage. It's a great venue when crowded; it was packed with more than a hundred people that night.*



*It was also the first night I saw Andy perform. He did "The Chicken". I wanted to include it in this book but he's lost the poem and he couldn't remember it. He's pretty fucked so this didn't surprise me. Hard to sum up but it's a crazy Acid Trip poetic play about this guy who's off his face and finds himself in the middle of the road playing chicken with the cars.*

*It moves between fuelled fearlessness to self realisation of his weakness and insignificance. How alone and close to the bottom he is.*

*Andy performed to the max, rolling around the stage acting out the poem, or just standing there, in the stage spotlight like he's in the middle of the road staring down the cars with their lights on him. The audience was crying with laughter.*

*Andy is a one off. He likes to push the boundaries and doesn't give a fuck what any one thinks. We connected straight away, and I always looked forward to hearing him perform. He never reads; it was always a performance and he usually improvised. Sometimes he totally forgets the words. But this gives an edge to everything he does. I always feel there's nothing there for him to lose. What more can you ask of a performer.*

## How can we lose

How can we lose what we never owned?

A child

For which we hold a flimsy lease

On love, and understanding.

A friend we never loved enough,

Who would fail our subtle expectations,

So we could walk away unhurt, and disappointed,

Our barbs still glinting on each solitary dawn.

Those ideas we claim our own, but never were,

Sprung unheeded from a Universal Knowledge,

Or those gifts with which we are uniquely born,

From which our best emerge.

Crimson juices of our creativity

Which crash like waves upon a stagnant pool

To stir our dormant feelings into passion,

And our sharpest insight into Spectral Secrets.

Those faint winds of instinct,

That of our link to distant planets,

And a man long dead

Yet still revered.

Nor possessions, which succour our inferiority,  
Chain us to the floor,  
And paper over yawning cracks  
In the fake flaking self we would present like debutants at court.

Or this land our forbears fenced and stake as theirs,  
Is not their land,  
For with what currency could they have earned the right  
To claim it as their own.

And not those traits we think our best,  
Which merely shout the loudest,  
We should listen for the soft clear voice  
Of our Soul: this our sole possession.

Not coloured by the numbers of someone else's choosing,  
To reflect their own Fool's Gold reflected image,  
So that, goes unnoticed, is the paper lantern through which  
The murky light of our true selves shines out.

Should we embrace all that we are,  
Then Brutus walks the stage,  
At our most provocative  
Who wouldn't think we could endure, and claim our triumphs?

And when we love ourselves enough  
We may become our most inspired thought,  
Our most prudent gamble,  
And we the vessel of its articulation.

But perhaps not freed men,  
For that takes  
The courage of indecent abandon,  
Which few may claim.

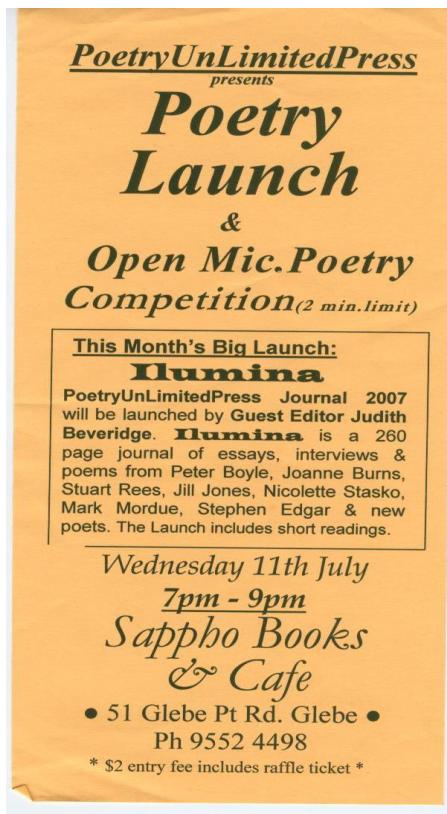
A partner, so often thought our chattel,  
Is just an interlude in life's solitary journey,  
But we do not own her, and nor she us,  
Though many may have tried.

Even our life sometimes seems not our own,  
Jostled in this crowded room,  
Nor our body, a sack of filth we indulge beyond reason,  
Our ill fit companion, we sometimes wish we could abandon.

Dust made mud, until with age it dries, wrinkles, shrivels,  
In life our thoughts, our feelings, are all we ever truly owned,  
But death *is* ours to own,  
Alone.

# Nothing Matters

## Sappho's Café (13 June 2007)



*Most of the poets that read at this venue are academic; really into the poem with little concern for performance. This is the great divide in the poetry scene.*

*The academics have cornered the published market, which has killed it because most of their stuff is dry, too clever, sterile, or trying too hard. Middle aged (in mind) with no interesting life experience or challenging ideas. By contrast the slammers are angry, don't give a fuck, and a few are just plain crazy.*

*I heard a few academics that went against the grain but it's a fair generalisation. How the fuck did this situation come about?*

*But for some reason I liked the venue. The cafe's at the back of a bookshop. It has a good atmosphere. The MC is a neurotic spinster who has a fine tuned antennae for insincerity. She caught me out one night later on, but also she missed the genuine concern I had for her.*

*I really enjoyed doing this poem. I turned up late, came on almost straight away and then disappeared. I was in a don't give a fuck mood and it came out in a Scottish voice.. It went down well with the crowd.*

*Poems have a natural voice that emerges only when I read it aloud – many of the more emotional or emotive poetry comes out with a strong Celtic accent that I can't and don't want to mask.*

*This was the first time I heard Matt Moore, doing one of his dry as vinegar pieces. He was the standout for me. I wasn't into any of the other stuff read that night.*

# Nothing Matters

Nothing that we do in this life matters,  
We're thinking all along how we're special,  
When in cosmic terms,  
Fuck, in any terms, we're just a speck of dust!

Bet you thought we're more than that,  
Not on your fucking life, Cosmic Baby,  
We're nothing  
When the money's being counted.

But if you're a Speck why you'll feel great!  
For we've no need to prove to anyone  
How fucking "IT" we are,  
Cos Specks don't have expectations.

Just snugged up against another Speck  
And together we might be a nug of gold,  
Or then again:  
A lump of shite!

What do I do?  
I'm so gormless I wouldn't know,  
Tell me Cosmo when you've got the time,  
I can wait, I'm just a Speck remember.

We'd always have some laughs for sure,  
Though no one would like us if we're dog shit  
Ooh the stink – imagine all those turned up noses!  
But us no fuck all Specks, we'd just be pissing with our mates.

But what if we are that shiny nugget?  
Girls all drooling, guys just wanting it for power,  
From us, the little specks of yellow  
How foolish that such things can change a lifetime meant for good.

Turned to envy, greed and jealousy,  
For a Speck – what a fucking waste.  
But we wouldn't care,  
We're just tipping back, just being a Speck: the audience of our influence.

Another time I'd be a Speck in space,  
My life a drifting loneliness across a timeless void,  
Seeing planets, why fucking Universes, come and go,  
Everything that happened in the history of Man.

When Dinosaurs had roamed the Earth,  
And I was there when Jesus lied,  
And I know what really happened when Allah shed the blood of Infidels,  
And Buddha got all his Answers.

What about a Speck of dynamite,  
The terror boys would love us,  
Just light the fuse, step back and ...  
Fuck .... we're all Specks.

All One – no us, no them,  
So now there's no one to pick a fight with,  
Maybe that's what they meant when someone said  
There's times when good can only come from bad.

Or maybe I'd be a Speck upon her breast: now that's my idea of heaven,  
She'd touch me to excite herself,  
I'd hear her moaning fingers roaming  
Shit I'd be aching, and she'd be sweating.

Me, your little Speck,  
I'd go wherever, do whatever, baby.  
But remember, Specks don't have to think  
Not ma job, no worries me.

Once I'd been a Speck upon a moulding corpse,  
The worms on riot to get a taste of me,  
Then I was turned into something new,  
I'm LIFE.

## **Wishlist ( by Matt Moore)**

**Here's what Matt wrote  
about himself:**

"Matt Moore writes and performs his own novels, movies, and play cycles in less than 2 minutes. Due to a congenital deformity, his reach exceeds his grasp."



***Matt Moore***

### **Wishlist**

Maybe I did join Al Qaeda for the chicks:  
It's so hard to meet a nice girl these days,  
And it's not because I spend my spare time in brothels, Mother.

The man I met at the retreat told me about 72 virgins:  
Pure, chaste, blessed by Allah (May His Name Be Praised),  
Like 72 Pamela Andersons running in slow motion  
Across the Baywatch Beach of Paradise,  
Not like the sluts & whores who don't return My calls & texts  
And special poems written in pigeons' blood.

The mountains are remote and sacred  
And I have grown a holy beard like the prophet  
(Peace Be Upon Him)  
Only it has flecks of orange and a patch under my left ear that won't  
grow.

I sometimes think the other Holy Warriors of Allah

(May His Name Be Praised)

Laugh at me behind my back.

But they mostly pick on Ibrahim who wears glasses

And comes from Tajikistan.

It is cold here in the mountains and we pray five times a day.

When my head is against the mat,

I shut my eyes tight and try not to think of home:

In the afternoon, I carry a gun so I must be important.

The gun oil sticks to my clothes; smudges my skin into pimples.

Sometimes my hands are too numb to load my rifle,

Last week I found out the smell of napalm in the morning

Makes me want to vomit.

I wonder if this is truly the Will of Allah

(May His Name Be Praised):

Ah, I must remember that the mountains

Are filled with tempters & demons.

They said I could not go for flight training,

That my claustrophobia was a liability.

They would not send me to Indonesia or back to Europe.

My hands are decorated with no infidel's blood:

I am to be chosen, when it is Allah's will!

(May His Name Be Praised).

## ***Death Ran Swiftly***

### ***Parakeet Café, Blue Mountains (16 June 2007)***

*I only went to this venue once. It was, maybe still is, for reading original or someone else's poems.*

*There was a farmer reciting by heart these original poems that all revolved around sex. And an old woman with some great rhyming comedic poems – these were originals. I kept coming up on the little stage in the corner of the cafe straight after her. Reading my stuff straight after her it felt heavy and morbid. I didn't mind, I figured for the audience it provided a good contrast with her lighter verse.*

*The audience was just whoever was having a coffee at the time. A tired looking mother with a kid running riot whilst another slept in the pram. People coming in quickly to buy a takeaway coffee and stopping either in surprise or because something said had caught their imagination. An old lady with a friend, sitting back in an armchair. She was in to my stuff, like it really pulled a chord for her. That was great and made it all worthwhile.*

***I performed two poems that day: Death Ran swiftly at my Side; Where I come From.***

## Death ran swiftly

Death ran swiftly at my side,  
His coat tails flapping in the evening breeze,  
A fusty smell visible about him.

A head stripped of flesh; eyes black holes in which to lose  
Myself, my mind:  
My meaning of the cultivated man.

A raucous laugh escaped him as I ineptly tried to run him out,  
And then slowed on realising I'd never distance myself from Death,  
And so I dawdled at Death's side.

My heart no longer leaping, a gazelle in flight,  
I pondered death, and all its meanings,  
Lingered on each thought: old friends, over coffees at an inner city café.

When I might have run yelping, I did not,  
I must oblige, attentive at this interview with Death,  
What might I learn of life?

Could I have taken his bony hand in mine?  
Not then, for we'd hardly met, and I'm wary of all strangers,  
Yet now, I could, if we meet again before my time.

Why not?  
He is the hunchback with the gracious heart,  
The vulture, driven to his prey by instinct.

The cold assassin, a silently drawn and driven knife,  
The crazed killer, fated since before his birth  
To find peace only when blood smeared.

Or the speeding fin, to cut with sawing teeth,  
The iconic mark of the shark:  
Death's figure is never pretty, is it?

But he was not here for me this night,  
I had stumbled on another's Death Waltz.  
At the headland where a black man sat with his wife and their dead son.

Onlookers to the water's flow incessant,  
Trees on the far bank silhouetted,  
A light upon a vessel moored at the cliff's lee.

Instinctively they'd sought protection there,  
Whilst, oblivious,  
The Ghost of Death hovered over them.

The man cried loud, cried long past the day break,  
The woman sighed deeply, with more intent,  
More understanding of death's meaning.

And her tears fell upon the still boy's face,  
She could not restrain a swiftly passing thought  
That her tears might wake him.

They might, if and only if there was a constant god,  
A compassionate god,  
And an irrational god.

For why save him, if not all the undeserved of death?  
But the boy could not wake, already was he gone,  
Leaving behind grief dissipating like ripples from a cast stone.

Until the man walked away alone,  
Apart from his woman,  
Never since was he fully where his body occupied its space.

Even as he slept the dream would splinter,  
And a fragment cast a light upon his long remembered son,  
He wondered, did his son take the hand of death with wilful truculence?

A foolish prank all boys will one day risk,  
That, by a different fortune, would be nothing more  
Than pain, a spurt of blood, or the sweetest sleep,  
To wake no longer as a boy but at the fringe of manhood.

But the man would never see his boy  
Upon that fateful walk he once took,  
When his youth broke upon the Sacred Manhood Stone.

Of wisdom, courage, and independence,  
His stride lengthen,  
His voice deepen and embolden.

His body grow,  
And women fear his wrath,  
Whilst he held his gaze warily upon the world.

No lord has ever loved his estate as that desperate wanderer,  
Who wished now to lay beneath the wizened tree,  
A folly to that barren land he called his home.

And so he sought this place once more,  
With or without her,  
But she came, from duty, and love.

And hoping that her heart might be softened  
By the tread of feet upon the dry red soil,  
By the cicadas hum that drowns all thought, all words.

Or by the forlorn cry of a native bird  
Carried by the hot wind across the walled valley,  
Or the rush of water over sandstone, an oasis of cool air,  
Where the giant ferns bow, and the light turns bottle glass green,

All these things might soothe her heart,  
So she might walk again with men,  
And not apart.

## Where I am from

Where I am from I know a wall,  
Its colour any time of year, its warmth on any given day,  
it lies past the village well; women washing clothes,  
As every day collecting water for the toil of day,  
Preparing for the combat of the night,  
Oh! spare this body from its futile pain.

Talk, of the unfolding day,  
And thoughts upmost in our minds,  
Of deaths long past,  
Wrongs we failed to right, blind fakirs,  
But smiles return when we think of the foolish things we saw,  
By ourselves or some clown, the flameout centre of attraction.

And it was the same this year past,  
I walked this road, saw a farmer beat his cow,  
And there he is again,  
A stuck expression on his face, thwart dreams fuelled,  
His son cowered;  
Ignorant of a meaner world.

A place where dreams are shattered,  
Not this imperceptible abandon as a toy unwinds its coil,  
Where death meets us at the door this day, unbidden,  
Barely time to reflect upon our dreams now dirt bound,  
Trodden unintentionally by my companions,  
Fellow travellers on this well worn road.

Home,  
Here I know my place, my worth, rocklike,  
Our strength's a broad estate,  
Unassailed by the raucous laughter of the city bummers,  
Their home which ever corner finds them resting  
As the sun goes down.

A bottle in their hands,  
How like a baby we return  
When life turns hard against us,  
Could I abuse them,  
Make their life more bitter?  
Even when they ridicule my clothes, my speech.

In our village are we not all like me?  
So their words float past me as a river to the sea of thoughtless meaning,  
If we wished, together, we could beat anyone,  
And would if our joint needs be,  
Hesitation never caught us when it really mattered,  
So in the city I walk proud, ambassador for all my people.

And imagine, once home,  
Sitting round the fire,  
Faces toward me turned,  
Expectant, nervous young at our feet,  
Bold a second later, once we'd laughed and they knew it safe,  
As I recounted sorties.

About the place out there which turns upon a different axis,  
But could as well be gone,  
A pyromanic blaze implode,  
For all the difference it made to the turning of our world,  
This life we've led since the mists parted,  
And will lead, long past my death.

The world beyond the village bounds matters not to me,  
As a tourniquet upon an arm,  
This extremity might gangrene,  
But it makes no difference to the pumping  
Of the heart  
That drip feeds life and breath to us.

So when she'd no money,  
Her husband not long dead,  
And mouths yet to feed,  
We will work –  
A day, a week, or more,  
Until she has a room filled to the roof with yellow corn.

A bridge across poverty  
Which all of us must make,  
She repaid the unspoken debt  
With toil for months on,  
We each knew our duty,  
As if the head man had commanded us.

Unspoken it was nulled one dark day in May,  
As rains fell, as in May they always do,  
The rivers flood, streams formed, clothes drenched, the children play,  
Rafts disintegrate on rocks, bodies flung waterward,  
Or onto muddy banks,  
With cries of laughter; cries of pain.

Sounding little different  
To my own voice when I too built a raft,  
Crashed it on those same rocks,  
Where the blood of my friend  
Painted those indifferent rocks a vivid red,  
As life pulsed slowly out of him.

It didn't stop us playing,  
We soon forgot, not him, but danger,  
Our children never heard his name, unless they too bled,  
Then we were reminded, and we talked of him,  
He lived again -  
A short while as we recount his exploits.

Recalled the things he said, profound and cruel,  
Speculated what he might have done with life,  
Which girl he might have taken as his wife,  
What kind of man would he become,  
And what connected us to him  
And all within this village.

For are we not all parts of a body larger than ourselves?  
Would I not suffer if my hand lay useless at the wrist,  
Could no longer feed my mouth;  
Defend myself, or earn a livelihood,  
Would we not then protect  
And accommodate such weakness?

In the same way must we defend our weaker brethren from assault,  
Nurture those that fall to sickness,  
Or betray us out of cowardice,  
Care for young and old alike, be they family or not,  
Understand the weakness in us,  
And how best to mask it.

My house, my father's house, from the year it was complete,  
It is hearth, the village sanctuary; the rest, who cares!  
I work in a field and I know the texture of the soil,  
What it will grow, where weeds will form,  
Where the plough will break its blade  
On the rocks with purple streaks.

And which other fields I will labour through my working years,  
For myself or neighbour  
Who has struggled side by me,  
To toil and bear fruit from this patch is our obligation,  
As it was and will be,  
Until one of us gives in.

I am every person in this town,  
That ever was,  
Or will be,  
Aware of all their weakness, dreams and fears,  
What makes them laugh,  
And cry when they hear a certain sound.

Why on a day in late December  
They will drink until the next day brushes over them,  
Why the man we call the strongest walks head bowed,  
And his wife not show here face for days thereafter,  
We know each other's shame and glory,  
And we bear them both.

I carry myself with the strength of all my people in me,  
It makes us invincible against a single man lost in the city,  
He was drawn from a place like ours,  
But now the bonds lie tattered,  
At first he yelled for joy at the freedom of no past  
Or duties mounting as a debt if left undone.

But now he walks alone, haunted by unseen spectres,  
Eyes seek connection with any wandering stranger,  
Up against another man he is merely arms and legs  
And whatever courage he can foster,  
He may pass a million people,  
Yet never see familiar faces.

He'll hear a voice that triggers memories  
Rewinding him to that security he once had,  
His work now - just that,  
With no personal meaning to it,  
And he no part  
Of some design we understand instinctively.

How will this city man find love that lasts his lifetime,  
That gives him peace, and makes him greater than himself,  
How can he, if he knows not where she is from,  
Her family, her land and what it means to her,  
Her hopes and needs,  
A deep resourceful current.

No, he could not,  
He'll merely get a glimpse  
And pile on assumptions,  
So she drifts further from who he thinks she is,  
What can the outcome be of this misunderstanding  
*That breaches wider every day?*

## **How Fortunate are We?**

### ***The Last Bastion of Civilization (20 June 2007)***

*This was the last show this crowd put on. I wish I'd known about them earlier because some of the performers were fucking unbelievable.*

*This old queen let these kids use his antique store once a month. All his clutter got stuffed over in the corner and they'd put up the lighting and minimalist props. There were a couple of hundred people at the venue and it was wall to wall. The slam was more of an open mic event tacked onto the end of the show.*

*The show kicked off with a poet; I thought he was crap except for one he did. I knew I could do better. A short play followed which I didn't get. There was a great singer; she didn't look much but she had the voice of an angel which transformed her face when she opened her mouth and let lose in song.*

*I saw Wednesday Kennedy for the first time at this show. She looked like an over the hill hooker.*

*And the way she moved her body repulsed me, yet at the same time I could imagine her ten years before parting the crowds with her oozing sexuality. Brazen as only as a Sydney girl can be.*



*She did her own stuff which was OK, then jazzed to a recording of a Lionel Fogerty poem with some cool music behind it. The lighting helped. I remember thinking, shit this chick is the real thing, and I don't feel like the real thing at all!*

*This was also the first time I'd see Miles Merrill perform, though I'd met him at the Opera House once at a show by a performance poet from the US. I wasn't that impressed with the performance this evening by Miles, though his ease and confidence was something I admired.*

*I came on after this Spanish guy did this beautiful poem in Spanish – “Bese Me” (Kiss Me) – then fucked it up by doing it in English. It was so banal in English; so bad I'm still not sure if it was a wind up.*

*It was totally silent as I walked out in front of the crowd. I couldn't get the mike up high enough so I had to crouch a bit and my legs were shaking; I was so nervous I could hardly breathe but I wanted it to be real so I put a lot of emotion into this poem. And it is a great poem, it carries itself along. For some reason I paused longer than usual between each verse. You could hear a pin drop. When I finally finished there was silence for a moment then someone wolfed and everyone clapped. There was this big sigh and sense of release ripple through the crowd. Great feeling.*

*The poem itself is about two real women – the first was a Nepali girl, maybe twelve or so, who'd had to become a prostitute to survive. I'd interviewed her for a film and can never forget her. The other woman was killed on a construction site I was working on in Iraq. I didn't see her killed – she was stabbed to death by an uncle because she'd dated (not fucked, just been seen with) someone she shouldn't have been with. The murder took place on the one day in the year when sharia law was permitted. The other characters are emblematic*

## **How fortunate are we**

**How fortunate are we:**

At night we have a bed to rest upon,  
Safe and warmed with our family around us.

But there's a girl amongst us who dreads the night,  
She lives on the street because her father would have killed her,  
She dreads the night because she has no shelter.

She dreads the night because she has no food,  
She dreads the night  
Because one of them will fuck her.

At each day's beginning she has nothing to her name,  
At each day's end  
She still has nothing.

The boys protect her from the other gangs, so they possess her body,  
She sniffs Dendrite to fog her mind,  
So she does not recall what happened to her body in the night.

How fortunate are we to work, and have an education,  
But we know a woman's son,  
And he will never work.

Lounged at every street of every city in the world.  
For there is no purpose to his life,  
No future to inspire him.

They are an army waiting for the call from clever salesmen,  
Selling Purpose, selling Courage, selling Wisdom, selling Pride  
Selling what all young men want, their Manhood.

Called to arms they will believe each word their leader utters,  
He has inspired them, they'll follow him to death:  
For there is no other way to die, if we've forgone reason.

How fortunate are we to live in temperate lands,  
For there is a girl amongst us who lives in a place  
Where seas have turned to sand.

Bound by men's convention, she is a slave to every man  
Where he may kill in the name of god and be a hero,  
Where he may adulterate a woman, and his friends will merely laugh.

Whilst she will be stoned to death,  
Unclean Pariah,  
Men's Weakness.

She cannot walk freely down the street,  
Bound by the walls of her home  
That become a prison when she begins to bleed.

She will receive no education worthy of her mind,  
She cannot wear  
The gaily colored clothes she weaves.

For women all around the world: your mother, your wife,  
She was a prisoner  
From the day they found a cunt between her legs.

***Children of Israel  
Slam Competition  
Carrington Hotel, Blue Mountains (21 June 2007)***

*This event was one of the first of the Sydney heats for The Australian National Poetry Slam which would have its finals in November.*



*The Carrington is a famous Victorian era masterpiece and we did the slam in The Grand Ballroom! I'd planned to do "Nothing Matters" but I couldn't do it - too coarse, not with all the kids around, and it was as a big social, family occasion.*

*A big event in The Mountains. The old fella I'd performed with at The Parakeet was there. He*

*looked out of place.*

*There was also a crazy guy dressed up as a crocodile pushing some political message. But you couldn't hear what he was saying through the headpiece with this massive crocodile snout. Every one was falling about as he got more angry.*

*I did this poem instead of the one I'd originally planned. This was a lesson I never forgot – if it was my first time at a venue I'd always have a backup. The stuff I had available on the night was totally out of place.*

*But it's a great poem. It's inspired by a meeting with an Israeli guy in a Buddhist teaching centre in Dharamshala, India. He had been in the Israeli special forces and seen many of his close friends killed in battle. He saw himself living their lives vicariously through his own. A duty, a debt, an honor.*

## **Children of Israel**

My friend, you have many lives to lead  
For your dead men at arms,  
Live then for all of them, those Children of Israel,  
Live a crowded life, full of their dreams and hopes unrealized.

Learn wisdom to unravel life's confusion,  
Which they never gained, and so they drifted  
Unsure, or over certain,  
Led down to nowhere ends.

The reason for their life was never clear to them,  
Or reasons for their killing men they'd never known,  
Or why  
They too were in the cross hair of another man's gun.

Their life and death was just the consequence of someone's war,  
They were an instrument of war,  
Like all their brother warriors,  
Yet they may always claim youth.

Once revelling in their bodies strong, burned by the sun,  
The chorus of a song upon their lips,  
Laughter in their voices - lion cubs at play,  
Why did they so conceal their generous hearts?

May you, in your wandering, find the peace they never had,  
Nor their parents, bound by their past in fear, as victims,  
A life of cowardice, flight and ignominy,  
Which should not be forgotten, Children of Israel.

But leave it there, accept what you cannot change,  
It may come to pass again; face it then as heroes,  
The while, put your hand upon the wheel of conflict,  
Cease its turning, at least until you've reason why it should turn again.

You my friend live then, see with their eyes,  
All the places in the world they never went,  
Smell the fragrant bloom of some tropic paradise,  
Feel, with their hearts, the pain of loss, the joy of love.

Love the women they were destined never meet,  
May your heart race with fear,  
Or at the soft sound of a woman's voice,  
Whilst their hearts are forever still.

Hold their fading picture in your hand,  
As you rest the other on your daughter's head,  
Carry them to old age, and set them down at death,  
You may then claim a full life, full of your men at arms.

Through you their lives are now complete,  
Not one of those weary tragedies of life cut short,  
May they then rest in peace beside you,  
Replete of all the vagaries and victories of life.

## Trample Kids....

### **Brett Whiteley Studio (24 June 2007)**



***Brett Whiteley Studio, Kings Cross***

*There's something about this venue that captured my imagination and released my inhibitions. I felt Brett Whitley there, pissing himself at all the pretension. The first time I performed here I went early and spent an hour looking at Brett's paintings. He's probably Australia's best known modern painter, who died of an overdose in the 90's. It was good inspiration, made me feel I could do anything and get away with it, which is what I needed for this poem.*

*The MC is from the academic school so it's not a slam but I've heard a few good performers here. An old guy, who used to be a famous actor, did one about a jockey, and he got right in to it and pulled me in. This was also the first time I heard this regular performer, a real woman hater, and he couldn't keep it out of his poems. I still don't know if it was good that he got it out, or did it fuel his hatred by the audience's tolerance. He appeared a few times and then disappeared off the scene.*

*My poem's a ribald one that comes out in a bog irish accent and a lilting rhythm I can't wait to get in to. It's about the freedom and futility of peasant life a few hundred years ago. This still has echoes for me today - there's no expectations when your at the bottom of the barrel, and there's a wisdom ingrained like the dirt on your hands that can never be taught. I like the language and the don't give a fuck attitude of it. I feel great when I perform it, another person, but still connected by the words and ideas.*

## Trample Kids....

I'll trample on the kids and watch them scatter,  
Chooks in all directions, squawking, hopping,  
Run to mother blubbing,  
Don't mind me, I'm just your da - with feelings too.

You little bastard have a thought for me,  
They never will, but don't blame them yet,  
They're free to love and fight,  
An open face all wanting answers.

Let's have it then,  
Your best shot - defeat me!  
Christ they get you every time.  
Who knows the answer any road?

The worry is they'll never need to know it,  
Except how much it costs to buy a bag o' chips,  
I'd like to know, and they should too,  
But school's for wasting, time, or any other thing that matters.

Its just there to make them little clones, drones, cone-heads,  
And when they've flown, an empty head is all they'll have to show,  
A bag o' chips is all they'll ever get to eat.  
The jobs, they're scarce and brains they've none for work.

All filled with crap they'll never use,  
Two hundred years ago, with money in their pockets, maybe,  
To fart and fuck around and talk in riddles  
To amuse, confuse the inbred Lords.

But its no use to my trudging offspring,  
No pretty pirouettes and graceful bows for them,  
It's a kick up the arse and out these wailing walls,  
Get on your bike and make a quid or die.

In a factory, machine life,  
Your pinnacle a thousand widgets turned out by your labour,  
We'd not wasted dreaming, you're just a cog in someone's wheel,  
Better times were then when we were left alone.

Peasants, to drink and fuck and die in golden fields,  
As the sun shone upon us,  
And we worked with purpose and a native wisdom.  
But the fields are gone, replaced with brick and iron.

A noisy tomb, we're all a living carcase, no purpose, no meaning,  
Surviving when there's little reason to,  
But we trudged on, as the days got longer,  
And our bodies failed us: "Why?" seems the only thing worth asking.

A chance escape from that life might seem like paradise,  
To where the poncy boys are wasting lives,  
Trying to make a pile of nothing, that they'd worship half a lifetime til  
One fine day they'll see it as it always was.

When rose tinted Gucchi's couldn't hide it any more,  
Then they'd wish they'd spent their time with us,  
At least we fucked like dogs, and have no money worries,  
For we've no money and we never will.

Yey, don't start on that soul stuff on me again all right!  
Where's the point in that old crock of shit?  
It don't buy a pint  
Or let me shag a blonde.

Yes right now I'd feel much better  
if my head and heart stopped kicking,  
But when I'm dead I'm gone,  
Til then it's fucking Dog eat Dog!

***Die without Regret***

***Live Poets***

***Don Bank Museum (27 June 2007)***



**Don Bank Museum**

*This is a cute little venue, an old house full of rooms recreating life a hundred years ago.*

*They clear out a couple of rooms and the performances take place there, like performing at home in front of the family. The audience was right there, close.*

*The venue had an intellectual feel about but not staid. It was a mixed performance venue – singers and poets mixed it up. A middle aged guy sang a few funny songs, affecting a cynical and distant persona, but I could sense his desperation. This was as good as it was going to get for him. He'd wanted to make it, make a living out of singing, but by now he knew it wasn't going to happen.*

*After a few poets a young American girl came on and sang with a sensuous style. I don't remember what about. This was the second time I heard Matt Moore, and we had a good chat. He's a funny unassuming guy. Full of repressed angst, hard to fathom. He did his "Osama" poem and I loved it, so dry and sad, but full of his quirky humour. His performance style is understated but it works perfectly with his poems. The place had a bit of a desperate feel about it; lonely people filling their time. Or maybe that was just me. I performed two poems that night. The First: "Die without Regret", and then "Real Drastic."*

*I wrote "Die without Regret" in Nepal, recalling a euphoric feeling that engulfed me when I was out on a rafting trip. I told a Dutch guy in the raft how I was feeling – he looked worried, hehe! Did I have a death wish and was I going to kill them all as I did myself in? I couldn't understand his reaction at the time; I was in a state of bliss. So alive, so in touch with everything around me and aware of the world's beauty.*

*A woman praised the poem and the way I delivered it, which came out quietly in my natural voice. It's always good to know some one got something out of it.*

*An Indonesian guy then performed holding up a wooden face mask in front of his face. In Java they use it to liberate them from inhibition; it's a big tradition. Performers can become someone else with the mask on, like at a mask ball. I don't recall the poem but he definitely became another person, more powerful and a stronger, more extrovert personality. Some of the guys tried to perform with it but it didn't work with them.*

*The second poem, "Real Drastic" is the closest thing to a rap for me. Whilst I was performing the rhythm suddenly kicked in after a few lines so I really enjoyed performing this one. It started with a tapping foot and then I felt it right through my body. My whole body was in the rhythm.*

*This poem is not about the words, it's all about that rhythm.*

## Die without regret

This day I'd die without regret,  
For what better day than this,  
A joyous day, my mind in peace, aware.

My body rested, no pain to drag me into introspection,  
Or throw myself  
Upon the rotting dung heap of self pity.

My heart is clear, as white as I could ever paint it,  
Anger never mauled this day, love was never easier to feel,  
I'm up high, with the Sea Eagles, as they float across tomorrow.

It would be a day when all debts are cleared,  
Discarding every petty victory  
At the instant of its claiming.

My heart reclines, freed of guilt  
Of what I should have done, and had not,  
Or kept silent when a wrong demands the spotlight cast upon it.

On this day I loved without care, regret or measure,  
And this final day would be one I'd beg would never end,  
Is this not the way any party should be left?

Not a dried out day we'd rather leave behind,  
I'd not wish to die upon a day  
On which we'd fought, or weakly bickered.

When we'd gossiped foolishly,  
Or closed our hearts on someone:  
No, I'm up high, with the Sea Eagles, as they float across tomorrow.

On this day the lion roars his loudest,  
The warrior's at his bravest,  
The snake his most wily – and the king his most decisive.

This day no fish would fear the net, no animal the gun,  
Flowers will bloom their finest; insects take their fill of nectar,  
The tree alive as birds shimmer round it.

A moving tapestry of colour,  
The seas a turquoise blue,  
Drift into the haze of a cloudless sky over golden sands.

In the distance white capped mountains, saffron robes,  
A place of Silence,  
A place for Wisdom giving birth to Reason.

Inland lies the dense green jungles thronged with a cacophony of life,  
On this day I'd find all this beauty,  
For I'm up high, with the Sea Eagles, as they float across tomorrow.

Now, halt me at the gates to question me  
And I would have a steady answer, enough to satisfy  
The meanest bar room lawyer at his ego's zenith.

For I am well prepared for death,

Yet I do not invite it:

Let this new adventure start.

Regardless that I'll never feel again, never love again,

I'd leave all I most cherish with no hopeless backward glances,

Cast off the ropes that bind me to this life.

Let my vision stretch on and outward;

My mind join with the universe,

The Earth diminish: hasten me to loose the last familiar bonds

Now at last, I'm up high, with the Sea Eagles

As they float across tomorrow,

But I'd circle back across the mountain line,

And so embrace a welcomed death.

# Real Drastic

Change is the life that surrounds me

All comfort stripped away

Real thorns

Real cages

Real drastic

Fit you into straits

Brush me feathers tied to bruise

Breath fog horns in my ear

Enshroud me in a cloud

Safe, cotton wool, embalm, for ever,

Real drastic

Pinch her bum and start a conversation

Or a slap fool for love

Torque it up and skip the beat

Skip here, into my arms, my dear,

Feel change

Breed change

Real drastic

Crash through,

Glass,

Blood splash,

Dash,

Fashion interrupted intersection

Brief.

Fast time cars whine

Light time,

Introspection averted

Cool breeze

Real drastic.

Shed a layer,

Then say your prayer,

The merry go round spins faster

Speed junkie

Love strains to contain

Real drastic

Sheared waves;

Brain dead,

Real life,

Naked eye trivia

Tigers claws

Blood gore,

Real drastic

Pale blue shimmers,

Matrix layers

Beat description

Light white:

Hot

Real drastic.

Paper slips  
Catch a future fast  
Animal easy  
Hard on watch  
Real drastic.

*Heal, deal, feel, seal: The end....*

## **Blind Man**

### **Mars Hill Café (29 June 2007)**

*This was a deadly night: not in a good way, hehe.*

*I was expecting a similar experience to the last time I'd performed at The Mars Hill, during a slam. That time there'd been an electric atmosphere. But this time there were only a few people in this massive room. A Friday night. I was thinking what the fuck am I doing here?*

*Mostly guys. Most of the performances were forgettable, including mine, except for this one: “**Blind Man.**” I wouldn't have been game to perform it any other time, though one of the performers said he liked it. And I just thought, man you must be a sick bastard to like this.*

*There's an interesting story behind this one; something I never experienced again but confirmed my feelings about where these poems come from. Like many I've written I've really no idea where they come from. Even, did I write them? Most of the time as I'm writing it's as if I'm the Scribe, copying down someone else's words.*

*Immediately after I finished writing “**Blind Man**” I got a call from a girlfriend. She asked me what was wrong. I didn't know what she meant until she told me I was speaking with a strong Australian accent. I didn't sound like myself; she'd never heard me speak like that before. I was totally unaware that I was talking like this, even after she told me.*

*So I like to think some old digger got in my head and pushed my pen around with one of his stories. I like the pathos of it and the undeniable love he feels for his woman, however fucked up it might seem at first take: he'll die in her arms, and she'll want it that way.*

*I also performed “Your Body” and “Old Age.” There’s a few comments about these poems at the start of each one.*

## Blind Man

HIM

They say you can pick it from their voice, or touch,  
Fuck that,  
It's not the same as seein the bitch  
With knickers down and panting for it.

The smell might be a blue turn on  
So bury me up to me ear holes in her fish tub juices,  
That's when you don't need eyes boy,  
It's all touch and feelin.

What I'd do to see abandon on her face,  
I'll never tell you what I'd fucking do to see again,  
That's me, fuck I'm no use to any one, least of all meself,  
A blind peg leg, the leaning fucking tower of Pisa.

Fuck it, crank up the music boys, this party getting tame on me,  
The girls have all but left, and the booze is getting dry,  
Wha's my chances of a fuck tonight, I'd say feckin meagre,  
And since it's me last, course I was hoping for a corker.

But the corks are popped,  
And all who loved me hate me now,  
Can't blame them, given all I did,  
Broke faith, lied, stole, beaten: the list goes on.

I hoped I'd get it right  
Before I ran out of reasons,  
And someone to fuck over.

But here I am in this fucking dead end bar,  
With no one I'd want to call a friend  
If we wos the last johns on Gallipoli's beaches,  
And the fuckin bastard Turks were making their last charge.

God she's not a looker but she's coming over any road,  
Christ, it could be me night after all!  
The one to leave on then for sure, for as hell there wont be another,  
Who'd want this old carcass?

"Take you're fucking hand off him!"  
Ah, a voice I'd recognise  
In the storm of all mother fuckers,  
The old girl, where'd she find me?

"Take me home love, I got pissed and pissed again,  
Me mind played tricks,"  
A belt for luck, ah she's a card!  
But love me, always.

See ya boys,  
Poor old bastards the lot of yer,  
Til next time the old waves short out on me.  
I smell it before I feel the bottle crack across my face.

A fucking waste of some good liquor,  
Or is it blood? who gives a fuckin shite,  
The auld one'll sort me out, she will:  
She will.

*HER*

*Sort him out I would,*  
*What was the auld git playing at?*  
*Those fuckin dark glasses again,*  
*Pretending he was blinded in the war.*

*Fucks sake he never left the street,*  
*Excepting when he had the run in with the law,*  
*And he's the eyes of a hawk, the cunt,*  
*He'd spot any chance across the market floor.*

*I tried his glasses on,*  
*Christ I thought I'd lost me hand!*  
*Fucks sake,*  
*I've no idea what it's all about.*

*But he keeps me sane, and in the booze*  
*When I can get the pension off him,*  
*Before he pisses it*  
*Or fucks some auld hoor.*

*Why he'd want them*  
*When he has the oldest hoor on all the street I'll never know,*

*But then I never know  
What makes any of the fuckers tick.*

*How many times they blubbed their stories out on me, a fiver down,  
Should have been a fucking counsellor and kept me clothes on,  
More fucking use I did them mind,  
With the gladdies off and legs waving up around their ears.*

*A good suck on their knob,  
Most the time that's all they need,  
But the missus never had the rhythm or the touch,  
Or she didn't like the taste of spunk.*

*Fuck its only salt you'd put on chips for dinner dear,  
So they all lined up for me,  
Me? I got it by the bucketful,  
I fucking felt I'd drown in it at times.*

*Well I dragged him home, again,  
Begging all the way,  
I never touched him but he thinks he's for a beating,  
And I don't let on.*

*Let the cunt suffer,  
Like he's made me,  
He gets some twisted pleasure there  
Like those bastards all tied up in leather.*

*Now that I never, never understood,  
Who'd want a beating on their privates?  
And a dog chain round the neck.  
Sick I calls it!*

*Let them fuck me arse  
Or anywhere,  
But fuck me how well they paid  
For the whip, or heel and chains.*

*"Gave em what the suckers want"  
That'd be my tombstone epitaph,  
But what priest would let me near a church,  
Except that old cunt who loved to get it in his praying kit.*

*But I never loved a one of them,  
You're no different to all the rest, George,  
Why is it then that I love you so?  
God would never answer that, though I'm still waiting.*

# Your Body



Kopan Monastery, Nepal

I wrote this poem on a Buddhist retreat at **Kopan Monastery** in Kathmandu, Nepal.

*It's about a French woman who was on the same course. I never found out her name because I was doing the course in silence, for a month, and barely spoke to anyone the whole time.*

*So I never spoke to her, but I saw her every day. She was always smiling but not in an insipid, fucked up or condescending way like some religious people. She was a strong personality and a lot of the younger girls looked up to her. She always appeared to be genuinely content and very self contained.*

*At the time, immersed in Buddhist philosophy, she looked beautiful to me- even alongside a young English girl that also caught my eye too. The younger woman had the most penetrating green eyes and a vibrant personality.*

*Unfortunately the feeling didn't last; I'm weak for a beautiful body.*

## Your Body

Your body is not young, your limbs are weak,  
It sags, and ripples when you move,  
Your hair is lustreless and streaked with grey,  
Your skin is lined and blemished,  
But it is your body, and I love it so.

I see young girls, with bodies lithe and strong,  
Her hair jet black, offset by eyes of jade,  
Skin that glows, and muscles taughen nonchalantly,  
Stomach packed, breasts firm and pert, everything in place,  
But it is not your body, so I could never love it.

And as you lie beneath me, I see only you,  
Your legs imprison me, your eyes draw me to your heart,  
Your smile envelopes me, it guides me homeward,  
Your body is the hearth at which I'll lie content,  
Love is bliss, love is comfort, love is infinite.

Now your body lies languid,

Sated:

Your mind drifts across all possibilities,  
Love still clings to our bodies,  
The last remnants of an ocean.

Your smile deflects all fears, all distractions,  
Consumed by the kisses raining down upon me,

Over my body, my closed eyes,  
I cannot separate each touch of your lips:  
Soft, smooth.

And your laughter deep,  
Reverberates through me,  
Days later I still hear its echo,  
Your voice, sensual, almost silent.

But I've no need to strain to hear it,  
It is not words that drive my passion,  
*They are not the meaning.*

## **Old Age**

*When I was working as a gardener I worked for an old Kiwi lady. Tough as nails on the outside, with a brood of kids flung across the nation. But she had a heart that melted and she let it. You could see the energy was still there, but her body was letting her down. I think I captured her frustration; still wanting to do so much but unable to do much more than look out of her back yard. It made her very angry some times, and difficult to live with.*

*I never showed her the poem so I'll never know for sure if it captured what was going on for her. But another friend of mine said it captured her own feelings of frustration, so I guess I got it close enough.*

*It brings it home to me every time I read it. The weakness of our bodies and that we should make the most of our bodies when they're healthy and can get us around. It's not always going to be so – why do we so easily forget that?*

## Old Age

What do I know of ancient bodies  
And their wilful sagging?  
What respite can I bring to suffering of failing limbs.

The weakened pulse and wrinkled skin,  
Which all reveal  
The true extent of our mortality?

Our time is soon to be complete;  
Few sensuous delights remain,  
Make then the most of shrinking remnants.

Once a pile of gaudy coloured clothes in which we revelled long,  
Now mere scraps of faded garments long forgotten,  
Reminding us of pleasures once we owned.

Slough off this body like a brittle snake skin,  
Oh how I wish it could be so!  
I've energy and will enough to share.

But what fool am I to dupe myself!  
Does not my body curl as dying leaves,  
Hunching over sepia memories.

I wrack my mind, give wings to my imagination,  
But still the blankest future beckons,  
There's no young blood to lust for.

No pleasure we could gorge upon,  
No experience to grip in strong embrace,  
No laughter to be heard within this failing trunk.

I feel my hand is weakened on the grip of life,  
Slaked with a thirst for death,  
Suicide seems but the loser's course.

An act in times past I would disparage,  
Yet sometimes now  
The shoes would seem to fit.

Are we not just a beacon's warnings?  
By our withering to immobility does not life have  
More colour and excitement for our youth in lazy play?

Yet is not life now on a more expansive plane,  
Unsullied and untroubled  
By the vagaries of daily toil?

Then fathom what we can of the unknowable,  
And come to gentle terms  
With all we did, or did not.

For we are soon recalled  
To the unbroken chain of our eternal being,  
Escaped from for an instant to this wondrous interlude called life.

Our true existence is a sea of breaking waves,  
Which drift repetitively to shore,  
Yet there is no ending within their crashing.

Their essence merely filters back to sea,  
To form again a different wave,  
This endless cycle is our being, with death a brief implosion.

Old Age is for the unwinding of the clock,  
A gentle fall to timelessness,  
The discarding of a body once so closely treasured,  
The abandonment of ego, for what is there to laud?

The shattering of mirrors,  
fooling no-one who we really are,  
The passing on of hard found wisdom,  
The giving up of friends and loved possessions.

Then rid me of this rusted armour!  
And there will be no shadows wither I can hide,  
All masks will crumble but to dust,  
No legs to carry me to safe hermitage.

So, square facing life, and death,  
Shorn of all delusion,  
Let it not fear me,  
For would I be here if unprepared to face it?

# **The Day's Remain**

## ***Square Circle, Kings Cross (2 July 2007)***

*This was a weird setup, I only went there once. Sunday night graveyard feel, in this vast community hall in the city just down from The Cross. The regular guys meet and tear each others poetry apart with the relish of a cannibal.*

*I don't know what the purpose of it all was but I was checking out all the venues at the time and it was on the list. There was some good stuff. I remember a Chinese woman who could barely speak English but she captured something in what she wrote. It wasn't technically right and the grammar was all over the place but the feel of it was there; she got across what she was trying to say, what she was feeling. I forget what it was about. But we all sat around this table and just read like we were in a classroom. Weird. But I love this poem and this was the only venue I could get away with performing it.*

*There was also a young guy there who read an amazing story he was developing. It took me in to another world, full of trees with rich and utterly believable personalities, and imaginary creatures. All of them living in this separate world right under our noses. Maybe one day we might see them – that was the feeling – if we were lucky the scales would fall away and we'd see what he saw. Great story.*

*The poem, “The Day’s Remain,” was written for a friend of mine, Tom, dealing with the imminent death of a dear friend. We were travelling around India and Nepal in a German WW2 ambulance when I wrote it and*

*he copied it on to the inside wall of the truck because it helped him get through the loss.*

*So this was my first published poem. I often wonder who read it and where they were at the time, because Tom kept travelling around India for a few years after we'd travelled together and then drove it overland back to Germany.*

*Also performed “The Wind Blown Valley”. See the notes at the start of the poem.*

## The Day's Remain

How may I familiarize myself with death,  
Yet still enjoy the day's remain  
Without a saddened thought?

What can I do to ease the pain  
Of countless lonely miles to cross  
As landscapes strive, and fail, to wake my eyes to beauty?

The while wheels turn on an endless treadmill leading nowhere,  
This I face if so I choose it,  
along with thoughts of final endings.

How many memories will fill with peaceful thoughts of you,  
Times we joined in silent contemplation, we two conspirators,  
Of love and conversations of our souls.

Which cleared my fuddled thoughts,  
Transformed them to jewels of knowledge,  
Reflected through them feelings' rainbows.

How many photo moments shared, my compassionate friend?  
How many tears you dried, how much pain assuaged,  
How often did I drift in to sleep whilst at your side?

Then let my heart and mind be open  
To an endless friendship  
Merely parted by an ocean's distance.

The good things of life  
I gave to you with love  
Can now sustain me in my loneliness.

And realize the fortune gained,  
Short yet richer  
Than a wealthy man's entire estate.

Time lulled the notion of her death,  
Was I then a man  
Who passed some object daily without it's observation?

So I must have been a man  
Who closed his eyes  
And feigned that he was blind.

May I avoid days replete with anger, fear or anguish,  
Thoughts of missing you  
And what was left eternally undone.

Living in each moment would I sift the sands of time in morbid thought?  
Yet amongst these jagged shards of sadness  
Lies the gift of universal love.

Despairing feelings crowd my new found wisdom,  
Through meditation  
May I still my mind, as breaking waves along a shore  
And still the teeming ants that cross the pages of my mind.

In this calmed peace

Can I prepare myself

To ease her death.

And in so doing

Think of her and not myself:

The surest antidote to self pity's mire.

## The Wind Blown Valley

*This one's captures the melancholy and joy of an afternoon spent flying a kite with my daughter on a gale blowing day. For the record I don't have a toupee.*

*I don't know why I was feeling sad that day, because I felt very close to Coco, and she was close to me. It was a special day. Maybe I realised we wouldn't have so many more of these days ahead of us to share, and to enjoy. It's the best of what being a parent is about.*

*Every time I read this poem I feel waves of happiness and sadness. I remember her laughter, the noise of the wind, and the utter silence when the wind eventually dropped as the sun was setting. I see it in sepia.*

# The Wind Blown Valley

The wind blown valley, green waves,  
A bird caught on the storm, scared, shitless,  
Wind tears at my hair; the toupee gets a workout.

Engulfing, white noise disengaging us, marooned,  
Paints a private world, immune from pain and explanations,  
A sound distraction, spins me from equilibrium.

The kite flew, a cat with ears pinned against the wind,  
We held it back together, tail wagged in fury,  
It reared and ducked, to find no escape.

We pulled it cruelly on a whim,  
And all it's want was freedom,  
Trees bent engagingly, and laughed indulgent.

You raged, bit me, copped a whack across the head,  
But then you wanted me, my warmth and permanence,  
Clung tightly, secure in love.

And know that I'll fuck up,  
But never mean to hurt you,  
Which for you's enough.

My hand in yours, your face looked up at mine,  
In certainty, and love –  
Careless.

Ah, love you,  
Your voice battles with the wind,  
And, despite it's power, you win hands down.

The kite skits across the sky, lips and makes a dash, life filled,  
A kamikaze plunge, entanglement, rent orange,  
Pulls up just before it plunges into branches clutching.

Shame they cry, and then, caught,  
Just by the tail at first, enough,  
Disentangle, mangled - fangled fucking wires!

The Advice Princess lets loose,  
All four foot of her,  
How I shoudda, wouldda stopped the kite from catching.

How I couldda got it free,  
Shut up! I want to shout!  
But wouldn't say it cos she'd cry, today.

Darkening sky, the sun slid down the mountain's face  
Red outline limped to pinkish grey,  
Shapes disappear like thinning clouds.

The wind drops and silence lives,  
Til a car roars by and killed it,  
Wrap it up, ready for another windy day.

# Pissed Myself

## **Friend in Hand, (3 July 2007)**



*This was the main slam venue during the year I was performing, though another venue came up towards the end of the year, **The Tap Gallery** in Darlinghurst. But I never performed there.*

*The **Friend in Hand** is a pub in Glebe with a long tradition of performance.*

*and there was a real buzz this night because this was the returning venue after the slam scene in Sydney had died for a while. It had a great punk feel to it – anything was possible, allowable – or so I thought. This was my first slam at this venue.*

*The poem is a stream of consciousness, the first of its type I ever wrote. It's about a guy that's definitely at the bottom. He makes the most of all the freedom that brings him, and he feels no self pity.*

*I remember the crowd was warm and clapping supportively for everyone that went up. As I walked up lots of people smiled encouragingly. I really nailed this performance – it came out as a strong Scottish voice, fast and hard. I was totally in the skin of this guy and I loved doing it.*

*I didn't realise til later there was an old Scottish guy who sat himself right in front of the stage. I only really took notice of him after he got stuck in to one of the other performers that came on after me – heckled the kid in this strong brogue I could barely understand, but you could tell he was pissed by the look on his face. He wasn't down and out himself,*

*but he wasn't far off it, and he was definitely a loner. It could have been written about his life. I never saw him again.*

*I remember Miles Merrill, sitting at the front because he was MCing, cringed at some of the lines. That was good – I wanted to confront and push some boundaries – and it did, much more than I'd expected.*

*There was silence after I finished and it lasted me across the room to where I was sitting. No one would look at me. I sat down with mixed feelings – a pariah and out there. The rebellious artist making his audience confront something about themselves.*

*I was taking it all in, nursing a beer, when a woman leant over and gave me this piece of paper. She'd written a critique of the poem and my performance. And she gave me a 10. Needless to say it was the only one I got – I don't remember the score I got from the real judges but I didn't give a shit with this in my hand!*

- fully developed character/voice
- persona/attitude/vocabulary off the character.
- accent was great.
- great performance poetry!  
Keep it up
- great timing, clear, naturalistic.
- very Ken Loach!

## Pissed myself

Pissed myself.

No worries there,  
I can do most anything.

I'm in a barrel and there's no looking down,  
So I'm free,  
No constraints on me!

Suits look past,  
Eyes averted, fear tainting, losing  
Something.

Me, I've got nothing left to lose,  
Lying in this spreading yellow stream,  
My world caught in a plastic bag.

Alley Cat, don't you try to sidle by: lie with me, let's share your milk,  
But Cat I don't trust your fangs and claws,  
They seem like weapons for the shrouded mind.

I'm relaxed, bedraggled, legs spread wide: suck the lolly, baby,  
Eyes all innocence, don't fool me old darling,  
It's written in the expert wandering of your hands.

Wank me!  
Wrap those red nail talons round my cock!  
While I wet dream petticoats and crimson lips.

But she wasn't my fuck to have;  
Don't need to wonder why,  
But I had a few good ones in my time.

So I'd still want her,  
Cos some way she'd be different,  
And that's the itch I can't reach inside to scratch.

I'll lay down everything for this,  
Just say the fucking word,  
Believe me, try me, bring it on!

This is my land, this is my backyard,  
I'm survivor,  
I'll give a shit for once!

So up go the fists and I'll square off:  
Crack, one punch is all it ever takes,  
Fuck I'm nothing when there's action to be had.

So tear up the cloth,  
Let life's stench come in  
To brush the Death of Life away.

And bare the Soul and Passion that is our raw selves,  
Which most would cover with a modest pane,  
Ashamed of cunts and sores.

Expose the lie of this quaintly painted world  
Thrust our faces  
In this Shit called Life.

Close your eyes or shit is all you'll see,  
Hold your nose or shit is all you'll smell,  
Cover your mouth or shit is all you'll taste.

It's a hard road, but what's the choice?  
We'll waste a few, but it's a secret war we're losing,  
And I'd be tough on you; or else you're fucking lost, OK.

I can still recall, but only just,  
A happy time before this life,  
When Shirley held my hand.

We walked together, piggy back or leapfrogged,  
Along the ledges,  
Cars a zillion miles below.

I'd sing in to her mouth,  
Our voices merge, reverberate,  
Later we lay down to sleep but end up fucking.

But I tired of this complacent life,  
And looked for some other star  
To cross my path and light the way.

But it's not stars I'm seeing now,

---

Don't know why this rocket up my arse propels me,  
I try to blow it out: have you ever tried to smell your bum?  
It stinks, so save it, take my word.

So I'm flying now, alone,  
Into the sky, my bum aflame,  
I've left you all behind again!

Yeah I'm the prophet, so stop the staring,  
If there were parts for choosing,  
Why, I'd be a fucking mouse on acid.

## **Monotype (By Miles Merrill)**

### ***The Friend in Hand (performance date unknown)***

*This poem is one of my favourites and the performance Miles put in was fantastic, perfect capture of the mood and the characters. He does it in a gravelly voice full of all the accents and attitude. Miles performed this one at The Friend in Hand, along with another one I liked, The Crow. For me Monotype captures the power play between black man and white man; the dominance the white man assumes and claims just because of his skin. One of those emblematic relationships in which the story is always going to play out this way. It's inescapable.*



#### **About Miles Merrill**

*Miles, from Chicago, is regarded by many as the founder of Poetry Slam in Australia. He tours his monologues and poems internationally. His shows The Night Words Festival (Sydney Opera House 2008) and Slammering (Sydney Festival 2005) have won outstanding critical acclaim. He publishes on CD, DVD and in print but is best experienced live.*

*“Wild, witty wordplay reminiscent of Gil Scott Heron, Lenny Bruce, Ken Nordine, Ginsberg and a tincture of Woody Allen” - Chicago Reader*

*“This work is passionate, deeply enjoyable and demands attention. More please” - Sydney Morning Herald*

## Monotype

I was workin this cafe right? Over on... Devonshire street. Place get about 15 customahs in 8 hours. Manager walks in. "Yo Mr. big man what up?"

Man had the nerve to say to me, "Who told ya ta sit down mate?"

I stayed seated I said, "Forget that. I ain't seen nary a customer up in here for over an hour, punk. I ain't gonna be runnin my little butt around up in here, ain't nobody up in here. You know what I'm sayin?" You shoulda seen his big ol' Australian jaw just about like drop, Hit the flo'. I seen we was gonna have ta duke it out. But ol' boy change his tune. He come out wid "Mate listen, I'm drya than a dead dingo's donga. Why donya get behoin the couna and cut me a piecea mudcake. And make me a flat woite whal ya back theya." Well, I ain't stupid, You Know? I mean I am gettin paid. So I do what ol' boss man say. I get up. Get me one a dem aaahh... butcha knives.

You know the kinds we use to cut cakes wid. An' I dish him out a piece. I dish me one out too. I sit back down an say "Yo mama made you a flat white Ain't nuthin I can do about dat." I look up. He steady clockin' me. I say "What you lookin at niggah? I'm tryin to my

cake over here" He pick up dat knife. He start to shakin like. Kinda tremblin. Dat bottom lip start ta quiverin. He break out wid "Ya ya ya cawl that a knoif!? Ya cawl that a knoif!? That's naught a knoif! This a knoif! That's naught a - that's naught a knoif! This is a knoif!" An he just keep repeatin it you know. Steady walkin toward me, all slow an stiff like; like one a dem robots when dey got too much power surgin trew dey circuits. Exterminate! Exterminate! I mean I knew ol aucka mug were crazy but he ain't never pulled no Crocodile Dundee stuff on me beforw. My lips start ta pokin out... how you say,... involuntarily. Like I's fixin ta say " Whachew talkinbout' Willis?"

Ol' swag wearin, outback, red dirt, larrikin bout ta jump me when one a dem Uh...Aboriginal mugs walks in da do. Lookin like he been out partyin las night. Kinda scraggly you know. He don see no knife, naw. He walk in like he own the place. Jus' like he own everything. Walk right up to whitey's cake layin on the table. An while he helpin his self , while he eatin' it up he say; "Eh, brudda. Oi get a piece a cake brudda? Eh, Brudda. Oi get a piece a cake? "Daaaamnn Boss man turn aroun knife in dem pudgy hands an he come out like a

freight train. He come out wid, "Ya black beast!! Ya black beast!! GET OUT! GET OUT! GET OUT NOW! Get oudda moy cafe." Like some rhino on the frontlines of a hallucination he say, "Abo! Abo! Out!"

Somethin bout seein a black man stabbed through the hand by a white man shocked me outta my chair. I get up, grab that raving boss by the back a his head. Put my boot up his ass. KICK HIM OUT! KICK HIM OUT!, kick racism out of the world cafe. Jus in time fuh dat 378 bus ta cut him down.

Turn around. Wipe his hair grease off my hands. Brother man aboriginal ain't layin on the flo' like a victim. Oh no he out da back do'. Whole mudcake in da good hand; bottle a coca cola in da bleedin hand an all that cash register money jus spillin outta his pockets. An he's runnin down the alleyway laughin like everything in this country belong to him or he belongs to everything in this country and maybe he's right. I don know what ta do. I jus pick up a chair throw it through da window an say , "It's one crazy country you living in bro". For we are young and free.

## **Laying Flowers**

### **Sappho's Café (11 July 2007)**

*I was in the middle of a very fucked up relationship, and learning to be a man, when I wrote this one. I was very much in love but always knew it was doomed. However much I tried I could never escape that feeling. Even so I was on a trip, the natural high in the extreme of passion. I wrote a lot of love poems out if this relationship. When I was writing was the only time anything made sense. An oasis in the middle of a tornado.*

*I was really in to this performance and I remember the MC was sat near me as I performed. At the end she gave a deep sigh like she'd just finished a Mills and Boone. That was the reaction I wanted. At this venue the footlights create a barrier with the audience, you don't get to see their reaction. So I don't know how anyone else was taking it.*

*I introduced the performance with these words : “.... When love’s more important than a fuck, and nothing’s ever over ....“*

*Some smart arse made a crack, but it wasn’t that good!*

## Laying flowers

Would you be laying flowers on my coffin as it's lowered in the ground?  
For we've been friends long - past the lovers' fashions,  
You were a child when we first met,  
And I a man just reached his prime of heart and mind.

I wish you were dropping petals on me,  
His children at your side,  
Than risk your friendship  
For a fuck I could acquire in any ill lit alley.

Love to fuck you dead but I can't give you what you want:  
Three or four, four I think it was,  
Ducklings all lined up behind you,  
Swimming down life's drifting tributaries.

You all silhouetted on the crisp horizon,  
A static outline  
Of your dreams I cannot fulfill,  
Though how often did I dream I could.

Ah, your ducklings, a warm smile reflected in their eyes upturned,  
Waiting on your every word, breaths caught in unison as you hesitate,  
And turn riot upon each other, when your back is turned,  
Though you know everything, for you are their mother.

How glorious is a woman's strength  
With destruction pressed close upon her face,  
She is invincible to the last,  
Whilst we would blaze or abandon at the first confront.

My heart was missiled to the heat of love,  
My mind flung across the pages of every dripping love story,  
But my hopes were dashed  
Against your smooth walled logic.

My heart slid cartoonly down,  
And quietly spatters,  
The trail of blood  
My feelings dissipated.

How I wish we could have been lovers  
Without the shadow of tomorrow upon us,  
For another day on which to feast,  
Our bodies merging.

What's more to say  
Than I loved you once  
And always will:  
Man Inconsistent.

Understand that leaving,  
When the picture's torn,  
Is selfless love:  
The only love worth counting.

Go then,  
Have your children,  
Write to me  
How wonderful they are.

How like his father has the boy become,  
The girls so little ladies like their grandma,  
How they bemuse, amuse  
And lose you.

But now, time passed,  
All but brittling memories exist,  
Yet I, friend, remain,  
Remain through all our small meanderings, love our binding.

So life is change not bitter endings  
I recalled this was the lesson from my life with you,  
Though I'd ignored your hinted warning frequently enough,  
But now it pigeon's home when needed most.

And so, when we are wiser  
And forgive each other's weaknesses,  
We will be friends, and lovers once again,  
Cherie, je t'adore: mon coeur est pour tu.

## **Delhi in my Heart**

### **Bar Me Cafe (17 July 2007)**



**Performer at Bar Me Cafe, Kings Cross, Sydney**

*This was the first time I performed at this venue. It's a great venue – an old jazz bar with a lot of history but really run down and you could see the money walking out the door. There was no one in the upstairs bar, literally no one. And this was The Cross on a Thursday night. There were people everywhere. Outside.*

*The slam is run by a pretty and well spoken girl, who liked to introduce the evening with one of own. I never liked her stuff; pretentious shit from the academics. Even so I wanted her, but she didn't want me. I didn't know her story. She does a radio show. I often wondered how she got that gig;*

*what did you have to do to make some space for yourself in this secret world of entertainment.*

*This was also the first time I saw a performance by Tug Dumbly. Superficial, really obvious comedic rhyme. Not my thing but lots of audiences lap it up – it doesn't challenge, it doesn't make you think. For me this guy single handed kills the slam scene, because after a while there's nothing to keep you there. You've heard it all before; just the words mixed around some. And it's even more obvious when he tries to do something serious. He looks awkward.*

*And this night he went on .... and on ... By the end the slam performers were the only people still there. I was so over it by the time I came on, but once I got going I really enjoyed doing this poem. It's one of my favourites and captures the thrill and the contradictions of my experiences and feelings about India. I wanted to evoke India for anyone hearing this poem - smell it, taste it, hear it. So you wouldn't have to go there to be able to say you knew it.*

# Delhi in my Heart

India my home, I love,  
And share the fine line with hate,  
The land of forebears, jute kings and indigo barons.

Enslaved to those English shores they'll never tread.  
And to pretty women of silently domineering character,  
For whom boredom filled their days, til they'd snared their man.

The purpose of their brief flirtation with my land:  
They took the best of men back to insipid life of mediocrity,  
Away from this land they loved, but had tired through loneliness.

This crown of all countries, this kaleidoscopic jewel,  
This sea of senses,  
Into which I have but merely dipped a toe.

The airport silent : anti climax  
To the longed for throngs to push through, swear at and cajole  
Only off white marble, fluorescent light.

Smart dressed bearded Sikh: who'd fuck with them?  
They've no fear of death,  
It's a forever open gate to them.

Out into the night I brace myself for the onslaught of humanity,  
Assailed I am, but not by any man,  
The pungent smells of a city alive with life, love, deceit, and excrement.

Smells congeal as the colors on a tantrum baby's picture.  
The heat a clammy overweight,  
She covers me with the throbs of her beating heart.

Past gorgeous parks, wrecks of humanity, fallen in railway station,  
Down eerie, empty streets with neon signs still flickin  
On the half lit words that make no sense.

Morning, and the sun rose upon a street narrow and still,  
It seemed the world had died  
Or like on a quiet Sunday in a sleepy English hollow.

But they were drunk  
On this too much light fantastic,  
So, slowly to their feet they rise.

Yawns, a spread of arms,  
Smells bounce off the high hotel fronts,  
All glamour from a distance, but flaking when you get up close.

Then, out of where? Here at my feet looked up  
The clearest, cleanest face, in the starchest clothes,  
A boy with everything at his feet.

Except his legs,  
Useless flapping wings, curled about him,  
And yet, his face was full of happy expectation.

I never saw that look again in this land of hopeless dreams,  
He has something we all want,  
And it shone from him.

Later, at the café, the gigolo with a racy word for all the girls,  
The clown, who makes them break a smile,  
He moves so slow you have to fuckin microscope to see it.

Doing nothing,  
Til the boss has had enough and makes him work his butt,  
But over shoulder comes the last word and they all fall about.

It passed the day –  
Wasn't this like any other day in those Delhi streets?  
Outside, the girls in saris, a gauze like scarf conceal and reveal.

A glimpse of blackest hair, curled about her wrist,  
Full lips, dark eyes downcast,  
Preoccupied with gossip only girls can share.

But she could not ignore the cheeky whistle,  
For which the boy had earned a blush from her  
And praise from all his mates.

The street of harlots: was this a half night drawn dream?  
Of Elephants charging – the buildings quaking under them,  
Great spikes driven in their heads,

The silent parade of racing camels,  
Gone as if they'd never been.  
Minutes later, on a street side, another dream.

A silent shroud in black about her head and to her hidden feet,  
Face a floating moon,  
As she leaps from one cab to another.

As if across the waves  
Upon a lighter,  
To a secret assignation.

Now, me, I'm wanting main stream nightlife,  
Disco, girls, dancing, drink, knock backs, and dreams,  
Into a gaudy painted room, gaudy music, gaudy lights, booze racked.

Girl alone, dancing on a stage, men fawning,  
An erotic dance: just a foot exposed enough to set our hearts aflame,  
Their pride at her flashing feet.

The green dress swirled,  
Money floats like autumn leaves about her head,  
Envy bouncin' off the walls.

What's her story?  
Found in this room,  
With these men, at this time, at these dances?

Oh, the rise of those legs from the ground,  
To heaven at those narrow thrusting hips,  
Paradise at her breasts.

Hair laced about her icon face,  
Eyes through the haze, blaze,  
Laughing straight at me:

Yeah, got fooled again.

Yeah, got fooled again.

Yeah, got fooled again.

# The Painter

## **Brett Whitely Studio (22 July 2007)**

*A lonely Sunday afternoon at The Studio.*

*I don't remember anything about the other performances, and I'd missed the keynote poet. He's an academic who writes about country scenes, which kind of goes with this poem of mine. The crowd was silent, or clapped politely. No reaction. No connection. But I like this poem; it carries a lot of memories.*

*The poem is about a family holiday with a friend who liked to take the lead with everything. The holiday was in Port Macquarie and he'd been there many times before. So he's The Painter - it was like he created everything that happened; all the adventures, and all we saw. Without him nothing existed.*

*The writing style is descriptive; I'm painting with words. When I came to perform it I was reminded of all the things I'd loved about that time – carefree, content, no pressures. Everything that my life was no longer. But I only have to read the poem and it evokes the same emotions and sense of myself. It helps me reconnect with a part of myself that I sometimes lose, forget or leave behind.*

## The Painter

He saved us,  
As we looked out upon a snaring wind that clattered down the windows,  
In the rearing waves, tumbling bodies and screaming kids,  
Ice creams sprinkled with the finest sand, all gritty on the teeth.

The Painter spread his arms wide, "welcome to my world" he said,  
Unbroken green of rolling fields, a tree dropped artistically just so,  
A house sits haughtily upon a rise or fatly in a hollow,  
Dots of black munch grass: one arches as it shits a stream of brown.

Hills steepened secretly, deceptively,  
Inviting effort to surmount the final crest,  
The sun, molten lava spread over head and shoulders  
Drools down our backs.

We dart like nervy fish, to each shadow's haven,  
Singing hedges, full of warblers,  
Imitate the screech of brakes  
Slamming as we hit a lurking hairpin.

The throbbing heat  
Reflected off the deep red earth  
Packed to form a snaking scar  
Across the distant hills.

So fuckin slow!  
Enough to count the spokes,  
Christ even Grandpa'd beat us,  
On a good day with his meal in sight.

But finally! Shrilling down a hill, earned by those leg shagging climbs,  
Drinks all round we cried!  
The waitress' smile then faded to derision,  
At our overfilled city slicker's indecision.

He painted tall eucalypts straining sunward,  
Competing for the merest shaded ray of light,  
The subtle browns of sturdy trunks, and fallen leaves,  
The colour of the dead.

Lazy palms spread across the lower canopy,  
Giant ferns cast green tinged light upon a pausing Frilly,  
Their burnt brown tips mottled like the aged sun seekers  
Left behind on beaches we deserted.

Filled with boredom, wanting something new:  
Another master piece,  
Singular, bared with a flourish,  
Lumbering rollers indifferent to their destructiveness.

Whilst we stood upon the peak,  
The lighthouse at our backs,  
Solid, white, immovable:  
Man versus nature, in the shape of something squat and ugly,

Up here we'd nearly overbalance onto  
Rocks that glisten threateningly,  
Like leathered bikkies smiling warning  
Through nicotine stained stumps of yellow orange.

The green breasted thrush  
Stands for a moment on the fallen log,  
His songs mingle with our chatter,  
The waterfall tumbles unabated whether we ooh or ah!

And wonder what kind of death the boy endured,  
When he fell so many fathoms,  
He nothing more than pulpy smudges  
When they found him on the neatly folded rocks below.

The waterfall's creek backs up to a murky, ice cold lake,  
Showies somersault for cooing girls in soft straw hats,  
With widened smiles and stagey voices,  
The musketeer looking fellow climbs to the tree's top.

Gracefully arching back and shatters the still water  
Like shell formed plumes of Flanders soil,  
My mind can only play with thoughts  
Of broken necks or Byzantine mysteries.

A small girl braves her fears and leaps from a lower branch,  
A shaky smile and hair lanked about her narrow face,  
Eyes shine mockingly at her scaredy brother,  
He swings down, a podgy arse skids one.

Face reads desperation, indecision,  
Fluffs it, and belly flops for all of us to laugh,  
We've all been there:  
Don't worry son!

He painted scenes in which we played larking kids,  
Along side springy girls with promises,  
But mostly full of talk and giggles,  
At last one tumbles from the bridge and then the others follow.

A sleepy turtle  
paddles by along the bottom of the sandy bed,  
The gorgeous blue and gold of tropic fish  
Trail in his gentle wake.

Rapids! with imaginary freefalls, heard but not yet seen,  
Sounding huge, high as any man had ever conquered!  
We'd do it too! With wobbling legs and wriggly voices,  
Wishin' sometimes that we'd stayed at home.

To brag about those things we'd never done,  
The water like a boa, crushed us with its lithe, lazy power,  
We took turns to drown,  
And then get rescued by each other.

The Painter never failed us don't you know,  
Though finally he flaked himself,  
Was he somehow jealous,  
Pettily, as we all are?

Let's walk past this grave to our abandon,  
Enjoy as children would the thrills and spills,  
The love and tears,  
Nursing our bruised hearts and limbs.

# The Splintered Glass

## *Friend in Hand (7 August 2007)*



**Jack of Hearts and Bravo Child (right)**

*I've no doubt this was the best received performance I ever did; I could have had any girl in the room. It was a very special night that I could never do justice to in words. I'll do my best to give you a flavour of it.*

*First up it didn't seem like it was going to be anything special. The usual slam performers were there. Peter had become a regular fixture. He's an old hippie, head full of dope. All his poems sound the same, and he performs them in the same way every time. He's always about to lose the thread, and sometimes does. I can't remember what he writes about, but it usually involved a lost love, confusion and bemusement with the world. It's the whole package I like, and it's unique. It's him.*

*The headline act was **Jack of Hearts** and **Bravo Child** performing a duet. A poetic play about two kids imagining they were blasting off in to space. It was very funny and they performed it very well. It really captured the innocence of kids. Their excitement at making it into space, and then their fear and sadness when they realised they wouldn't see their mum again.*

*And it set the standard for the night. I was thinking, fuck, all this for \$10 bucks. I'd been performing for some time now, so whilst I still got a few butterflies it wasn't much. But after their great performance, followed by a few others that kept the standard up, I was caught up inside. I remember thinking, I have to pull something out here or I'm going to look a prick.*

*The first slammer is an old guy, with a strong European accent, and he does this very precise poem about infinity. He talks very quietly, so the audience has to lean in to listen. We're like kids with a teacher.*

*Then this burly guy with a full beard gets up and does a poem about Hell in a gravelly Robert De Niro voice. He nailed it. Evoked every fear we have. Great stuff.*

*Soon I'm on. Since Robert De Niro there'd been a few performances that had dampened the crowd's enthusiasm. I wanted to lift them up again.*

*The poem's about the confusion I felt about myself at the time and an idealised view of my girlfriend, who I'd been split up with for a couple of months. I was still deeply in love with her and writing this poem had made me believe I could make it work..*

*So I was really in to this performance; full of love and able to reveal it through this poem and its performance.*

*At the end of the performance there was a big sigh and a wave of love rippled over the crowd. I felt really connected to the audience and pleased*

*I'd kept up the pace of the night. I'd been the best performance according to lots of people who came up and told me. One girl gave me a big smack on the lips. Hehe, I felt like a Rock Star! But I still didn't win the Slam.*

# The Splintered Glass

I'm stood up here cos I'm always on the outside,  
So yeah I'm the splintered glass that never fits,  
And the unexploded bomb  
With a second on the clock.

We're the creed that no one understands,  
And the Prophet no one wants to hear,  
And yeah, we're the romantic lover, when all the girls just want a fuck,  
But we're the real deal when there's only little boys around.

We're the crime we won't confess, and the goodness we can't admit,  
So yeah, I'm the killers gun that blows up on his face,  
And the orphan kid that got too old at five,  
And doesn't have what every parent wants.

I'm the one that pissed you off, and still borned your dreams,  
So yeah, I'm the 60 K sign on the straight line road - no car in sight,  
The pothole which broke the axle as the speedo touched one twenty,  
And yeah, I'm the cop that caught you.

But You,  
You're the lorikeet that never leaves it's dying partner,  
The herd of horses roaming free across the broad savannah,  
And the fish that swims all the oceans to seek it's mate.

You're the gorgeous scent of flowers I never planted,  
And the open cage, with the sound of bird song in the distance,  
The day my daughter launched herself upon the world,  
And those infrequent days when I forget she doesn't love me anymore.

You're the wild animal that runs to me for safety,  
And sometimes bites me when I pick her up,  
An all day pass to the fun fair that whips up into my hand,  
And I'm first on the best ride, and last on the one that never stops.

You're sailing when the wind blows lazy,  
Then roars up to a storm,  
The day I wish I'd live for ever,  
But only if you're there beside me.

The time the Bikkie kissed me, then denied it,  
And when I did everything bang on, and everybody noticed.  
Cos you're the best I'll ever be:  
Darling you're the best I'll ever be.

# Ralph

## *Sappho's Café (8 August 2007)*



*It should have just been another night, but it wasn't.*

*I won a prize. I had the chance to fuck a beautiful girl. An English girl did a great piece which humbled me.*

*This poem is about the son I'll never have. The first time I read it, straight after I'd finished it, I cried hard and long. For myself, as all tears are. During the performance I shouted the last line. It released the energy of my sadness and I've never felt that sadness again.*

*I remember one performance that night by a slam regular. I'd never liked any of his other stuff but this one was great. All about his youth in the bush. It captured the innocence and the timeless and endless boredom of living in an Australian bush town far from any city. The hope and expectation of it all changing if he escaped to the big smoke.*

*Then an English girl got up and did a kind of Pam Ayres on Speed. Very clever, insightful, and a great performance. Polished, a pro. I spoke to her after. After the performances a beautiful girl came up to talk to me. We*

*went to the back of the courtyard and talked. It was dark and intimate. She was in to me to start with. Then she said "You're not like when you're on stage". After that she lost interest and it petered out. I was only half hearted about it, thinking about my ex girlfriend. On the back foot. Trying to make sense of what I was feeling about myself.*

## Ralph

He would be a Sweet Wanderer,  
The world his yard and hearth,  
A free man, unchained by expectation  
Of what he should be or should have done,  
Or by convention, those diminishing constraints,  
He will own his world, with a cool heart,  
Be every woman's lover, their ideal of manhood,  
This will be my son.

But he will be lonely,  
For with a cool heart there are few connections,  
When age has crept up on him and he turns to spin a yarn  
He'll find the stage is empty and for the first time  
Observe his hands are wrinkled, his clothes worn through.

So he turns away from his fellow man,  
And seeks safety in solitude,  
But he found no safety, no peace, in his solitude,  
He found only fear, and doubt, and distrust,  
What he heard about his fellow man made him suspicious,  
What he saw for himself he did not understand,  
He thought to withdraw himself further but  
He had reached the cave's limit.

And so his voice quavers, strength deserts him,  
He must summon courage, drawn from a life's experience,

Tread a firmer foothold in the sand, and straight his bended back,  
Look clear into the distance, or into the face of any man before him,  
For he need fear no man, no woman, and no beast,  
They cannot best him, invincibility armours him:  
This will be my son.

So when people speak of him they'll say  
He has loved the only way, abandoned to its pleasure,  
And his home has been wherever he found love,  
Many times he fought for the rights of all free men,  
He is their champion, their muffled voice released,  
The guide on their meandering path,  
His courage becomes their courage, their determination  
To live, and be men worthy of that name.

He will be clear visioned, the King of all his dominions,  
And the wily Magician that no man can fathom,  
In front of them stands Warrior,  
With beliefs that he will kill or die for,  
Yet above them all stands Lover,  
Unflinching in his love:  
THIS WILL BE MY SON !

# Lips for Giving Head

## ***Word Jammin at Bar Me (21 August 2007)***

*Ha Ha!*

*This was a weird performance. I'd just spent the afternoon at my cousin's house. Very conventional. But I was feeling like I wanted to confront again.*

*I was really conscious, even from when I did "I Pissed Myself" that you have to pull back from the edge otherwise there's only air after that and it gets thinner the further out you go. You can't go pushing the boundaries forever, otherwise you end up broken. How many performers have proved that?*

*I wanted to pull back so I could push again. Maybe a bit further the next time, but not endless pushing. Seen too many performers burn themselves up or finish up hating their audience. What was the point in that? It's a trip to bring the audience with you as well as scandalising them and bemusing them. It's fun to play and manipulate.*

*But this night I was thinking I don't give a fuck and I didn't care if I had no one along with me for the ride. So in this context it went better than I expected. At this venue, because it was a jazz venue, a jazz trio improvises behind the headline poet / performer. It sounds a great idea but it rarely worked for me. Though when it did it was fucking awesome.*



**Jazz Quintet at Bar Me**

*This night the headline was a multi media artist – so tonight she was doing her own backing, on an electric guitar, along with the jazz trio. Some of it was good, but I was mostly thinking about my performance. She caught my eye a few times, I guess she was in to me, but I wasn't interested. If I'd liked her stuff I might have gone for it.*

*There were no other slammers apart from me that night; I guess it was dying out as a slam venue. It had never taken off. Even so it's probably my favourite venue - atmospheric, a kind of Kerouac feel about it. After the headliner finished nearly everyone left. Miles was there with a couple of girls. He stopped them leaving, but after a few lines they left too. It was hard to see beyond the stage – a bank of very bright lights shone in my eyes. So I gave it everything, did it exactly how I wanted to do it.*

*It's not supposed to be sexist but I guess it will be taken that way. I don't want to explain it, even though it definitely needs an explanation.*

## Lips for Giving Head

She knows that some poor girl will soon  
Have those self same lips  
She says please and thank you with  
Wrapped around his dick.

The same lips she kissed her daddy with on birthdays,  
He, dear old doting fool,  
Still seeing her in pretty skirts and barely talking,  
If he could see her now:  
Skirt around her ears, and morning breaking.

The same lips that spoke of loyalty, and trust,  
And kissed the girlfriend with  
Confiding her most trifling thoughts -  
Then shagged the boyfriend in her bed.

The same lips that made such promises that only angels keep,  
Then sucked the life from parade grounds full of ardent boys,  
But she could justify it all, as only women can,  
How we love you / hate you / can't do without you darlings.

The same lips that vowed to honour and obey:  
Aren't we all just fucking up our lives and anyone in range?  
Unless we're so gone up to heaven,  
Or lost all feeling neath the neck or navel.

The same lips that one day crack their dying breath,  
Just before a smile would pass her lips  
As she recalled the boys she had,  
And could have had, but wanted them forlorn instead.

Which is better girls? we'll never know,  
Our dicks just take a running jump  
At anyone that spreads a thigh,  
And grateful for the invitation to the only show in town.

She'll never feel the fire between her legs again,  
Or see the look of ecstasy,  
His face as melting wax,  
And feel his body shake to breaking.

In her control,  
At her fingers' wishes,  
As it throbbed and jumped,  
And he begged silently for more.

## **Jealous Man**

*This one was performed the same night as I did “Lips for Giving Head”. I don't remember anything about this performance.*

*The poem was written shortly after I'd met a new girlfriend. It became prophetic of the play out of this relationship.*

*I like the idea that jealousy is crass and embarrassing. But it's such a measure of all that makes us human, and is as far as we can be from our god potential. So animal, so trivial, so unjustifiable, so childlike. So not Buddhist, nor being the bigger person.*

*The poem forms a circle at the end. He hopes he can find something deeper and more enduring than this jealous love. But is it really? He thinks this friendship might come from the better man in him, but I'm not sure it is. Just because jealousy takes him out of self control, does it make it less significant?*

## Jealous Man

I could not be friends with you  
For I am a jealous man,  
And jealous men have no friends who once were lovers.

Their love's a gun spittin devotional obsession  
Indecent to anyone that's never loved this way,  
A crass and misfit friend.

My jealousy will not diminish whilst love still stirs,  
Nor will it be extinguished by the wind of new passions,  
For time would not allow it.

A jealous man could never stand there weakly tepid,  
And watch you falling for another man,  
See you lie in his arms as you have lain in mine.

Look into his eyes and forget all other men you ever cared for,  
I would turn away with hate in my heart  
As you grow gorgeously fat with his child inside you.

Then would I wish you and him  
The very worst of lives,  
Barren of the sound of children's footsteps.

Every day a struggle to survive the shit of life.  
That you'd have heaped upon you in unequal measure,  
And I would gloat as you're wearied by my blizzard wishes.

One of you, him I think, the weaker, will abandon you  
Seeking light,  
And release from the weal, and chains.

Yet if I could love you without condition,  
Whilst I might be gone, to never meet again,  
Then could you bask in love's warmth.

Contentment sighing in your every outward breath,  
Your face softened  
As all concerns dissolve.

Your body lie languidly still, as only pregnant women can,  
Suffused with an inner pleasure,  
A feeling of completeness, and hidden meanings.

And I would only want the best for you,  
My desires discarded,  
Without trace of rancor.

For I'd feel my needs were of no consequence  
When your wish to be unburdened  
Is foremost in my mind.

Then I will love you as a friend, that less fiery love,  
Which might be overlooked,  
As the best things often are.

# Run to Death

**Brett Whitely Studio (26 August 2007)**



*It disturbed me that at the time I wrote this poem the theme of death arose frequently in what I was writing. It certainly wasn't something I was thinking about consciously.*

*I confess I do not understand this poem and as I wrote it I didn't feel any of the themes it explores so ingeniously. It's another one I channelled. I have no idea where it came from; the pen led my hand. I recall I wrote it very fast. Maybe this is why I can love it so much. As if a stranger wrote it, I can just admire it for what it is without self coming between.*

*I guess this is a complex poem, full of constantly changing themes and images, making it less accessible than most I performed. The audience at The Studio is never the most animated so I'd have to perform it at another venue to be sure if this one can be performed – if a crowd will get it. Certainly the reaction at The Studio was blank. Polite but blank. For myself I felt quite impersonal and detached as I read it; as if I was reading someone else's work.*

## Run to Death

Death beguile me,  
Silken gloved and caped She calls to me,  
My siren lover,  
My child lost.

I run - up the gently sloping rise,  
Never slowing as I near the cliff's edge,  
I run - coarse wild bushes draw blood across my face,  
Feet no longer leadened by the press of gravity.

Slow, my body turns upon itself;  
The sound of cracking limbs  
That wrap themselves around me,  
Awkward - independent - a Lover's last twining.

My arms stretch  
As feathers form a wing,  
I slow - until I am the nexus  
Of fall and flight.

I am a small bird:  
Member of a flock,  
Never to be alone,  
Rich colours - never to be drab,  
Sing sweet - never to be silent,  
I am a being of natural beauty - never knowing shame.

I swim - out beyond the sound of crashing waves upon the shore,  
I swim - toward the ocean,  
The sun my distance mark  
While I sail the small pleasure boat of my childhood.

At last I feel the gentle nudge,  
This Unseen would be my translator,  
The unconscious instrument  
Of my fanatic wish.

My leg's grasped,  
Let the final breath escape; watch it rise,  
As my hands and arms  
Form small gills.

My last kick turns into a fin flip,  
Breathe the water's air,  
Gills fill and expunge  
The stale breath of my lungs.

I am a small fish,  
Well placed member of a shoal,  
Never to be alone,  
Soft golden shade of my translucent skin -  
Never to be drab,  
I am a being of natural beauty - never knowing ashamed.

Leave the rush of town, embellished and opulent history,

The sound of car horns honking,  
Of language never understood,  
Though I cared to.

The mud buildings daubed with ancient colours faded,  
The women floating cloaks, eyes redeemed by life,  
Chart a course -  
Not caring where, for I will not return.

I crawl - into this empty desert: my life,  
Clear, unclouded sky: my dreams,  
This burning sun: my enemy victorious.

I crawl - my sanity emptied like a sand clock,  
I crawl - pain completes me, shrouds me, universes me,  
I crawl - strength abandon me!

Craving weakness to speed me to my journey's dark temple,  
Now I lie upon my belly -  
Heat leaves me; limbs wither,  
Crenellated skin scales into dry smoothness.

I am a small but poisonous snake - and I am alone!  
My brown skin is drab!  
Never silent, but my death rattle instills only fear!

Measure me  
By what I have felt,  
By my courage.  
Measure me

---

By how I have loved,  
By what I have relinquished and overcome.

Measure me  
By how I have wreaked defeat  
And confusion on evil.

Now, Death take me,  
Purge my soul of all its crimes!

## Rip It!

### Friend in Hand Hotel Glebe (4 September 2007)



Word in Hand!!

TUESDAY 4TH SEPT  
THE FRIEND IN HAND HOTEL

"All this for \$5?!" – Overheard @ WordinHand 7 August 2007

This Month Featuring  
**EDWINA BLUSH**  
Overheard by word in hole solo show  
**JODIE CATHERINE**  
A triple decker monologue

JOIN IN: OPEN MIC, HIGH-ENERGY SLAM  
Cash Prize & Featured Spot Next Month  
7:30 for 8:00 PM \$5 Donation \* REQUESTED

The Word in Hand HOTEL  
PUB

*This performance measures the pinnacle of my performances during the year. It's a harsh, angry poem, and I was in the right mood to deliver it.*

*With me was the girlfriend I'd been dating all that year that had inspired so much of what I'd written this year. Our relationship was full of conflict and by then she hated anything to do with my poetry and performing.*

*which til then had seemed such a cool venue, through her eyes. The place suddenly became shabby and small.*

*This awareness combined with a truly awful performance by a new headliner, and a very insincere performance by a regular headliner. Along with this my girlfriend became jealous of the Headliner. Not because she really meant it, it was out of boredom. Or habit: she didn't really give a shit.*

*So I was in a foul mood and didn't care what the audience thought. Which was good, as they were all dedicated supporters of the virgin headliner, and her stuff is very different to mine.*

*The crowd looked bemused as I performed the poem, and at the end of the performance sat there stunned. I don't recall any applause, which gave me a buzz. It was right, and fitting for the feel of the poem. I wanted to be hated and misunderstood. Too, a guerilla performance - on and off before anyone could do anything about it, hehe. Even the MC was lost for words.*

*The delivery came out in the Celtic voice; hard and fast. Lots of angry energy. The inspiration for the poem comes from how the relationship with this girlfriend might have developed, given her personality and my feelings about her. Crazy, out of control. In trouble. By that stage I realize everything about our relationship is fucked but I admire her self destructive commitment.*

## Rip It!

The crowds parted like the Moses Tide as I shit on the party floor,  
I was looking for someone that understood this little turd of satire  
Is the only real thing in this room of words that have no feeling.

You're laughing with a finger pointed  
Like the looks weren't already daggers on me,  
And the storm troop socialites have the batons out and dogs unleashed.

I thought you're pissed but no,  
You're stone cold sober,  
And that impressed me.

Everyone's thinking you're a fucking eejit,  
And you don't betray yourself -  
Just raise up the middle finger.

Slow so we all know what's coming,  
And give us time to craft reaction,  
Cos that's what you're waiting for.

You shed a flimsy shirt that's hardly on you in the first place,  
A few girls start to notice:  
Are you the stripper no one ordered?

Black leather trousers is all you're wearing now,  
Skin on skin, live porn, no rush,  
Spread across the floor, you writhe like a snake on heat.

I want them all to know this is how dogs are,  
How we all are when we forget  
That someone we never fucking knew said "No you can't!"

My heat seeker, no one like you, no one left on the stage but you,  
My girl that likes to push me off the edge  
And fly past cos you want to hit the bottom first.

Some one asked me who my hero is, apart from you I'd have to say  
It's that life's-beaten-me looking wee mongrel  
Who's getting a shag every time you see him.

Strobe flickers,  
So they only get a glimpse of our action every other second,  
Then the lights go on as if your mother's caught us.

You just laughed,  
Got up and walked out the door with your ass waving,  
In time with the heads of all the boys.

Like those nodding dogs in the back of cars.  
I didn't know the boyfriend was such a big strong boy,  
But then they always fucking are.

So yeah the blood across the wall is mine,  
And I bled some more where I thought they wouldn't find it,  
Like it was some spell from the shaman.

Cock's blood on the Voodoo Doll,  
So she becomes a vamp on a dark night calling,  
And he turns into a priest when the full moon's out.

You broke into the car,  
"It was grey and looking bored" you said, "like a naked shark",  
So we spun out from the city bank and all those phallic buildings.

All this symbolism breaks my heart,  
Seemed like we were making sense so I'm not happy,  
So I take the wheel and you braked on.

A little more grey on some cars and a lot less on ours,  
Well not ours:  
More the red faced guy with Popeye arms that runs at me as I get out.

He's too quick for me, and madder, which I can never be,  
Kicking hard then stops when people start to stare,  
Cos suits have boundaries they'll never cross.

But we have none,  
So I just pissed on him when the cop was yanking him around,  
And you start to laugh, like you didn't think I'd do it.

Don't you know I'd do anything, say anything, if there's a point to make,  
Even when I didn't know what the fuck it means,  
Instinct's good enough for me.

But why'd you have to kill yourself my love?  
Leave me alone with no other course than follow you,  
I promised you I'd two heads full of schemes to melt.

But there's weariness in your wide set eyes,  
Logged it but nothing more than that  
Til I was standing on the lip of the neat rectangle  
In which they think they'll bury you  
But I'd paid the funeral man every dollar I could borrow,  
So you were buried in the bush, at the lookout where you jumped.

My heart leaps when I hear the sound of a voice like yours,  
See a girl or boy with that fine hair, softer than it looks,  
I keep a locket, cos I've forgotten what you look like,  
Yet now I can squeeze the hand of every lover discarded by their twin  
Who took them places they'd never had the nerve to go alone,  
Yet, with her at their side, became the rulers of their unkempt dominion.

## KILLER

### *Sapphos Café (10 October 2007)*

*I loved doing this poem; it really lends itself to performance. It's another exploration of the theme that all people are doing their best, how ever bad it looks.*

*I read this in a slow Southern drawl, really dragging it out and emphasising the underlined words.*

*The headliner, who always judges the Open Mikers, said she really liked it but it sounded too scary and morbid. She'd thought I was one of those crazy guys writing and reciting poems of what they'd really like to be doing. But then she heard me talking to one of my friends and felt OK to talk to me.*

*So I have to be happy with this poem and the performance, capturing the torment and resigned indifference of the would be murderer.*

*The headliner recited from her new book - a good example of the bland and unimaginative crap all the academics write. It doesn't touch me. It doesn't teach me, or illuminate a common experience. She might as well have been reading off the back of a Corn Flakes pack for all it did for me. Yet she rattled off all these projects she's involved in and how she's making a living as a writer.*

## Killer

What of the killer,  
Knife in hand?  
This no bloodless, antiseptic death  
Removed by distance  
Of the bullet from the gun.

The woman knows he wants her dead,  
But fore knowledge didn't shield her,  
He sees a face reflected in her:  
Eyes drawn wide in terror.  
Eyes drawn wide in terror.

But does not see it as his own,  
Does not know this twist bulge hate,  
Acrid breath, bile rising in her throat which  
Overpowers the natural scent of her,  
a scent, faint, forever in his dreams.

The cry interrupted, his hands about her throat,  
Something gives beneath his fingers,  
Something soft, something feminine,  
He shudders,  
For he is no expert in this art of fear.

No!  
This is passion thwarted:

This is revenge.

This is revenge.

This is revenge!

For only this way can he redeem his pride,

And call himself a man again,

Yet he wishes it is her that has him

Dancing at the noose;

Dancing at the noose.

To have the chance to lose himself to death,

The only way he may place frontiers round this pain unbounded,

For he knows:

She is gone from him.

She is gone from him.

Doubt floats briefly in hope's shallow water,

But doubt floats cross the reasoned mind,

And this mind is not the action mind,

The reasoned mind

Is not the action mind.

Knife stained red, the blush spreads across his shirt,

She lies in the corner panting like a whelping bitch,

Then she crawls across the floor, weary,

Compelled to ease his slow decline to death,

For long ago she gave up trying to ease his heart's discomfort.

"I've never loved a man" she said  
"Some times I think it's love, but then I realise it's only pity,  
That's always been my weakness,"  
*"Then I wish I'd had the fortitude to kill you"*, she heard him whisper,  
Many times she wished he had,  
For she would never love a man, never love a child, never love herself.

## **Sing of Love**

**Half Moon Pub, Brixton, London (9 January 2008)**



*This was a real different experience. As you'd expect, there's a thriving slam scene in London with venues all over the South of England.*

*I guess it's the same further north but I didn't check it out as I was only looking to perform in the South East, where I was visiting.*

*There was none of that on this iconically cold and windy English evening.*

*The pub is the centre of the social life for the locals. The TV blared, pints were consumed with monotonous regularity; the punters like little drinking machines lined up at the bar, forearms pumping.*

*Through the back was a dimly lit entertainment area. A large stage; a few raised booths against the walls, wobbling tables (beer coasters under the legs) down the front. A young guy is the MC; a poet trying to be cool. I've never seen that pulled off and he was no exception. Turns out to be a mixed night of slam and open mic music night.*

*The poets go on first; I'm up second. Feeling very flat – the lights remain dimmed so I can't see or even feel the audience. The stage feels big and the audience small. Never a good feeling for me. I like a crowd I can either live or die by. Not this empty feeling, like I'm shouting "Anyone there? Anyone give a shit?" And the poem was not for this venue.*

*But I didn't give a shit; it was a new one and I wanted to give it a try out. Needed an intimate venue, not this barn like place. So it wasn't a great performance but I got what worked and was able to hone the poem down later.*

*There was a cool black guy that gave a dead pan delivery on a couple of poems; nice pathos and humour. Only like a Brit can. After that it was the singers; a few solos, and a band which did a full set. A few of the punters poked their heads through the door, then rapidly pulled back, like turtle necks, unsure of what was going on.*

*I like this poem. It's about a few loves; happy ones. I like the imagery and the contradiction of the feelings of aloneness - both literal and emotional.*

## Sing of Love

Sing of love,  
Sweet, softly, with your Nightingale voice,  
Sigh out your lust desires, for only me to hear,  
And feel in you the ripple of passion, an animal awaken.

Each day we brush against each other's hearts,  
Yours, it seems, unhindered,  
Unaware of how this instant rules my waking  
And confines my thoughts to you.

How often I feel alone, you far away,  
It might be only in my mind  
Yet at times it seems that oceans lie between us  
As you sleep cradled in my arms.

Your voice indistinct, as if across a wide plained valley  
As you whisper in my ear,  
Your touch so faint  
As of the memory of a lost and distant parting.

Yet there *was* a time when many islands separate us,  
When the sounds that still my fears elude me,  
Soft words spoken in your sleep,  
Your breath on my neck.

The beat of your heart against mine,  
Your laughter, free, wicked, desire ridden,  
And then to see you, silhouetted by the moon,  
As you dance for me, naked to the waist.

Countless are the times I wished we'd never met,  
But love is unremitting, my heart's fast,  
So forget about tomorrow, when it's wrong we'll end it,  
Til then take joy and sorrow as they come in equal measure.

But do forgive me now for what ever I might have done,  
Yet I have no regrets,  
Knowing that I hurt you the least that I was able,  
My own desires are no matter, when contained by you.

I wish you think like this of me,  
But we must all love in our own way:  
Do you love me  
As I yearn to be loved?

## **Time Stands Still**

### ***Friend in Hand Hotel (6 February 2008)***



*My last performance and I knew it was going to be. I hadn't performed for a while. Part of me was glad it was over, but I'd discovered I like performing.*

*I like the camaraderie between performers, and the immediacy of the audience reaction. And I really don't care what the reaction is, as long as there is some reaction. I hated the times when there just indifference and a luke warm hand.*

*I've spent some great nights in this pub, but this wasn't one of them!*

*The crowd was great and the headliner is Morganics, a hop hop guy. He did some interesting stuff but he seemed out of place and disinterested. A friend of Miles Merrill. A few years later I later heard a song of theirs on Triple J. It was good and it kept the interest going right through, but there*

*was something missing, or maybe there was too much. Something. But it was great to hear them have something out there, being played to a wide audience. Maybe connect with someone, change their life for good, or turn away from something shot with holes.*

*Morganics took it late. As soon as he finished the entire crowd left. So we're left with just the performers. It was dismal, barely 10 of us, and I'm living the mood.*

*I'm on half way down the list. Morganics is one of the judges and he gives me an 8. Given he's a rapper, I took that as a compliment. I don't remember any of the other performers or performances.*

*This poem comes in a Southern drawl. It's about that moment when we're absorbed in each other and everything around has stopped. Like in a movie where we're the only thing moving. You know you're in love when that happens.*

By now I'd ended the fucked up relationship I'd had throughout the previous year, but I was still in love and coming to terms with the damage. So my performance had a wistful mood, still wishing it had worked and remembering the good times. Fatal!

## Time stands still

Time stands still around us,  
As life runs its frantic pace,  
You an arabesque statue:  
Slow motion waterfalls.

Each drop takes pregnant seconds to splash on your naked shoulder,  
And lick the long contours of your body like a lover,  
A Spanish lover.  
Jealous I clothe you.

Time stands still as lightening strobes,  
Staccato glimpses of you,  
The glint of a smile,  
As you cavort, naked in the rain, in love.

Complete,  
And yet you crave the lust of every man.  
Lips touch, sending sparks in a halo round your head,  
And reflects in your eyes as they crease in smile.

Your skin glistens,  
Sweat never tasted like this before,  
And the slightest movement of your fingers' tips  
Mainlines me on that elusive powder.

Sends bolts of passion through me:  
Mainlines me on that elusive powder.  
Your whispered words slide love's arms about me:  
Slide your arms about me, Love.

Time stands still as we dance and spin and you cling to me,  
Then you rest your head on my shoulder,  
Our eyes still, glazed, looking outside the present,  
To the past for you, and me as always looking forward.

Time stands still as your lips part to say words that never needed saying,  
Because I felt them, here and here,  
(He pointed to his head then rested hand where he imagined heart:  
Beat, beat, beat).

Words would only crush our feeling's fervour,  
And somehow, crystallising into text trites everything,  
Left merely felt, our feelings are untethered,  
Embryonic, uninhibited, instinctive.

Possibilities an uncharted river,  
Down which we explorers merely run the tide,  
The landscape of our passion is unbounded,  
Our passion is unbounded  
When time stands still around us.

## **Poetry Idol, Auckland New Zealand (May 16 2008)**

*A few months after I'd finished performing I visited my brother in Auckland. I'd seen this event advertised on the internet and it turned out to be nearby where my brother lived.*

*So we went down. If nothing else we'd have a few beers and catch up on our news. But this event turned out to be much better than I thought it would. There was even a famous Maori rapper as one of the judges. He was very cool, but generous and encouraging. Even my brother knew the guy, and he knows nothing of the slam scene, so he must have been well known.*

*The set up was as it sounds, using the Pop Idol format. So there were a few rounds, gradually whittling it down to a couple of performers. There'd already been some culling before the night – these guys had already gone through a few slams to get here. So the overall standard was impressive and consistently high right from the start. The venue was a large pub in the centre of town. It was a freezing night but the place was still packed out. The stage was tucked away in a corner.*

*Nearby, in the centre of the room the judges presided. There were people milling around them and stacked up against the walls - a broad mix of academics and Joe Blows. Of course the academics had got their early and were clinging to the best spots, but could be easily drawn to righteous indignation if someone moved in when they went for a piss. I feel I'm being too hard on them, but that's how it went.*

*A skinny white guy did a great performance of an imaginary (maybe not) letter of resignation from a shit job. But the thing which really blew me was what the women were writing about. I'd liked very little of what women in Sydney were writing. Invariably about a fucked up relationship, but without any insight. Just angst. I rarely connected and it seemed someone had already written the same poem many times before.*

*But here, listening to these Islander women. They were writing about something else, with passion, pride and distinction. They were writing about something much bigger, something powerful and of its own energy. I've included two different poems but they're connected somehow and they're both fucking great. Celebrating womanhood and sisterhood.*

*The poems I've included are by **Grace Taylor** and **Tarah Rudolph-Ah Kiau**. Grace went on to win the comp but I can't separate their performances or their poems. I love them both. I spoke to Tarah; she's like her poem, all heart.*

## **What Women do you Know?**

***Grace Taylor (Winner Poetry Idol, Auckland 2008)***

The truth of a woman

sit down, stand up

do this, do that

hold me, leave me

Yes, no

What women do you know?

Is she Mother?

The women who's belly cradled your beating heart,  
gifted you, held you, loved you.

Put up with doors slammed in her face,

and your back chat talk

sneaky smokes around the corner

when you say, "Oh mum, I'm just going for a walk".

Yet when you came home . . . she still fed you

What women do you know?

Is she Sister?

The one who your clothes always seem to look better on,  
or shouted you a feed when a love had gone wrong.

Drove you crazy with all her,

“I’ve been there, done that”

pushing her advice aside,

only to find that maybe she wasn’t talking all smack

What women do you know?

Is she Daughter?

Whose eyes are a reflection of your own

makes you smile, laugh, cry.

But when she does wrong,

“Oh, she’s just like her father”

but God save the man who should ever stop her laughter.

She is of you

What women do you know?

**Is she Nana?**

With her smile so old and sweet

But after accidentally breaking her favourite plate,  
those knowing eyes you just could not meet.

The hand that would slap you  
should she find out you lied,  
yet the same hands that would hold you  
when you broke down and cried.

**What women do you know?**

**Is she Lover?**

In whom you delight  
Her spirit smelling so sweet,  
yes, it was love at first sight.

Yet pissed you off with all her,  
“You should know me by now”  
When she just didn’t understand  
that to speak love you never learnt how.  
Yet, she still loves you

**What women do you know?**

**Or**

**Is she You?**

**Strong . . . yet silent**

**Loud . . . yet hurting**

**Independent . . . yet yearning**

**Not quite one shape**

**Not quite one size**

**But carries Her heart**

**soul and mind**

**You are You**

**You define You**

**So be cautious how you treat her . . .**

**For she is someone's**

**Mother**

**Sister**

**Daughter**

**Nana**

**Lover**

**Be cautious how You treat You**

**For You are someone's**

**Mother**

**Sister**

**Daughter**

**Nana**

**Lover**

**What women will you know?**

## ***Grace wrote this about herself and her work.***

*I have always loved poetry, although I didn't know it to be poetry. Music was my first introduction to poetry as I have always foremost heard the lyrics of a song before the actual music, so I guess you can say that I was first introduced to poetry through songwriting.*



*At the age of 14 I started to keep a journal of writings, it was my outlet for the roller-coaster days of a teenager. It wasn't like I thought, 'right, I'm going to write some poetry now.'*

*It was more like I just started to write and I loved the freedom it offered me. It wasn't until I shared it with a close friend that she said, 'that sounds like poetry girl'.*

*I had a dry spell of writing for a couple of years after high school, but I soon opened that journal back up again and used my pen as my weapon to express the journeys I had experienced. My poems remained unspoken and unshared until 2007.*

*While running a youth camp at a Marae we had a talent sharing night and one of my colleagues encouraged me to share a piece. After about 20 minutes of persuading I asked everyone to close their eyes and in a very*

*shaky nervous voice I shared a poem. The response was overwhelming and it was then that I really felt my poems could actually speak to someone else.*

*I was then introduced to Spoken Word by watching some poets on Russell Simmon's Def Poetry Jam and just fell in love with this way of sharing poetry. My passion to share poetry through spoken word just exploded and although still building up my confidence I was persuaded to audition for the Auckland Readers and Writers Festival Poetry Idol 2008. Much to my surprise I won!*

*For me the win wasn't about the money or title, but a huge affirmation for me that what I had to share through poetry people actually wanted to hear and understood. I have no formal academic learning's of poetry, I just write and share.*

*Since then I have been invited to share at schools, expos, conferences and poetry nights around Auckland. While on my OE in 2008 I even braved it and shared 2 pieces at the Poetry Café in London.*

*I also am one of the three founders and facilitators of the South Auckland Poets Collective, which is a group of 8 young poets from Manukau that use Spoken Word to share their stories.*

*My inspirations for writing come from first and foremost my own personal experiences, many of my poems seem to be about my cultural identity, the falls and celebrations of being a women and my faith.*

*I am a pretty honest and straight up kind of woman and my poetry is reflective of that, which makes me completely vulnerable when I share, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I was once advised by a very amazing Pacific poet to never lose the vulnerability in my poems as it is unique to my style.*

# ME - Tarah Rudolph-Ah kiau (Poetry Idol Finalist, Auckland 2008)



*Tarah has a lot of heart, and an innocence I hope she never loses because it's beautiful to see and it comes through in what she writes.*

*I don't know anything more about her than what I saw that night except she's good friends with Grace Taylor. This photo of Tarah was taken at Otara Fresh Gallery 28<sup>th</sup> May 2008 (a couple of weeks after Poetry Idol) whilst performing for South Auckland Poet's Collective.*

# Me

This is my full mouth

Curling into a grin.

Look at my teeth

As they shine so bright

Like the Maclean's lady watching me as I wink at her.

These are my brown eyes, my Maori nose,

My sometimes white sometimes brown skin

These are my hands

Dancing around the circumference of my stomach.

These are my flat feet, my thick thighs

Pound the pavement

With power and strength.

These are ears as daintily posed

As the hibiscus in my hair.

This is my body

From the base of my neck

To the tips of toes.

From the arch of my back

To the curve of my breasts.

From the round of my butt

To the sparkle in my eyes.

These are my scars as pink as my lips

As bright as my toes,

As tender as my heart.

Watch my hair flows down the riverbank of my back

Curls cascade through silicon valleys,

Washing away billboards of Pantene Pro-V perfection.

Pushing them outwards, and upwards

Stretching to the stars

Singing adoration to the heavens

"Thank you Lord for this is me,

This is me"

# Conclusion

## The slam scene is dying before my eyes!

Over the last few months of my performances, gone is the quality, excitement, and love - that created a cradle for new performers and a foundation for the rest of us to stretch ourselves.

The slam's been pushed to the graveyard shift, so there's no audience for us. Dead end. I came down in to the city a few more times and it hadn't changed. There had been something here at **The Friend in Hand**, but now it was gone, for sure, for now. I'm glad I was part of it when it was up, and I'd helped to make it happen. Circles round, so it'll come up again when the right mix of people come to the fore.

There were some crazy people, some very talented, some crowd favourites that brought it down to a level which meant the audience didn't have to think, so became transformed to cattle. And on this stage I'd learned about myself, let myself go, and put together a book of poetry exactly how I wanted it. And more, because I had the opportunity to include the poems of some great writers, and spend some time with some great people.

What I performed was accessible; some people got it. Undeniable, because I'd seen the realisation on their faces. The sound of an audience moved by words someone had written alone in a dim lit room while other people were out partying or fucking. Written on a scrap of paper or printed off a computer. It didn't matter; the poets thoughts had persuaded someone to share their imagination. This is what it's about.

Which performance do I remember most? I'll go back to the first slam I went to, memorable for Andy's "**Chicken**". It was a great introduction to the scene, and for the non-judgemental attitude of the MCs and other poets. The Arabic duo that performed that night was special too. I never saw them perform again.

The weirdest night would have to be **Square Circle**. I don't what the two old guys that organised it are on but I hope they get off it soon. It didn't seem to be doing them any good.

The best night, because of the consistently high standard of the performers, was Poetry Idol in Auckland. Though that night at The Friend in Hand when I first performed "**The Splintered Glass**" was special for its spontaneous and unplanned brilliance.

Of my own performances I'll go with "**The Splintered Glass**" from that same night. It was one of my best performances and the crowd was obviously melted by it. I'll never forget that sigh, then a wave of love flowed over me. The night at The Last Bastion of Civilisation was fantastic too.

There were many other highlights, on and off the stage, and many great performances - by virgins and old timers.

There's some great poets in Sydney. What they write is revealing and exciting. But the academics hold all the book contracts and edit the zines, so there's no room there. And there's barely any performance venues any more. In Melbourne they've got a community TV slot, which is cool and inspires people to try that bit harder.

I am confident for the future of performance poetry. It's the future and life of all poetry. Not so with the Dead Sea Scrolls of the Academic poets,

who write cleverly without passion and inspire no emotion. It's all a head thing. Too safe.

Let loose the crazy American kid who ranted crap for a year, then blasted me when I least expected, with something truly wonderful! That's the future of slam, however uncertain and unpredictable it might be, as all our futures are, unless we have the wisdom and experience to know otherwise.