

"FULL OF LIFE"

A collection of poetry and prose

Edited by Michael Laskey



About this book

In January and February 2008 Michael Laskey – freelance poet and founder of the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival – led sessions with six library reading groups from across Suffolk in order to inspire people to write creatively.

This book celebrates the creativity of the people who took part.

Michael has edited the work, choosing one piece by each participant to be included in this book.

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These writing sessions were part of Suffolk Artlink's Culture Club project which provides a programme of creative activities and events for older people in Suffolk. For more information visit www.suffolkartlink.org.uk



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Imagine

Tents made from the clothes horse or the kitchen table
Cut-out clothes for paper dolls
A cooker drawn on a cardboard box
Dressing up in the old net curtains
Mud-pie meals, petals to decorate
Submarines and clubs in the shed
Wooden bricks

Lowestoft Group

Some of my learning experiences

I learnt and played when I was a Brownie
And then had great fun learning to ride my bike
And even better, no hands – good job roads weren't then so busy.
School was okay but French was even better
And at fourteen off I went to stay en famille near Paris –
Six weeks of all-the-time French I had.
And now I had got the travel bug as well
So off I went as an au pair to Marseilles and Monte Carlo,
I had learnt French quite well by then.
I worked for Lady Kenilworth
Who dictated her letters to me which I typed –
Those poor arthritic hands.
I learnt to type on a French typewriter
So I got a bit of money for typing a book.
So then I came back to learning English ways again –
Back to the office where all the learned shorthand was a help.
And now after a lot of learning
When I had my knee done I learnt to walk again
And most importantly now I am trying to learn
To lipread as my hearing is deteriorating.
And the shorthand I learnt at sixteen
Still comes in handy for writing messages –
That is, if I can read it.

Marion Alderman

What I learnt as a carer

to a lady with early Alzheimers in Lyme Regis. She lived alone in a grand house and garden and I visited regularly over a period of time. I learnt how to help her to cook, bath, garden, use the bank, enjoy outings in the car etc. Most of all I learnt not to try to 'take over', how to stand back and let her try to 'do' for herself, retaining her dignity, but also avoiding any danger, e.g. slipping in the bath. And the greatest thing was to be aware that what I could see as obvious was not to her, i.e. she thought of me as a friend only, not a paid carer (been forgotten over time) and a day of huge insight came when she 'discovered' I was paid for the friendship and it ended there and then – huge upset on both sides and it really made me think and re-evaluate the job and just be more aware – a real wake-up call.

Ann Anderson

Bonfire Night

I remember when Bobby Downey directed the traffic on the corner of our street he had a large pocket that through use had enlarged. I thought it would be good to put a penny banger in his pocket. We discussed who should do it and I decided that I would do it myself. So I did. I thought after what a daft and dangerous thing it was for me to do to anyone.

I remember when I was grown up and came back on leave for the first time in uniform, he shook my hand and gave me a £5 note, no hard feelings, though if he'd caught me then, he said he'd have given me a right battering.

John Archer

It was a large, palatial dwelling on a posh street,
harlequin tiles led up to an impressive front door.
Always smelling fresh, clean and never untidy,
a straight hallway with steep stairs
leading to a first floor of massive proportions.
Down a step into a bathroom – what luxury
not having to go down the garden into a freezing cold loo.
Bedrooms big enough to live in –
all three of them with proverbs
and ‘Home Sweet Home’ displayed on sturdy walls.
Beds with old-fashioned quilts as thick as pillows,
filled with feathers from hand-reared chickens
which roamed freely in the garden.
Glass dressing-table sets in assorted iridescent colours
gracing furniture built to last. Net curtains
making everything dark and gloomy.
A walk-in pantry without any damp,
full of home-made goodies,
gleaming china and cooking pots.
An understairs cupboard you could hide in,
smelling of shoe polish and household cleaners,
creepy and exciting.

Pauline Atkins

The Photograph

I am in my early fifties and still walking with a stick.
I’m with the Felixstowe M.S. Group and we are on an outing to Buckingham Palace.
I’m standing between two policemen at the gates before we actually go in to the palace.
I am wearing a red check short sleeved blouse and blue denim jeans.
My hair is short and I feel happy today.
We all smile for the camera.
You can hear the noise of the traffic.
My late friend Pat is at the end of the group.

Heather Atkinson

Names

I used to be 'Miss' or 'Luv' to shopkeepers.

I remained that for years.

Time ticked by until the day when I became 'Madam'.

What was it that marked the change?

Valerie Bennett



A Day in the Life of...

Thinking back to the day
my baby was born
ten days after she was expected
I have blacked out the actual birth
but when I first saw my daughter
I thought 'most beautiful baby in the world'
and 'well worth waiting for'
and appreciated the tranquillity
after all the turmoil
I look forward to taking her home
although husband's nervous of the responsibility
This was the beginning of our family
three of us together

Joyce Berridge

I remember when I was young going up the Warren, taking a picnic. We spent hours climbing trees and running down the sand dunes. Our mother never worried about us going home late as everything was safe in those days.
I remember how I hated the planes where I used to live, night after night they kept me awake.

Jean Berry

Willow Field, Chediston

My willow field – it grows each year
Lots and lots of basket willow.
Wild life thrives
The hedges fruit
And up the top –
What's here?
It's my Will's grave
He's resting – peace,
Escaped this mad, mad world.
I'll join him there when my turn comes
And watch the willow grow.

Jennifer Berry

The Wilds of Suffolk

I come from a house in the wilds of Suffolk.
The school opposite was a hut, a blanket stretched midway for junior and senior pupils.
My gran had a wall of home-made wine
which was a panacea for all ills she thought.
A place where children were seen and not heard,
where adult voices stopped abruptly on the entrance of a child.
Where eggs were collected from the free range chickens
and I searched about in the bushes to find them.
I wondered as they rattled down the track
if they would all be scrambled on their arrival.
Where I played with our two dogs,
the Schnauzer living outside in a large kennel
and the Bedlington Terrier indoors.

Bella Bridgewater

My Names

I was christened Julia Jane, Julia after an august Great Aunt – Hannah Julia. As a baby I had a cute little face (not august) and my father called me his little 'snicket' which I pronounced as Nicky. This was my home-family name – an endearing name by which I was known by everyone. I liked this. When I was nine my mother became headmistress of the village school and considered Nicki too familiar so I became Julia or Julie and so little Nicki was lost and some of my childhood went with it.

At Grammar School I was Julia to the teachers, Julie for my classmates and friends. At the time Jane was considered old-fashioned and for a while boys used to hide behind the boys' gate calling 'Julia Jane'. I hated this, especially as my horrible brother had told them the Jane secret.

Julia Brown

Who am I?

The sum total of other people's opinions
Or what I imagine to be their opinion of me.
That doesn't tell me much, that's my imagination – how can I trust?
And equally my own opinion of myself doesn't count,
Because I can't trust that either!
In the cosmic scheme of things, we're all less than a full stop.
An atom.
But perhaps that's the beauty and wonder of it.
We are all star debris,
Ten thousand trillion trillion trillion atoms in the cosmos.
So who am I?
Recycled stardust.
I've already been doing, thinking, experimenting.
That didn't get me far – out at night looking up at the stars.

Something's happening, I'm being drawn up,
Encompassed by them, I'm part of them.
I think I'm beginning to know who I am.
I dance and sing and paint, smile, laugh and cry,
Feel sadness and joy,
Given birth and written this?!

Yes I've found who I am –
Recycled star dust.
That somehow comforts me.

Bhakti Brunson

Nameless

I present many skins
to the external world
some friendly some formal
some affectionate some reserved

But who is behind all these?
Without the title what or who is left?
Nameless it remains
A receiver of stimuli from outside the me
A receiver who senses and responds
But what is the central link
The nucleus
The one who experiences all that is?

A mystery to you?

But a far greater mystery to me!

Val Burnham

Monday morning wash day, therefore no lying in bed till the last moment.
Clean the living-room fireplace out first before starting on the copper in the kitchen.

All removables had to be removed to prepare the working place. Then water was carried in a pail from the sink to fill up the copper. The fire was lit, first with paper, then with wood which had been collected previously.

How I used to groan when the firewood would arrive and I would have to stack it in the coal house when I had other plans.

The day when spring arrived the coal house had to be cleaned out and whitewashed, ready for the cheap coal at summer prices.

Away with oil lamps. Then gas, then electricity and now the touch of a switch.

George Cable

I remember my father lifting me up until my head touched the ceiling.
I remember kneeling beside Gran's bed to say my prayers.
I remember my little bedroom two steps down from hers.
I remember walking to school along the road – to St Margaret's School.
I remember the Christmas decorations made with two hoops decorated and hung from the ceiling and the paper chains made from strips of coloured paper.
I remember Eastholme – the worn stone flags in the hall and the dark stairs we went up to hang our coats, the bigger ones told us there was a ghost in the attics.
I remember standing in the armchair brushing my mother's hair.
I remember standing in our kitchen, the back door open and the sun streaming in, while the voice from the radio said 'We are now at war with Germany'. I was just nine.
I remember the town changed – so many sailors everywhere, no room for civilians anywhere.
I remember the night Pakefield Church caught fire. My mother was so frightened, she took me out of our Anderson shelter to a large public shelter, but it was so full we went to my Aunt's which was on the edge of the cliff, but when we got there the Church was on fire and we were sent away – I think to home.

Sheila Cable

I remember when I was about five, before I started school, we lived in a painted green wooden bungalow that had a white picket fence at the front and to one side. There was a picture in red, black and white of a cat.
I remember that on the other side there was a tangle of bushes and some tall weeds.
I remember that one day as I was looking at this piece of ground something brown and furry appeared half-way up one of the taller weeds.
I remember calling to my mother to come and see this little thing that had appeared out of nowhere.
I remember her coming and her scream of horror, "Rats, horrible dirty creatures. We'll have to do something about them".
I remember on another occasion climbing the large tree that stood opposite our bungalow, but this time climbing higher than I ever had before. In fact when I popped my head out of the top I saw my mother coming out of the front door and calling "Michael" in the way she always did, and me replying "Here I am, Mum" and her look of terror as she said "Well done, now show me how you can come down".

Michael Carr

Heads and tails

I come from a council estate in Stockton-on-Tees. I was the only girl in the street so I wasn't allowed to play outside the front garden. I would stand on the bar of the gate and watch the boys playing marbles, envy them cycling round the streets. My mother had worked in a posh hotel in Harrogate before marriage and she tried to live like the residents she had served. So our table was always set properly at meal times. We had a butter dish and a special pot for marmalade and its spoon. She tried to 'improve' dad but didn't succeed. Every attempt to introduce him to a mac or a topcoat ended in a row. Relatives rarely visited us but I loved visiting them on Tyneside. I was allowed vinegar and Tizer and slept heads and tails with my cousins.

Betty Chicken

Lost Things

When my mother was pregnant with me, she was going to call me Bernard. But one day she found a watch in the street and took it in to the police station. An elderly lady claimed it and came round to thank my mother. She told her that she'd prayed to St Anthony, the patron saint of lost things, and that was why my mother changed her mind and decided to call me Anthony instead.

Anthony Collins

I remember falling out of a tree on Purley playing fields and coming to on the grass –
I must have knocked myself out.

I remember being in the cubs and how going to camp we carried our kitbags on a trek-cart.

I remember being camped near a railway and as we were stripped naked for washing a train went past and we all ran for cover.

I remember when I was a scout being called over under a tree and stepping back when a drop of water went past my nose, just in time to miss a bucketful.

I remember I got my revenge.

I remember journeys on my combination, motorbike and sidecar.

I remember the sidecar with my pregnant wife in it separating from the bike when we were going on holiday. We had to have it welded.

I remember coming back from Southend in the war and the forks separated, so we tied them together with some wire and drove home.

I remember going through Runymede and the sidecar wheel overtook us, heading straight for the river.

Bill Collins

It was

the gramophone we were not allowed to touch
with the fluff underneath it

the back garden with the arches and trellis
covered in rambler roses

the cold lino and the sliding rugs.

Banging on the knocker and rushing in –
chased by what?

Edna Comport

My Photo

My photo of my grandchildren
is placed on the sitting room wall.
It was taken years ago
when their ages were one, three and four.
I value it very much.
It is hard to realise it was taken over thirty years ago.

Nancy Cross

It was a walk of anticipation to her front door
with the shiny brass knocker on the dirty front door.
It was the smell of lavender polish
disguising the cabbage smell.
The not so white arm caps
on the moquette settee.
It was the empty coal scuttle waiting
to be filled
beside the empty grate waiting
to be laid.
It was the hanging horse brasses waiting
to be cleaned.
It was the unkempt lawn
waiting for a mowing.

Pat Davies

I remember the bus to school and hiding under the seat to save a penny-halfpenny.
I remember the long ride to school on my bike
I remember the baggy grey flannels I had to wear
I remember losing my temper for the first time
I remember being hit by my Dad for doing bob-a-job and getting home late
I remember losing my wellington boot in the swamp to prevent sinking
I remember going to the local bakers for a penny-worth of stale cakes
I remember a ride in my friend's first car, a TR2
I remember my first driving test when the car radiator exploded at the end of the test
I remember jumping off Clacton pier at a concert when the police raided
I remember passing out in the bath due to carbon monoxide gas and waking up in front of the fire with no clothes on

James Dillon



I **remember** school being very warm but I was very frightened
I remember my brother's pyjamas when he came out of hospital
I remember three of us in bed
I remember whitening the step
I remember when Dad was on strike
I remember Christmas when Barry set fire to the mattress and Lesley and I shovelled
snow over it
I remember a lady singing down our street and Mum gave me twopence to give to her,
her voice was beautiful
I remember looking after Mum and taking her to the London Hospital
I remember a little girl that never thought she would have a lovely family

Jean Dillon

The Photo

I am 14 years old.
I am in a field in Lincolnshire
camping in a tent.
Standing near the campfire,
one hand holding a stick to poke the fire,
one hand holding the billy can of water.
I am wearing a blue girl guide's uniform
with yellow tie and leather belt,
my dress emblazoned with badges
of different shapes and colours.
My hair is shoulder length,
probably untidy due to lack of mirrors in the camp.
I am smiling, blissfully happy.
There are cows in the next field,
fortunately with a gate between us.
I can almost smell the smoke
which was curling towards me.
There will be more camps in the future
for me to look forward to.

Audrey Drake

I remember my father coming home from sea during the First World War. I always thought he was important because he was called boss and wore an earring. I thought he was important but it was supposed to cure the turn in his eye.
I remember sliding down the cliff on an old tray.
I remember being kicked out of guides for stealing apples.
I remember having to give my sister things of mine because she was always ill.
I remember an air raid warden in London – “Put ou’ tha’ light, boy”.
I remember buying my wedding dress in Petticoat Lane for thirty bob.
I remember lovely fish and chips from our local fish shop for twopence and my brother’s smoke house, doing all kinds of fish, specially sprats.

Nora Dyer

What I learnt as an only child

I quickly learnt the two sides of the coin:
utter loneliness and
utter independence

utter secretiveness, protection from the outside world
utter sensitivity to
language, the countryside, the Romantic poets and
the awfulness of man, the cruelty, the desecration.

I learnt an extra canniness
I was Fox, creeping along the hedgerows,
avoiding attack.
I was goody-goody Diana in the back row
nose down, working hard at school
never sticking my neck up
never rising to my full height (physically taller than all the boys)
or my full ‘potential’ (horrid jargon for one’s glorious possibilities).

Never free from longing for someone
to bounce off, for brother, sister – however quarrelsome.
Irony of ironies, I was never alone
from my mother’s neurosis, for
she had only me.
I escaped at about eight years old.
I devised an inner way
into my imaginings –
while Mother was moaning and ‘woe-is-me-ing’
I was indulging her outwardly with ‘Poor Mummy’
while inside I was with the Would-Be-Goods or Treasure Island.

Diana Fernando

I remember!

Where does one begin? My life has spun over many years.
Which episode should I recall? So many memories and one recalls sadness.

However I recall spending a deal of time with my father, pottering in the garden, sorting out the seeds ready for storage next year, candytuft.

In the garden next door lived a boy, but I remember my mother did not like me associating with him – I thought he was lovely.

I remember my father being unemployed. He had lost his business, yes, he manufactured pianos, but there came the age when no-one wanted pianos – it was the age of records. I remember how difficult it was for my parents, my father was nearly sixty, unemployment money was 10/- a week, and it was only because my parents rented a large house that mother was able to let rooms and so make ends meet.

I remember as a child life was difficult for me. I suffered from a form of TB, causing glands to swell in the neck, so I was excluded from school, dreaded going to hospital which led to operations which frightened me.

Peggy Flay

To the Lighthouse

I am in my fifties. In the Wirral.
I'm climbing up a lighthouse.
Half way up, going from a narrow placed ladder
to the rusted permanently fixed ladder
where there is a small gap to stretch.
I'm wearing shorts and tee-shirt, bare feet
having crossed over the deepest water circling the lighthouse.
Short hair above a nervous face.
Facing the lighthouse nobody could see
the trepidation I felt.
My friend who was too nervous to climb herself
took the photo from the safety of the rocks.
The air fresh with the smell of brine.
When I reach the top and go in
I am rewarded by the sense of achievement
and the view from a higher perspective.
Then I have to climb down again.

Diane Foster

The Necklace

The necklace my mother had
The necklace from the eighteenth century
The necklace that belonged to my grandmother
The necklace that is 22 carat
The necklace that has a locket as well
The necklace which holds my mother's and grandmother's hair and I think great
grandmother's
The necklace that is very precious to me
The necklace I will give to my grand-daughter which will be five generations old by then

Gloria Goody

I remember lying in bed in the dark and being afraid of wolves.
I remember my mother telling my aunty to stop telling me scary stories about wolves
and bears.
I remember listening to the clang of hammer on anvil from the blacksmith next door.
I remember trying to fish from the river which flowed alongside our garden.
I remember falling in and my sister hauling me out with the help of her fishing rod.
I remember climbing the trees for hazel nuts.
I remember the feel of itchy woollen stockings on my first day at Grammar School
(I had only worn socks until then).
I remember being reprimanded for running down corridors.
I remember standing on the carpet in the headmistress' room.
I remember my mother's reaction when, aged 10, I announced after my first day at
Grammar School – "Oh, I do love Gym."
"Good gracious, I hope you're not starting that nonsense at your age."
I remember my older sister explaining that I meant 'Gymnastics'.

Pat Grimsey

Next door

The house joined to ours.

The outside toilet where you could carry on a conversation with whoever was using the one next door.

My Granny lived there.

I remember rushing in, round the big table, and onto her ample knees, and being hugged, my face pressed into her soft black satin bosom.

The dog Norrie, resting on the gaily patterned, pegged, rag rug in front of the roaring fire.

The blackened kettle on the hob of the great black-leaded range.

The fire irons standing in the brass shell.

The brass toasting fork.

The kettle holder above.

Then, forbidden to go round. Keep quiet. Don't shout.

The rags wound round the brass door knocker to deaden its sound.

I never saw her again.

I was told she had gone to be with Jesus.

She was rarely mentioned again.

Mary Hackeson



I'm 77 tomorrow!

I've met many people, lived in several places, but who is the significant other?
My adopted father, long dead, but a gentle, generous, garrulous man! He worked at the docks, had an enormous overcoat and he brought home lots and lots of chocolate and sweets. I never wondered when I was a child where they came from. Off the back of a lorry – as they say? The halfpenny put on the edge of the mantelpiece and there for my discovery as I stood on the hearth fender seat. It bought five caramels from the village shop. Thank you, Dad!

Betty Hatcher

I remember the boy next door
I remember the fair, the coconut stalls
I remember my brothers' laughter
I remember the train full of evacuees and the crying and then the silence
I remember the silence of the doodlebugs when they stopped then dropped
I remember being bombed out and Mum running back to get the cat and Mum only had her underwear on
I remember my wedding day and the crowds outside the church. There were lots of Americans in trucks outside shouting rude comments
I remember my first date, what a jerk, all pimples and spots

Pat Hayward

What I learnt when I moved to Halesworth

That London isn't the centre of the universe
That I can live without West End theatres and shopping sprees
That now I can breathe cleaner air and enjoy the countryside
That I can have an opinion about Tesco buying up land and feel passionate about
breached sea defences and rising sea levels
That I can forget to lock the back door at night and can only be shot by a blind farmer
That I don't have to worry about my son growing up safely
That to become part of a community, you have to join things, put yourself out there, talk
to your neighbours

Elizabeth Holt

Group Photograph

At St Helier Hospital, Carshalton, Surrey.
In the January 1949 set of student nurses, I was the youngest, not quite 18.
Oh, to look at it now, those young, fresh faces –
we were all pretty girls, some more than others.
Now that youngest girl is not quite 77.
There I am on the far left, with life all before me.
Uniform green and white striped dress,
white aprons with bibs pinned over our chests.
Hair all tucked up under a most unusual cap –
a three-cornered piece of muslin put on like a turban,
we all hated them.
We were all smiling for the camera
outside the Nurses' Home that sunny winter day in January.
A professional photographer.
We'll all have copies to show our parents
and end up in frames on our parents' walls.

Margaret Holt

Farm Life

I was born in a little village in Suffolk called Ramsholt in a farmhouse.
I was one of seven brothers and sisters. We enjoyed farm life and of course all the animals, horses, sheep, cows, and always the harvest time, cutting all the corn-fields.
Then in the spring, it was looking for primroses, in the ditches, in the meadows.

Lilian Houchell

What I learnt when I started trying to swim

was that I sank like a stone every time I tried.
This was particularly embarrassing
being the eldest of three girls,
my two younger sisters learnt quickly
from our father who was an excellent swimmer.
It got worse as my sisters became excellent swimmers
and my poor dad was still trying to teach
his oldest hopeful the basic strokes.
In a way the start of World War II
saved further embarrassment for me.
P.S. When we returned and moved to Felixstowe,
I started lessons at the Leisure Centre
and actually swam quite well.

Jean Hughes

Heirlooms

A silver thimble my mother gave me
A statue of a girl holding a dog in Copeland Parian ware
A turquoise and gold Persian ring
My grandmother's rosewood Pembroke table with its bordered inlay
A French black marble and slate clock, just like the one in Cezanne's painting
A sampler dated 1806
An opera gown with a cape in silk velvet
A watercolour sketch of my father done by my brother
My maternal grandfather's nose
A sardonic sense of humour
Stubbornness

Ipswich Group

What I learnt as a housekeeper

How to keep quiet and allow someone else to be in charge and just to think 'I know she's wrong'.
How to clear up a shredded mink hat.
How not to smile when the repair man was puzzled by what was wrong with the video machine – the dog had peed on it.
How to clean up after the dog.
How to cook on an Aga – now I want one.
How to please two people with very diverse needs.
How to let a frail old man stoke the fire and hope he didn't fall into it.
How to ignore the chink of wine bottles hidden in a carrier bag at breakfast time.
How to pick snowdrops in the wood.
How to convince someone the salad really is too rotten to eat.
How to care about the tyrant.
How to do things someone else's way.
I never did learn how much sugar she liked in the lemon mousse!

Carol Joy

Grandma's House

It was
the stone cobbles on the outside,
the small path from the rusty gate.
The outside loo,
dark, forlorn, not begging to be used.
The old kettle boiling on the fire.
It was
the dampness, the old worn carpet,
hard stern chairs, unwelcoming.
The stale cakes and sugar lumps for tea,
the look of be seen, not heard,
the unspoken word.
It was the awkward silence,
the relief to feel the sun on the way home.

Brenda Ling

Washing Days

When I was a child washing was done taking a whole day. We had a so-called washing machine which had to be filled with hot water from a gas boiler, then soap flakes and a dolly bag were added. The clothes were agitated by wooden panels which one did by hand.
The white things were washed first, then coloureds. Very dirty clothes were scrubbed on the top of the kitchen table which was almost white with all the scrubbing over the years. Sheets were boiled in the gas boiler, they were made of pure cotton or linen. We did have a mangle which was turned by hand to get most of the water out after things had been rinsed in clean water in the sink.
Backs of houses and sometimes back lanes were where the clothes and sheets were hung to dry. On wet days things were hung in the house round the fire so the room was full of steam and it was cold and miserable in the house.

Nowadays you open the front of an automatic washer and dryer, put soap in and press a button.

Barbara Lynch

Names

They christened me Margaret Dorothy.

“Why Dorothy?” I asked my mother later.

“The Doctor liked it” she replied. “But I hate it” I said.

I was Margaret to my mother and Meg to my father and brother.

But Margaret if I had offended.

“Why Meg?” I asked. “Because your father wanted

to call you Peggy after an old flame

but settled for Meg.”

At school I was Cookie to all, including the teachers –
my surname was Cook.

The next school called me Meg and so did my friends.

Back to being Cookie when I started work,

until I changed my name to Wright and became Meg again.

But Mother to my children and Meg to my stepchildren

and both are used with love.

I am a lucky woman, whatever I am called.

Meg Manly

The China Teddy Bear

My most favourite ornament is a china Teddy Bear.

Teddy lives with me at Lacy Court, Risbygate Street, Bury St Edmunds.

Teddy originates in Bergen, Norway.

Teddy was given to my mother by my mother’s two sisters who all lived in Bergen.

Teddy was given to me over fifty years ago when I returned from accompanying a
relative whose husband lived in the Belgian Congo.

I received Teddy so that he could live wherever I lived.

Teddy has wandered round Europe and spent five years in Canada.

Teddy and I sometimes talk together and always enjoy each other’s company.

Not many people know about Teddy, but all that do respect him as they come to our flat.

Marian Mess

I remember

I remember when I was five I had been very ill and my father came to visit me with a lovely chocolate egg.

I remember when I was eight I had a lovely Hercules bicycle and my friend used to take me on several country rides and also to pick primroses in the woods.

I remember my first trip abroad to partake in French cuisine – quite an eye-opener – and my cousin was very sick en route.

I remember my first job training to be a cook was cleaning out six chickens. It took me all morning and the chef got very annoyed, but I mastered it all in the end.

I remember my first ride in my father's Morris Cowley car with a big dicky, in the end with the hood down he took us for miles, enjoyed by all.

Betty Mill

The Farmhouse

Oil lamps, covered hot bricks for our bed

The steep stairs behind the door frightened

Outside toilet, newspaper to clean

Ash with shovel, no chain

Smells of oil

Water from a well in the garden

Range for cooking

Chickens and geese running everywhere

Dodging the tractors

The farmer dirty and smelling of sweet cows' milk

Hay and rats in the barn

Hamish the bull with a ring in his nose

Ann Murley



The Fishing Rod

The fly rod I got from my grandfather
The fly rod I caught my first trout on
The fly rod that I broke on my first salmon
The fly rod that I left on the bus and thought lost
The fly rod that the bus driver handed in
The fly rod that I had rebuilt to 'as new'
The fly rod that I have had for over eighty years
The fly rod that brings back many memories

Jock Neil

Nana's

It was dark, the solitary window looked onto a neighbour's wall.
I can't remember the smell indoors.
It was the smell of the yard which has stayed with me always –
cat's pee, coal and dank soil.
Bare concrete walls on two sides.
I thought I hated it
until suddenly a large ship glided by beyond the fence –
excitement, splendour, envy.
But Nana belonged indoors
with the hissing kettle and tall fender on which you could sit.
Uncle Fred knitting socks – a merchant seaman
whose kiss both repelled – the rough whiskers –
and welcomed with gentleness and warmth.
I wonder if Nana ever went into that yard,
perhaps she had long since taken those ships for granted.

Clare Neville

I come from

an outside lavatory, a well deep and beautiful
drinking water, four joined rented
houses, dirt yard

from a managed garden to vegetables
from washday Monday, Sunday leftovers

from home cooking, chopping wood
Dad shooting game, radio listening
from beetles on the mat
open fires, range cooking
from gardening
flower gathering

June Norton

Uncle Alec

I see you Nuncky opening the garage door
The gleaming Citroën waiting for your key
The hood let down and clipped in place
The excitement rising as I wait your command
“Get in Gloria and hold on tight”
Standing up straight, long hair streaming
I shout and sing as we fly down the lanes
You join in by honking the horn
All too soon it’s time to return
Home to Auntie and warm buttered scones.

Gloria Ringrose

I remember the coldness of north east weather.

I remember summer holidays spent on the local beach and learning to swim in the cold North Sea.

I remember walking five miles to St Mary’s Island and the choice of either an ice cream cornet or return home by bus.

I remember learning the alphabet and how to read.

I remember reading to the class whilst they sewed.

I remember the first air raid siren and subsequent air raids.

I remember post-war confidence that all would now be well in the country.

I remember promises made and promises broken.

Pat Roche

I remember the house where I was born, gas light, green beads twinkling, large roses on the wallpaper.

My father on a Friday producing Nestlé's choc bars, sometimes a puppy or kitten also – he used to go through a street that was called Tibb Street in Manchester that sold pets. Monday came and my mother gave them away.

I remember going out in the street, Sale, five miles from Manchester, and watching a woman (tiny) with red hair leading the saddest band of men, singing, marching with good boots on. They were hunger marchers, from Sunderland I believe, marched to London asking for work, miners. They were fed all the way – so brave, so sad.

I remember Whit Sunday, all Catholic girls and boys had new clothes, mostly white, and walked in the streets to church.

I remember about 1930 going to get a pair of silk stockings for my mother. They were 15/-, I believe that would have kept a family in food for a week.

I remember the day my mother died and how I was told to read the morning paper with pictures of the crash. I was thirteen.

Brenda Rosner

I remember when my mother nearly fell into a bath of sewage

I remember when my father threw his shaving brush at my head and it drew blood

I remember my father always loving his dogs more than his three sons

I remember never having friends at home

I remember going walking with my neighbour's father every Saturday and Sunday

I remember playing golf with my neighbour every weekend

I remember being attacked by a swan at Waddon Ponds

I remember walking round the park rehearsing my studies

I remember not being able to rejoin a train at Crewe station on the way to Penrith – my wife was getting panicky in the carriage

I remember tying my friends with string to the lamp-posts in the street

I remember having to appear before the girls school headmistress as I had been caught peering through a crack in a door at the girls doing their P.E. Her name was Miss Bottomless.

Graham Serjeant



I remember when I got smacked for tearing my new red raincoat
 I remember going back to the convent, feeling sick and excited at the same time
 I remember Wembley market, how they sold meat cheaply on a Saturday night and how my mum and dad and I would bring it home
 I remember buying a quarter of pear drops at Wembley market and sitting reading at home, hiding them under the cushion and eating my way through the lot
 I remember being dressed in white in a veil walking in the May Day procession at school
 I remember being frightened of the candle flames
 I remember the trips to Cumberland on the train by myself after I was about nine
 I remember getting ready to get off once we reached Preston
 I remember my uncle would meet me at Penrith at about four in the morning
 I remember years and years of Christmases spent there – until my children were born
 I remember greeting Jaqui when she was born, saying “Hello, I’ve been waiting for you”
 I remember her messy black hair stuck on her head
 I remember the silence in the house when they had to go back to school – no more cups of tea together

Sheila Serjeant

Our First Home in Suffolk

July 1950

Leave Ipswich. Drive out a few miles
through fields, past churches and manors.

Struggle up a narrow track
to a nice 1930s bungalow.

And it's got its own orchard
and a rising field of corn

And pigsties and hen houses
and rabbit hutches.

Never mind the animals. What about
the bungalow?

Well, it's got three bedrooms, two reception,
a bathroom (outdoor WC)
and a big kitchen.

There are some drawbacks:

No electricity, no gas (except Calor).

No water (no spring, no well, no mains.

The only source was rainwater).

Carole Shafto

The Photo

I am twenty

I am in the village hall

I am on the pull,

standing at the end of the hall, making my choice,

in my red skirt, wedge heels and 'Swiss' blouse

I toss my beehive provocatively and smile suggestively

A camera flashes

Was I ever like that?

There's the evidence, yellow and creased,

I cannot destroy it

Maureen Sillifant

I come from a fireguard with nighties and pyjamas on it.
I come from Sunday school twice on Sundays, and my dad snoring in church.
I come from Miss Fox who read Chicken Licken to us.
I come from cold winters and chillblains on my toes.
I come from hot rhubarb pie and mum's lumpy custard.
I come from a loving family, not lots of cash, but great riches.

Jess Sinclair

I remember my primary school, the dull grey slate, so forbidding
I remember walking to school and going over the railway bridge and looking at the trains
I remember being evacuated to a farm in Wales, and whenever I smell new-mown hay
I remember that farm
I remember my first long trousers, the feel of them and being so grown up
I remember my first motorbike, a Matchless 500
I remember the first time I came off the bike on the way to a dance, no damage
I remember going into the army, the first time away from home
I remember feeling very much alone but surrounded by people
I remember being shouted at and being terrified
I remember my first car, a Ford Anglia, it was always a job to start

John Stallibrass

Two Schools

Then I went to school at five years old and left when I was fourteen. I walked 1¹/₄ miles to school in the morning. Back to home at noon and back to school after my dinner, then back home at 4pm. So I walked five miles each day. During my school days I learned to read and write, we also had singing lessons, physical exercise, needlework, cooking and always recognised special days in the year, mainly mornings on Empire Day when we all assembled in the playground, saluted the flag and sang patriotic songs. We then had the rest of the day off.

It was a council school, there were about forty children in my class. We had to pay attention to our teachers or else we were rapped over the knuckles or, even worse, sent to the Headmaster's room to be caned. Another punishment was to have to write out something or other a hundred times whilst the others were out playing. I am glad I had this education as I can read and write and can still say my 13 times table at ninety-two and a half.

Now many children cannot read or write when they leave school at sixteen. There are no cooking or needlework lessons and punishment is not allowed. But children now use computers etc which do all their lessons for them. They do not walk to school as they have someone who drives them to and fro, which causes traffic blocks near schools.

Edith Stevens

I remember being very worried and upset when I learned that my favourite brother was reported missing. What joy to hear much later that he had been taken prisoner and was in good health.

I remember making up my mind to join the WAAF's so that I could help to finish the war to get my brother back home!

Elsie Toulson

Names

She was Joanie
when she was a baby.
Soon it changed to Joan.
Her brother called her Our Kid.
Later in America people called her Joanne.
The boys at the corner called her Fairy Flip-Flop.
As a nurse her name was Atkinson.
When a post office mail van driver
she was Mrs Treacher.
Now she's alluded to as Mum, Grandma and Great Grandma.
The best names of all.

Joan Treacher

Names

I was born Beryl Jones.
Became a Beryl Turner on adoption.
Then in the WRAF was 2996062.
At Police College I was called by
Tommy Wall 'A twittering tit in a trance'.
On the beat I was known as Beryl the Peril.
As a social worker in schools I was known
as the Rottweiler for chasing kids in to school.

Beryl Turner

What I learnt as a junior nurse in a large teaching hospital

That all my colleagues were older than me
How to wear my uniform properly and keep my hair above my collar
How to empty and clean bedpans
How to make beds properly
How to be gentle
How to bedbath a man and not embarrass him or me
How to stand still at a bedside when an important physician did his rounds with his student doctors
How to listen to lectures
How to attend a dance when all nurses were invited to partner American soldiers who were billeted here and not get involved with the one who has chosen you to dance with all evening
How to not cry all day on your day off when someone you've been carefully nursing has died

Barbara Ward

Changing names

There once was a girl called Margaret
whose mother protested so much
because everyone called her Maggie.
So to disrupt everyone she changed
her name to Eileen.

But as Eileen grew older and older
she changed her name from
Thomas to Waugh – but the name
she liked best, which took
her back to her youth,
was Cariad.

Eileen Waugh

My Place

This is my beach hut, this is my sea.
This is my grass where I play French cricket.
These are my steps which lead to the sea.
This is my bush where I hang the swimming costume to dry.
This is my primus stove where the sausages sizzle.
This is my sunshine which browns my arms.
This is my breakwater where I pop the seaweed.
These are my stones where I hunt for cornelians.

Pat Wootton

Benin

That small city or large town called Benin, in Southern Nigeria:
I claim you, as a little cosmos all your own –
With my relatives, descended from Obas and brass-workers and ivory-carvers and
slaves.
I claim your seasons, wet, dripping, rainy months, followed by
the Harmattan from across the Sahara, sucking up all the dampness
so that the very doorjambs made of wood crack like pistol shots.
I claim the market place, full of winged vegetables, ripe green oranges, raw meat
and dried fish; juju skulls and bones and lotions.
I claim the Oba's palace, with its shrine of carved ivories topping
the brass heads of his ancestors, our ancestors, my ancestors.

Rae Wright

