The Blue Hour

Issue 13
The Bangor Literary Journal

Featuring the winners of the Eighth Bangor Poetry Competition; poet Trish Bennett; exceptional poetry, flash fiction, art and photography by contributors.

Photograph ‘Window View, Grange Over Sands, December’ by Yvonne Boyle; Title ‘The Blue Hour’ from a poem by Matthew M. C. Smith.
Editors’ Welcome

Hello and welcome to Issue 13 of The Bangor Literary Journal: ‘The Blue Hour’.

Huge thanks to gifted poet and editor Matthew M. C. Smith for the privilege of using the title of his stunning poem as our issue name; and to the multi-talented Yvonne Boyle, both poet and photographer, for allowing us to use ‘Window View, Grange Over Sand, December’ as our cover image.

In this issue we are delighted to showcase the shortlisted poems from The Eighth Annual Bangor Poetry Competition on the theme of ‘connections’. It is with great pleasure that we announce that Christine Valters Paintner is this year’s winner with her stunning poem ‘Field Notes on Being an Orphan’. This year’s runner up is Sharon Flynn with the fantastic ‘The Unlikely Intimacies of Airport Security’. We want to offer huge congratulations to the winner, placed poets and all of the shortlistees. Every single poem on the shortlist was of an exceptional standard.

The fifteen poems were displayed in our online gallery and the general public had one week to vote on their first, second and third favourite pieces. We had 730 votes in total. First choices were awarded 3 points, second choices- 2 points and third choices- 1 point. Christine’s poem is one that resonates beyond the confines of the page, touching upon the reader in a mysterious way and this was evident through the votes that she received. We really hope that you enjoy reading Christine’s, and all of the selected poems in this issue.

And as if all of this was not enough, our featured poet is the wonderful and unparalleled Trish Bennett. You can read Trish’s interview and three of her fabulous poems here. If you nip over to our YouTube channel, you will see her reading them too, which is something that you do not want to miss!

Finally, we also have a wide range of excellent winter themed flash fiction, poetry, art and photography from our contributors, for you to enjoy.

From both of us want to thank you for your continued support, and we hope you have a peaceful and safe Christmas, and New Year. Here’s to 2021.

Amy and Paul
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Matthew M. C. Smith is a Welsh poet from Swansea. He is 'Best of the Net' nominated (2020). He is published in Barren Magazine, Anti-Heroin Chic, The Lonely Crowd, Seventh Quarry and Icefloe Press. Matthew is the editor of Black Bough poetry. Twitter: @MatthewMCSmith Facebook: Matthew M C Smith poet Insta: smithmattpoet
The Blue Hour

I wake in the blue hour, a miracle-morning made anew. I walk through rooms of chilling dark and stop to touch the pane; its mist clears, the black glass, a phantom draught. A turning of the lock.

Before me, dawn’s spell of silence. Clumps of snow that soften packed earth, the shine of frost-topped grass, air crystalline; a prospect of planets, in blush of light-rise.

Sparse orchard leads to shrouded wood and at my feet, patches of snowdrops, their bell tops pristine. Petals that pirouette, green shoots that poke through blight, silk-tips gathered in ravelled roots of drift.

Through grey trees and the barbed thicket, a fox slinking away to a vanishing point.

At the turning of the year, in preternatural light, these revelations are found.

By Matthew M. C. Smith
Window View, Grange Over Sand, December

Yvonne took this winter photograph of Grange over Sands, Cumbria two years ago, in December.

Yvonne Boyle has had a range of poems published in a variety of magazines, books and online anthologies. She also enjoys taking photographs and has had a number displayed at the Blackberry Path Art Studios, Bangor and included in the Bangor Literary Journal.
COMPETITION FEATURE

THE EIGHTH ANNUAL BANGOR POETRY COMPETITION
WINNER  Christine Valters Paintner

Field Notes on Being an Orphan
(after Mary Jean Chan)

And yes my father died suddenly and I felt such great relief and yes my mother died almost as suddenly and the grief debilitated me for years and yes I was already 33 when I officially became an orphan so you might think I’m overstating my case and yes I know that Oscar Wilde famously wrote to lose one parent is a tragedy, but to lose both is careless and yes I felt compelled to piece together my family tree, to come to know my ancestors even though I have no children to pass it onto and yes it feels like I must do this before I die and if I stop doing it I will die and yes I have no siblings to share this specific grief and find myself drawn to friends who are motherless and fatherless, like we’re a secret communion, and yes I find myself coming alive when I cook my mother’s red cabbage recipe and when I play classical music and a Strauss waltz comes on I must take my husband’s hand and awkwardly sweep him across the floor and yes I remember my tiny bare feet standing on my father’s shoes as he counted out 1, 2, 3 and yes I have traveled across Europe to walk the lands of my grandmothers and grandfathers, to breathe that air, to let it fill me, to feel myself not so alone, and yes I did one day forgive my father, it came in a flash, without any effort at all, although I had worked hard at it for years, and yes suddenly I knew the freedom I had longed for, felt what I imagine the wind feels like as the geese open their wings, fall into formation, and ride the current toward the horizon.

By Christine Valters Paintner
Sharon Flynn lives near the Causeway Coast. Her poems have been published in several anthologies and magazines including *The Stinging Fly* and she was a winner of the fourth Blue Nib Chapbook competition. She is a graduate of the MA in Poetry course at the Heaney Centre at Queen’s University.
The Unlikely Intimacies of Airport Security

Someone’s socks are unrolled, one by one. Ahead of me, a stranger stands exposed to the camera’s stripping eye. A traveller lifts her arms as though to dance, her partner keeps the rhythm with her hands, tap-tapping softest underarms, pat-patting downwards, waist to knee. The secrets of a wash-bag spill. A wrist watch ticks in a plastic tray. I re-thread my belt, adjust my clothes, beside a man I’ve never met, who does the same. Complicit in this brief coincidence, our shoes reclaimed, we lift our bags and walk away.

By Sharon Flynn
THIRD PLACE  

Eilín de Paor

Eilín de Paor lives in Dublin and works in health and social care. Selected for The Stinging Fly Summer School 2019, her poems have been published by Vox Galvia and Ink, Sweat and Tears. Others will shortly appear in Panning for Poems and The Stony Thursday Book. Twitter: @edepaor
Nurses' Station, St. Agnes' Ward

Dressed in tidy tweed, lips
a perfect bow, worrying the clasp
of her Sunday handbag,
pacing, restless, waiting
for the next bus into town.

She couldn't tell us who she was late for –
a friend left sitting with a pot for two,
a lover flicking ash under Clerys' clock,
or a shopkeeper, locking up,
pocketing her deposit with a shrug.

We found a chair and Catering brought tea –
watched together for the driver to skew
through time and space to collect her.
He came while I was off one night.
I passed her stripped bed at the start of my next shift.

By Eilín de Paor
FOURTH PLACE  

Robin Holmes

Robin Holmes is a retired former social worker who now jointly leads the Causeway U3A Creative Writing Group. His work has appeared regularly in the CAP’s Poetry in Motion journal and he has been shortlisted in the previous two Annual Bangor Poetry Competitions.
As If  (A Reflection on Whin Blossom)

As if
an opportunist thief sneaked up
on the sleeping mid day sun,
then stole his yellow cardigan,
snipped it with scissors,
unravelled all that golden wool,
before embroidering it into all
of the hedgerows and ditches
of Ireland.

As if
a deranged alchemist
devised a new recipe,
collected tons of daffodils,
primroses, buttercups,
dandelions and strained egg yolk,
pouring it into huge vats,
where it boiled and simmered
for days, before spraying it onto
all the hedgerows and ditches.
of Ireland

As if
I travelled back in time
to a street in Arles
a night café, a bad house
perhaps, and rescued Vincent
from a bottle of absinthe,
an argument with Gauguin
over a skinny woman.
‘Come,’ I said, ‘back to Ireland,
bring tubes of burnt umber,
cadmium yellow, come and paint
our hedgerows, our ditches
give them the immortality
you have bestowed on
sunflowers, wheatfields, gleaners.
There will be no crows,
no threatening skies.’
So he came and painted
all the hedgerows and ditches
of Ireland.

By Robin Holmes
FIFTH PLACE  

Angeline King

Angeline King is Writer in Residence at Ulster University, currently undertaking a PhD in Creative Writing. Angeline’s latest and third novel is Dusty Bluebells. She lives in Larne and has previously been published by the Bangor Literary Journal.
Ballysnod

We reach the summit in the inky part of day — ready to be written — and look beyond lines of skinny houses to giant Woodbine puffing as the Townsend Thoresen scissor the navy sea.

Scarlet-cheeked cousins play inside — two score and more — and tumble and titter and tee-hee by the hearth, where a new baby is changed and wrapped in a white, bobbly blanket.

Granny casts a crafty smile in the corner — reflexive conjugation — and the clickety click of stout knitting needles conjures honeycomb lines in Aaron wool unwinding above a pile of cardigans scented with barley.

Granda’s heavy hands rest on his belly — past imperious — and he half-snoozes with one eye on his lamb sheep huddled close to the orange fire, where buckled, leather belts hang idle.

Aunts rattle the golden bucket of coal — eleven in prime — and the hiss of wet slack unleashes a draught as children eat a communion of squished up loaf and sip Ribena from silver goblets.

In the parlour, uncles talk unseen — five lost for a crown — and shake a fist at nephews who creep through the hall, sucking the scent of Imperial Leather as they learn what is for men to be at peace.

Joyce’s eyes well in the window pane — still one of sixteen children — and her cradling voice follows a gust of wind that catches me falling, lace-on-lace, into a bride’s arms in infant days of summer.

Later, I step outside into the darkness and hear the clickety click of time unwinding and know that they will all come home — to Ballysnod.

By Angeline King
HIGHLY COMMENDED

Elizabeth Gibson

Elizabeth Gibson is a Manchester poet inspired by city life, nature, community and hope. She has won a Northern Writers’ Award, and has been published in Antiphon, Atrium, The Bangor Literary Journal, Coningo, Popshot, Litro and Strix among other journals. She edits Foxglove Journal and tweets and Instagrams as @Grizzone.
Something happened

Inspired by you, I went out and bought satsumas and now, I slowly ease out semi-circular guts to peck at with almonds, to get me past morning. The peel remains remarkably whole and round, as if I could hide in its walls, settle by the fire of yellow rind strands curling from its centre. I am almost there, hermit crab in a ghost fruit, when you call to tell me something has happened. I listen, squashing the satsuma peel down like lips. Why are you trusting me with this? I don’t ask. I wish I could make your body stop scaring you. I don’t tell you about my experience with the peel. I could see all the tiny pores, dotting golden light and it blew my mind: this finite, heady orange sky.

By Elizabeth Gibson
Geraldine O’Kane is a poet, creative writing facilitator, and mental health advocate. She gave a Talk for TEDx Belfast in 2015 on how creativity helps mental health. She was a recipient of the Artist Career Enhancement Scheme (ACES) 2015/16 from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Her collection is due in April 2021 from Salmon Poetry.
My Girl - Where the River Flows
(after Cape Cod Morning, Edward Hopper, 1950)

She always liked that shade of blue, said it reminded her of unblemished sky, still waters, clarity. We painted the outside of the bay window as soon as we purchased the house in the uplands.

It became her reading spot, where she meandered from book to book as we waited for children to come. The sun kept her company; on good days she threw open the shutters let the rays reach in, their tendrils touching her bare skin.

It was on these days I’d lean against the door jamb and just take her all in. Sometimes she’d spot me, weave for me stories of the Women’s Revolution that was surely coming, her eagerness for freedom.

Once, with the violence of a river giving itself over to the big sea, she thrust her face to the sun, while perched at her window. In her best red sweetheart dress, earrings, hair slung back in a bun, her frame small but still strong; she drew the breath from me.

By Geraldine O’Kane
Charlie Bowrey originates from Cardiff and lives in London. She has been writing poetry for her own enjoyment since childhood and has recently started to enter competitions.
Seizure

things
aren’t
flowing
correctly
there’s been a system overload
it’s mis-fired - again
bit of an electrical s u r g e
and the blue screen of death…
automatic shutdown.
She’s pounding towards the floor
like a concrete tower under demolition
millions of simultaneous ignitions
imploding, exploding, imploding
straight down
no compromises, no time for plan b...and she hits
the jarring, crunch of bone on concrete
that’s the skull again, 5th time, perfect aim just on the edge of the kerb
it’s a highly vascularised area, the head
bit of a blood bath
nice pool of it forming under her
trickling down the tarmac
a little boy stops: I want to touch it
-No! says his mother as she administers first aid
then she’s carted off
not compos mentis
system reboot needed
she’ll be fully functional
until the glitch in her matrix plays up again
her throbbing occipital quilted together with tight thread
no harm done
except the questions
-Did you bite your tongue?
-Did you shake?
    And did you wet yourself?

She’s unsure where the disconnect lies – in her head or theirs?

By Charlie Bowrey
SHORTLISTED  Caroline Bracken

Caroline Bracken’s poems have been published in Abridged, the Irish Times, Skylight 47, Poetry Jukebox, the Ogham Stone, the Fish Anthology and forthcoming in the Best New British and Irish Poets Anthology 2021. She was selected for the Poetry Ireland Introductions Series 2018. Her poems have won the iYeats 2015, Poetry Day Ireland 2020 and DLR/Creative Ireland 2020 poetry competitions. She was recently chosen as the Parkinson’s Art Poet of the Year 2020.
The Bed

Twenty-eight years after we split
my ex brings me a double bed
he is clearing out the old homestead
after the death of his father
he has the old man’s grey beard
I have my mother’s bad back

I remember the bed in our first bedsit in Ranelagh
the two-ring cooker in a cupboard and the Mohicans downstairs who did
a runner after a mad one when a skinhead threw a television through the window

Our bed in Monkstown was a mattress on the floor three flights up
the stairs a daily Reek Sunday with a baby in one arm bag of coal in the other
I have no recollection of our Bray bed it is a landscape painting left out in the rain
it must have been cold a mess of creased sheets we could not smooth straight

Today the irony of this bed gift
is not lost on me but I say nothing
just help him lean the metal frame
take our breath
admire the mattress’ sit on memory foam

By Caroline Bracken
SHORTLISTED  Jane Burn

Jane Burn’s poems are published in many magazines, such as The Rialto, Butcher’s Dog and Under the Radar, and anthologies from publishers including Seren and Emma Press. She has been nominated for the Forward and Pushcart Prize. She is learning to live with and celebrate her late diagnosis of autism. Her next poetry collection, Be Feared, will be published in 2021 by Nine Arches Press.
These are the Rules of Indurated Fruit

It is possibly one of your Five-a-Day.
You must spend at least half and hour deliberating between.
They say that you could eat a different sort of apple
every day for five years before you need to eat
the same one again, there are so many kinds. Blackpool rock
is the same. You must take your own sweet time –
your mother is off, lost in aisles of knick-knack tat, drawn like a jay
to the spangles. Consider it well – it’s almost time for chips
and you will be allowed only one of the fragrant twigs. Mint.
Mint is the only fruit that comes in the shape of leaves. Banana.
Banana is the only fruit that fills your mouth with the shape
of smiles. Cherry. The one that somehow manages to always taste
a little bit like Vim. The one with a spindle of coloured stripes
is Fruity Rainbow. Rainbows are the sky’s fruit, scented
like a brilliant dream you might have had one night.
Your fingers walk the stiff harvest – some of the poles
are spoiled with cracks and you can see the bruise of letters,
Blackpool carved to the core. You already know the one
that you are going to pluck. Lager & Lime, the grown-up’s fruit
and even though it tastes like the bottom of an aluminium pan,
you could almost believe you arrive at the café half cut.
Here they all are, ready-rolled for you in one convenient stick – peeling a simple matter of
three clockwise twists.
Visit the beach just to lose your grip of its half-sucked spear on the sand –
cry and let your tears fall like a Bandit’s dropped coins. Be inconsolable,
for though it is run beneath the tap it will never be free of grit.
You must not forget to save the little pith of paper tucked into the clear skin,
picture of the Tower still wearing the rock’s curve. Tape it into a book
and it will remind you of the one day of your holiday where it did not rain,
or that you did not cry. Remember how big the beach looked, scalped of tide.
Remember how your mother bought a treasure chest made from shells.

By Jane Burn
Mary Ringland is a teacher, living in Holywood. She has written poetry, under the guidance of Ruth Carr, for the past decade. Her poems have appeared in publications including Washing Windows, Irish Woman Write Poetry and Her Other Language (Arlen House 2017 and 2020), and in four CAP anthologies.
Staying Back

Dear friend

You are out cycling with your household, a household of one.

I phone to fill you in on the nothing doings that I’ve been up to; you ask to call round the back for a chat. So, I begin to measure out two metres, wishing I was marking out (dressmaker’s chalk in my mouth) blue silk for the skirt of a Lindy Bop dress, like the one you tried on in Waterford, your fine shoulders back, two summers ago.

But I am not.

I set out one chair two metres out from my home. I lift a small glass-topped table but the lawn, lousy with moss, makes it wobble. I fold a card to fill the shortfall and think of the card we giggled at this Autumn on Portstewart Strand.

You said, ‘Buy me that and send it.’

The table is bare, and the small debris that shifts each night has settled there. I buff it until it frames the light, fill a white vase with flowering sprigs of Rosemary, cup my hands over it and breathe deeply. I’ll tell you to do the same and you’ll call me a feckin’ eejit and have none of it.

I think of New Year’s Eve, the table laid with silver your mum has given you, the unmarried one. So, I scramble about to find a tub and fitting lid that you can shove in that back pocket of your yellow, splattered jacket that I’m so used to following as we fly past whin in bloom on our spins to Nendrum and back.

The tub is filled with soup – the stock real this time – when my time is slack. The carcass simmered yesterday for hours; filled the house with the soothing scent of sage. Another layer of protection in a flimsy bid to keep you safe. I put the kettle on, hear the clack of cleats and from well back you call,

“I’m here.”

You tell me how you saw no one for the two weeks of your holiday, drove all the way to Coagh to give your mum a hug and tell her you love her and how she said:

‘You’re not half wise.’

You tell me how you’ve moved to A and E, the young ones bringing you up to speed, but no one bakes and brings it in for tea and craic. How you cracked the hollow head of a bunny clean off and snuck the chocolate up your mask and never let on.

You tell me how you x-rayed two old ladies who were mortified but chuffed to be in the thick of it. One had clapped with such zeal that some small part of her fragile frame just snapped. The other decided her palms were not enough, turned to go inside to find a pan and fell flat. They’d laughed and I did too, blowing all my early-morning-neighbour rules to pot – blowing them to you.

When you left, I stopped. Later on, I read that laughter carries it well beyond two metres.

By Mary Ringland
SHORTLISTED Benjamin Sears

Benjamin Sears was born and raised in Dorset, England and now lives in the Vale of Glamorgan, south Wales. He is interested in philosophy and nature, but also, the mundane, glum, and farcical aspects of our lives. Benjamin works as an environmental consultant and as a bereavement volunteer.
Shells

We heard the sea that day—
willed by hope from hollowness
like the hermit who outgrew
his small world.

Mr. Leigh said that’s the sound
of air resonating in an empty vessel
and physics washed away
another dream.

By Benjamin Sears
Stephen Smythe lives in Manchester, England. He achieved an MA in Creative Writing at Salford University in 2018. His flash fiction was shortlisted for The Bridport Prize in 2017 and longlisted in the Bath Flash Fiction Award, 2018. He was runner up for his micro fiction in the Bangor Literary Journal FORTY WORDS competition in 2019 and this year in the same competition his story was Highly Commended. He was also Highly Commended in 2020 for his 1000-word story in The Strand International Flash Fiction competition.
Good at Games

With your luminous smile,
blonde quiff, blue eyes
from our dad’s side,
not dark like Mum and I,
you were lithe, ace server,
quick bowler, smooth swimmer,
but never the same
after that searing May Day
when your broken howl
summoned me to watch
wide-eyed as you cowered
before a demon
only you could see.

From nineteen you went
straight to middle-age,
did not pass Go,
nor collect anything except
a shambling gait, shaking hands,
meds-fuelled obesity
but never grey.
Days short of forty
your heart gave up
long after hope.
We only ever looked alike
when we spoke.

By Stephen Smythe
SHORTLISTED  Geraldine Snape

Born in Belfast, living in the Northwest of England. Writing regularly with "Write on the Farm", tutor Dr. Geraldine Green.
Antibiotics

She never cried, she was as solid as a rock
Except on the days she remembered her sister
And the fun they had shared in the big house.
But apart from that she was a stoic and
I knew that the winds of life would not bend her.
Except on the days we made the beds together
And she sighed as quiet tears wet her marshmallow cheeks.
A memory of her mother tucking white crisp hospital corners
Around striped ticking mattresses.
But that was all there was to it then.
I could never hope to come up to that steely reserve
And be the unmoved.
Though there were occasions when the armchair in the corner
By the fireplace seemed too big for her.
Too big, and she filled the edges of the cushions
With lace edged hankies damp and tucked away and hidden.
Then her brother’s name was whispered quietly
As if such a thing could never have happened.
Though it did, for those were the days before the miracles.
We call them antibiotics and warn our families against taking them.

By Geraldine Snape
SHORTLISTED

Elizabeth Wilson Davies

Elizabeth Wilson Davies has received mentoring support through the Literature Wales scheme from Welsh poets Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch and Paul Henry. She was awarded a Literature Wales New Writer’s Bursary in 2018 and recently won first prize in the PENfro Literature Festival for her poem ‘Heartland’.
You used to breathe

with me in Morse, the code you taught me
as, with that first gentle tap you touched my hand

making the vowel ‘E’, for my initial (or so I liked to think, you later told me not). We sounded doorbells
to each other’s names, turned bedside lights off on off
spelled out messages on each other’s bodies.

When our code had all but passed from use, the final
Calling all. This is our last cry before our eternal silence.
moved us both to tears - it does me now.

I searched your eyes for sense, but I found
the blinks hardly perceptible, unreadable.

Your breathing mask now coupled to the concentrator
pulsated no meanings in oxygen hisses.

You had an old-time bedside bell and I still believe I heard it
ring: three short    three l o n g    three short.

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By Elizabeth Wilson Davies
Bennett’s widely published in print and online. She’s won The Leitrim Guardian Literary Award for Poetry (twice) and was listed or placed in many other competitions including Fish Publishing, The Allingham, North West Words (twice), Percy French, HeadStuff, Bailieborough, Hedgehog Poetry, and The Bangor Literary Journal. She’s won bursaries, and received an Arts Council of Northern Ireland SIAP Award in 2019 to assist in the development of her debut poetry collection. Hedgehog Poetry Press published Bennett’s micro-pamphlet, Borderlines, and have nominated the title poem for the Pushcart 2021 prize. Bennett’s performed at numerous events and festivals in Ireland and the UK including The London Irish Centre, Cúirt, North West Words Culture night, RTÉ Radio 1’s Poetry Programme, and on BBC Radio Ulster.

Twitter / Instagram: @baabennett

Facebook: trishbennettwriter
Trish, thank you for taking the time to chat with us. Can you tell the readers a little bit about how you first got into writing, and in particular, poetry?

Before I go on, I’d just like to say that I’m honoured to be asked to do this interview. Bangor and the BLJ holds a special place in my heart. Thanks to you both for letting me loose this past few years in the Blackberry Path, and to Gifford and Ronnie for inviting me to perform in Bangor Abbey. There’s something in that sea air that sets me buzzing.

I’d the urge to write creatively long before I took up the pen. I ignored it because I was already doing a lot of technical writing as part of my job. I recently discovered an old document that I’d written to my unborn daughter when I was pregnant. In it, I said that I should be writing, but it was too hard. A few years later, the grief of a miscarriage sent me spiraling downwards, and the only way out was to write about it. I joined a writing group in the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast, facilitated by Ruth Carr and thanks to her encouragement, I kept writing. When I moved to Fermanagh, I was inspired by many brilliant writers when I was part of the Fermanagh Writers group. I was drawn to poetry when my daughter was young. I found it easier to write shorter pieces when there was little free-time between work, motherhood, and other family commitments. As she grew older, I expanded into memoir and short stories. There’s a half-finished novella, and a play buried in the archives, but I keep going back to my first love — poetry. I love the rhythm of it, how a word can take on many meanings, the challenge of finding the perfect word because poetry is an efficient genre. There’s no wastage. Each word must have its purpose, or it’s gone.

You have had a very successful poetic journey so far. In fact, you have recently been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. What would you say have been your personal highlights?

It’s been a steep learning curve because my background’s in Engineering and I’d no interest in English at secondary school. Every submission that’s accepted, every accolade I’ve received, and anytime I’ve been booked to perform, is a personal highlight. Nobody sees the mountain of rejections over the years and the critic in my head’s worst of all. I’m grateful to everyone who’s encouraged me along the way.

The turning point in my writing career came in 2016 after attending the John Hewitt International Summer School. It was the first place where I’d mixed with established writers who took their craft seriously. I’d felt like an outsider most of my life until I spent that week in Armagh, and met like-minded folk. I realised that this league of tortured artists were my tribe. I met several gifted writers who gave me loads of advice, including the whirlwind, Jo
Zebedee. She persuaded me to join the ranks of Women Aloud NI where I’ve made many supportive friends.

In November 2016, the Leitrim Guardian gave me the first of two Literary Awards for poetry. I’m thankful for that huge confidence boost to continue writing.

Despite the disaster that is 2020, it’s been a good year for my poetry. The SIAP Award from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland enabled me to obtain mentoring support from the talented Maureen Boyle. Several poems have been published online and in print and others were longlisted in the Fish Publishing competition, judged by renowned poet, Billy Collins, and in the Forty Words and 8th Bangor Poetry Competitions, judged by yourselves.

Some performance dreams have also come true this year. I’ve participated in several zoom events including, The Word in Sligo, and TenX9. I was one of the featured poets at a live event in the London Irish Centre before lockdown, and in two Cross-border YouTube Concerts with the Glens Centre as part of the Across The Lines programme during the Summer.

I received my first recording commissions for BBC Radio Ulster and The Poetry Programme on RTÉ Radio 1. The poem for RTÉ was about a phone conversation with Mam while she was ‘cocooning’. The icing on the cake was when many old friends that she hadn’t heard from in years phoned to catch up with her after the broadcast.

**Your debut publication ‘Borderlines’, was part of the Stickleback series with Hedgehog Poetry Press. Can you tell the readers a bit about it?**

*Borderlines* is a micro-pamphlet of four poems, themed around the border counties (Leitrim, Fermanagh, and Cavan) where I grew up during the troubles. *Yalla Charlie*, recounts a funny story that I’d read about Cathal Búí, the wandering Baird. *Morse Code* is about settling down, and the lift I get from the stunning natural beauty that surrounds our home. *Monument to home* contains memories of growing up in Leitrim under the shade of the troubles. *Borderlines*, the title poem, was written out of frustration at the way war destroys the land and sets its people against each other. I compare the troubles to the threat of fracking that still lingers in our border counties. There’s a nod to Yeats (I’m a huge fan) and his poem ‘Easter 1916’. I was delighted when this poem was Pushcart Nominated by Mark, the editor, as it’s about the heartland that shaped me.
Trish, I know that you have a very eventful life outside of poetry. How have your experiences in the real world affected your writing?

I often give out about the responsibilities of life interfering with my writing. To be honest, if it wasn’t for the real world, I’d have nothing to write about. One of my favourite writers, Nora Ephron, used to say that she lived by her Mother’s mantra, ‘Everything is copy’. I didn’t start writing until my late thirties, life kept getting in the way. I hadn’t the time to take it seriously until this past four years. There’s a lifetime of shenanigans to write about. I’ve always been drawn to exciting hobbies — horse-riding, pony-driving, motorbiking, diving, the latest being cruising, knife-throwing and beekeeping (although not at the same time). Much of my writing is about the antics of my family and the other creatures that share our home. Beekeeping is a font of inspiration because our garden’s patrolled by winged lunatics. Being a magnet for madness means there’s always something to laugh about or to run like hell from, and it all makes great copy.

Finally, can you tell us what you are currently working on, and what plans you have for 2021?

For years, I felt like Mary Kate in The Quiet Man. I dreamed of having my things about me. Instead, I sat on the couch, typing into a laptop set on a cushion on my knees. My writing was scattered all over our small house. This year, with no visitors staying, we were able to convert the spare room into an office with a Murphy bed/desk. It’s heaven to finally have my own space with peace to write, record, and participate in online events. I’m currently working on several new poems as I build towards a couple of anthologies of poetry.

I enjoyed recording and performing in 2020, and aim to do more of that in 2021. Maybe even with real people in the same room.

*Borderlines* is available on the Hedgehog Poetry website as a FREE PDF:


The paperback version is available on my website at this link:- [Trish Bennett Stickleback](https://www.hedgehogpress.co.uk)

**Website:** trishbennettwriter.com  
**Twitter / Instagram:** @baabennett  
**Facebook:** trishbennettwriter
The Daughter’s Accused Me of Being a Stalker

As I stand each day with binoculars
to examine their legs,
and the way they carry themselves.
I watch for baskets packed with pollen,
dandelion-yellow, horse-chestnut-red,
orange-brown-clover, bramble-grey,
childer need fed, the queen’s in full-lay.
When they fly arse down, impatient,
barely make it onto the landing board,
I know their bellies are filled with nectar.
I worry on hot heady days
in May, June, and July.
They’re up-to-no-good
when they cluster outside their hive in clouds,
so I get the sheet, the box, the ladder,
the loppers, the barrow,
for those are not youngsters
out to learn their trade.
The scouts have returned
from the far-off hills,
told the troops to pack their bags,
ready the queen, start their engines.
For bees, the far-off hills being green
is not good, no wilderness
of Rosebay willowherb, Himalayan balsam,
Meadowsweet to feed winged things.
The swarm will head for hills
yellow with whin, scrambled in bramble,
for within that chaos of neglect
— lies life.

By Trish Bennett
Innisfree, Me Arse!
*Apologies to W.B.*

Small cabins are not ideal,  
a king size bed, an island kitchen,  
they’ll never fit in.  
Clay and wattle’s all well and good  
but you’re better with the block.  
Insulate like the Swedes,  
for the Autumn wind whips across that lake,  
skins ash and beech,  
to cover paths, and fill the gutters,  
brings with it Canadian Geese, who come  
to keep you up all night,  
with their honk-bonk orgy by the shore.

Skeletal cats move in,  
take over chairs and laps,  
purring and pats,  
turn into big brutes that drag in prey  
and lap milk night and day  
with low sounds by the door.

Linnets won’t get a look in  
with the magpies and the crows,  
who sit in trees  
to Gogglebox your windows like reality TV,  
as they wait to steal the food you leave for tits.

For evenings filled with wings, get an African Grey.  
He’ll dive bomb dinner with a *kaw* and a *kak*,  
shout *ME ARSE!* throwing scraps  
to the dog — barking mad.

Don’t plant the nine bean rows,  
for steroid-pumped slugs  
— the size of an ink stained thumb,  
will scoff your hopeful shoots.  
As for slug traps filled with stout,  
those louts’ll down the lot,  
then slime home on beer bellies  
lost in the plot.

If you love Game of Thrones,  
get that hive of honey bees.  
The summer’s filled with battles,
and drones in death throes
after mating with the queen,
Poor lads, they come — as they go.

A bee loud glade’s not the place to live alone,
for it’s far from cricket song
when you dangle at an angle
on a ladder saying prayers,
as you cut a branch of brown winged leaves
that breaks to a roar,
and a swarm of twenty thousand bees drop slow,
into a cardboard box,
balanced on the head
of your only help
— a passing ten-year-old.

Walkers stroll down your road
on their way to the shore,
stand to admire the birds and the bees
in your gardens flowering trees.
They don’t notice the cats
giving death-stares from below,
‘til your little dog barks
RIP THEIR HEADS OFF!,
and your Grey
wolf-whistles like a sailor out the door.
I hope they feel your peace
in their deep heart’s core.

By Trish Bennett

NOTE:
‘Innisfree, Me Arse!’, is my response to the ‘Lake Isle of Innisfree’, one of my favourite poems by WB Yeats. I lived in Sligo in my student years, toured Lough Gill and went for walks in Hazelwood. When I found my own Innisfree, a small house by the lake, planted the bean rows and got the hive of honey bees, I realised what a dreamer Yeats really was.

This poem was Shortlisted in the Aurovivo / North West Words, Poetry Competition 2018, and published in North West Words Magazine, Issue 11, June 2019.
Lockdown for Bees

Attempts to explain will fall on deaf ears, for bees want to sail the wind,
dive into dew-depths of clover, dodge hammer-drop rain on their return.

They will not be impressed when the beekeeper locks their door
to stop them from drinking weedkiller sprayed on the grass,
until the poison’s dried in and of no more harm.

The beekeeper must be suited, booted, and ready to run when the curfew is lifted,
for thousands will charge out from that hive ready to kill the invader
who dared block their dance in the sun.

By Trish Bennett
Going for Coffee on a Winter’s Morning

Even in winter,
the dawn is new.

Behind me, rumpled blankets
defy the plain white sheets
of snow drawn up over
hills and fields.
Before the sun
has barely settled
in its rusty chair-lift,
all along my path,
I’m leaving deep footprints
in lingering night.

I’m at the wheel
of my car
floating like a hymn
down icy streets,
past fields where
horses move slowly
as if still in their sleep
and the weather snores
deep and gray
behind the clouds.

I walk old rhythms
on the frozen sidewalk,
to where, under the swinging
main street awnings,
men talk of old times,
loudly, excitedly,
like they’re just about
to happen.

By John Grey
FLASH FICTION  Claudia Lundahl

Claudia Lundahl is an emerging writer from New York City. She is a graduate of the City University of New York at Hunter College. Her work has been published in Vol. 1 Brooklyn, Rattle, So To Speak: A Feminist Journal and Io: Journal of New American Poetry.
Winter of Cryptonyms

I want to remember the night when your breath formed icicles on my eyelashes and we kissed on the bridge over the river. I’ve tried on many cold December nights since then to recreate the moment for myself on paper, tried to scrawl out some vocabulary to release myself from the sutures around my ribcage that tighten and tear through my flesh when I think of the way the river was reflected in your eyes.

I would have cherished it more than I cherished the slow drifting of preseason snowflakes. The stinging sensation of wind-blown ice fragments slicing at our raw skin reminding us that we were human though we wanted to believe that we had been released from the icy grip of our anatomy.

We should have run faster than our legs could carry us, as fast as the pumping of our blood to our hearts would allow. Instead we chose to linger in that one placid moment waiting for the changing of the tides to bring us back to shore. That was the winter that I had pearls for eyes that were so beautiful to look through but really could not see a thing. It was the winter of cryptonyms.

By Claudia Lundahl
"Snow Oak" is a winter scene from Castlewellan Forest Park taken in 2017. The light was dropping, like the temperature of my hands, as I stalked the tree to find a good viewpoint. I am always attracted by the extra relief carved out by the layers of snow frozen hard onto the out-stretched branches.

Biography

John Winder is a landscape photographer working mainly in the medium of black and white. He began creative photography 40 years ago and enjoys trudging around, hauling camera gear, and spending time behind the tripod. He enjoys the outdoors, physics and sailing.
Tom Barlow is an Ohio writer whose work has appeared in journals including The Stoneboat Literary Journal, Ekphrastic Review, Voicemail Poetry, Hobart, Tenemos, Redivider, Harbinger Asylum, Heron Clan, The Remington Review, Your Daily Poem, and many more. See more at tombarlowauthor.com.
Winter Vacation

The plane is the miracle or perhaps the spotless sky is the miracle or maybe the miracle is the scent of frangipani blossoms and the sight of psychedelic birds as we step out into summer.

Convertibles depart the airport with white hair lashing in the wind, corsages hang on bushes for the taking, and I have no regrets about leaving Ohio’s winter behind like a blowsy ex-lover.

On Florida’s Gulf Coast, real estate brokers hawk January sun the way plague doctors sold smoke and I fantasize about buying one of the bayside condos that promise to rock the aged in their tender arms.

At noon, we queue up on the beach to rake for shells that have waited a hundred years to become treasure and in the evening frequent restaurants whose staffs smile as they feast on our boozy generosity.

Day by day, we savor the languor of the poolside lanai and fight the temptation to rip our calendars into confetti.

The perplexing miracle is that, after such a surfeit of joy, I still choose to slink back home like a drunk at the bitter end of a bender, with half-hearted apologies and empty pockets, and it is no miracle that winter welcomes me home with a sucker punch of snow.

By Tim Barlow
Leah's book, Swimming Middle River, was published with REaD Lips Press, and her short story, The Family Blend, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize with Crack the Spine. Leah is an adjunct lecturer at UMSL, where she earned her M.F.A.

www.leahholbrooksackett.website
Remember Me

See me young and pretty. Remember my hand in yours, the way I cradled your face in my soft caress. Please, remember me. How I called you angel unto me. Remember me naked in your arms bathed in a winter's moonlight through the windows of my car where we were all elbows and knees. Where our world unfurled.

Every space was a place for making love. Every moment was us. In the night, in the afternoon, in the break of morning, I was making love to you, and you were making love to me. And although life came knocking, calling me away, remember when I said I love you, that meant I love you forever.

My love remains whole even though my life is broken. I paste the fragments and filaments that made-up us into a sad collage. All the colors combine to remind me of what once was. No one can take our past away. No one can put us back together. Please, remember me.

By Leah Holbrook Sackett
Skaters on the Rideau Canal

Henry took this photograph of skaters on the Rideau Canal that runs through the city of Ottawa. In winter, the canal freezes hard and so people use it as a very long skating rink.
POETRY

Tim Goldstone

Born in England, Tim Goldstone has roamed widely, including throughout the UK, Western and Eastern Europe, and North Africa, before settling deep in rural Wales where he happily explores marshland until he sinks. His poems and stories have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including Crannóg, The New Welsh Review, Stand Magazine, The Offing, Anti-Heroin Chic, Red Poets, Ghost City Review, Déraciné, Lamplit Underground, Veil: Journal of Darker Musings, Ellipsis, Altered States, The Mechanics’ Institute Review Anthology 15; and is forthcoming in Flash - The International Short-Short Story Magazine, among others. Prose sequence read on stage at The Hay Festival. His writing has also appeared on BBC, Waterstones, The Royal Court Theatre and Sherman Cymru Theatre websites. Scripts broadcast on TV and radio. Loiters in Twitter @muddygold
Death by Hypothermia, 1891

Believing it kinder
to assist that way,
asylum staff would leave
some doors unlocked
on freezing nights
in the tightened world
where Esther has learnt to accept
what she sees in the corridor walls
and it hasn’t hurt her at all
and neither have the dangerous shadows
from the realm of the violent cold
who are now her companions
back in the gloom of her cell
and tonight escaping outside
in her thin white gown
the shadows come with her
across the freezing mud
that brutally unsteadies her
feels them stoop to her heavy falls
feels their strength in her marrow
feels them leaching out her fears
and feeling their love for her
as they lift her
she reaches up to the snowstorm,
soothes the frightened night sky
with her dancing fingers.

By Tim Goldstone
FLASH FICTION       Kate Maxwell

Kate Maxwell is a Sydney based teacher. She has been published and awarded in Australian and International literary magazines such as The Blue Nib, The Chopping Blog, Hecate, Linq, Verandah, Lightbox Originals, Social Alternatives and Swyntax. Her first poetry anthology, to be published with IP Press, is forthcoming in 2021. Kate’s interests include film, wine and sleeping.
When he Leaves

He said he’d be back again next year.

Too close, cold calloused hands fingering my neck, he stale-breath promised, that I would shiver, arched and stiff-limbed, when he comes.

Those long grey months indoors with him: just endless cups of tepid tea, huddled under blankets, or flinching from his raw touch. I watched windows of sleet and spiteful winds, my hands numb and shaking on the glass. And all the while, he blathered bleak tales; of frozen kittens by the shed, a child’s head split while running on the icy path, and the late-night hacks and wheezes of the woman next door. All his best work, he gloated, while he held me tight and taut, kneading my chilled bones to aching.

Under a constant monotone of bland sky, he kept me meek and sombre. His icy breath, so sharp and cruel when I wandered, and nothing to see but bare trees and frost-bitten grass. So, I waited. Eventually, he too became restless, distracted by falling leaves in other lands. Watching as he packed his withering winds and hollow obsessions, I held the door, swore softly at his cold back, and smiled into the sun.

By Kate Maxwell
Bejewelled Winter Hare

Watercolour and pen. Painted after a winter walk in Glenarm forest...I’m one of those people who can’t leave a beach or a forest without a pocket full of nature finds so had plenty of inspiration on returning home.

Biography
Audrey Kyle is a contemporary watercolour artist who works from her studio which is situated on the Gobbins cliffs in Co Antrim. Audrey is a full member of the Art Society of Ulster and has been working in watercolour for 12 years. She also runs the family farm and has a small sheep flock. During normal times she also runs workshops from her studio. Audrey work can be viewed at local craft and art shops including The Yard Gallery, Hollywood and Shambles Workshop, Glenarm estate and 2020art in Whitehead, Co Antrim. She produces originals, commissions, prints and a selection of cards.
POETRY

Alan Cohen

Alan Cohen was a poet before beginning his career as a Primary Care MD, teacher, and manager, and has been living a full and varied life. He has been writing poems for 60 years and is beginning now to share some of his discoveries. He’s been married to Anita for 41 years, and they’ve been in Eugene, OR these past 11.
Nap

I sit in the lumpy chair by the front window
My eyes closed, an evasion from too much day
Suddenly the wave on wave assault
Car frames streaming through the dark
Is deep and beautiful as velvet
But also, as if a spider had chirped
Strange
A choir tuning
(A breeze upon dandelions) for caroling
Mistenors
And the carol of flesh on my high spine
Flings back recognition of inanimate voices
I tremble and long for light
I hear the trickle of another's longing
Dripping down his axis of time
And swallowed into a forest I can't fathom
I wonder if my wife isn't living
A bit faster than I--a bit more direct
Wonder what coordinates she'll steam to
While I navigate in this blind backwater
Seeking the future
The oven warm pie
Melts cinnamon
Mindbreach
And I shudder, throed in an orgasm of her sullen hair
We slept touching our feathered sighs unnumbered hours piled king deep in the bed together
When we still exerted a pull upon each other
Before our sleep diverged
I lean forward
Muscle smooth as magic in the dense night
Longing into the room's center
Like eyes
Somewhere, close by, the grail
Somewhere, far off, thunder
Vertiginous, feverish, acid
I shake my eyes open
And resolve my silence
A coconut, a poinsettia, a clay vase
Home, comfortable, and lost in certainty

By Alan Cohen
Cheryl Pearson lives and writes in Manchester in the North West of England. Her poems have appeared in publications including The Guardian, Mslexia, and Frontier, and she has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She also writes short and flash fiction, and was Highly Commended in the Costa Short Story Awards 2017. She is the author of two poetry collections: 'Menagerie', published by The Emma Press 2020, and 'Oysterlight', published by Pindrop Press 2017.
Ice Poem

The cold crust fogs under a thumb's push.
Somewhere beneath, water

lurches in protest, churns against
its unfamiliar ceiling.

We crouch to press and poke,
make milky starbursts, fractured glass.

Our hands trace every crack and fissure.
You are a boy about it,

thudding your fists like
hammers.

I am a butterfly, palms applying
tissue-paper pressure.

This, too, is how we communicate:
you bash and push, I am nervous and flutter.

How do the fish survive the winter?
I knew this once, but now
I cannot remember.

By Cheryl Pearson
Comeragh Spidereen

This photo was born one winter morning in the Comeragh mountains. I had driven down from Dublin and was just starting a hike of the Coum Tay Loop when some dewy webs caught the sun and glistened in the grass beside me. Walking was deferred for a few minutes while I took stock of the webs and the gorgeous rainbows they were throwing off. One had a spider in its heart and I thought it was beautiful, hence I took a snap of it. It’s my lovely Comeragh Spidereen.

Biography

Gráinne scribbles poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction and takes photographs. Winner of the UCD Maeve Binchy Award 2019, she has had her work published in numerous publications.
POETRY

Jonathan Croose

Jonathan Croose lives on the edge of Dartmoor. In addition to writing poetry, he teaches Cultural Studies at the Arts University Bournemouth and is a theatre-maker, musician and showman.
Crow Cold Nation

The first thing we noticed was a hardening of the ground.
The nights began to draw, and each morning’s waking breath was sharper than the last,
a fine frost, razor-dicing blood and pulse, as if fearful of the very air.

We dismissed it at first, preferring to sleep under summer sheets,
and believing it to be a dream
safely contained at the corner of our eye,
but as we slept, the Equinox came and went,
and the scent of petrol mixed with earth
began to seep beneath the door.

Days shortened, flowers went over,
dead heads drooped, and rot set in.

We rolled up blankets to plug the draughts, and laid in stores,
trying to ignore reports, from here and there,
of voices raised, of shortage, lack, and sabotage, and hungry gap,
of marching boots and innocents driven back
into the sea,
but still the cold came on, hibernal in its discontent, and ill-informed,
and even snow could muffle not
its stark, unfettered howl and roar.

Black ice.
Bedclothes tucked tight.
Fog, in the mornings. Whisky, at night.

A few weeks in, the birds began to leave.
Only they among us were free to cross the border,
and after that the fields and trees were silent,
waiting, with naked twig and ice-dammed stream,
for the final acts of men.

A hush—now of held breath began,
a push of mushroom, a cloak of blackberry mist and nettle tang
on roads that tasted more of fish and chips, and all drew in
to Saturnalia, that signal of our last descent,
the ritual of wrap and give,
and toss, and burn, and leave.

Dark days ahead, to January.
February, withering. March, in hiding.
April, no more than sunlit dream.

Years later, when we looked back, we wondered
if this winter could have been withheld,
and whether well-made bonfires could have burned away its bitterness,
but we could not decide.

By Jonathan Croose
Rachel Carney is a poet and PhD student based in Cardiff. Her poems, reviews and articles have been published in several magazines including the *New Welsh Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *Acumen* and *Wales Arts Review*. One of her poems was shortlisted for the 2019 Bridport Prize. She blogs at [www.createdtoread.com](http://www.createdtoread.com).
It’s Bonfire Night again

huddled by the fire   rubbing hands   stamping feet
releasing clouds of breath into the air
waiting for the fireworks to begin

and I sense you here beside me
one arm wrapped around my shoulders
solid as an oak tree in the dark

your warmth reaches out to my cold
teeth stuck on treacle toffee   mesmerised by firelight
I turn toward you   blinded by colour

your absence yawns in the black –
long shadows and the hidden bulk of more

By Rachel Carney
Christmas Mass

Acrylic on panel. A church I went to when I was in New York for Christmas.

Biography

I started painting in Jr. High School. Most of my paintings are Animals and landscapes, the rest are outside the line. Painting shows Eccles Art Center Hogle Zoo Utah State Fair Salt Lake County Fair I have had paintings published in SLCC Anthology, Bird in Tree 2017 Association of Women in Psychology Bridge on their bags. 2016 Literary home girl volume 9, 10, Old Faithful in room with a Nude, Healing Muse volume 19 2019 Promontory Owl, SLCC Anthology 2020 a Lion and a Landscape, Bison in Wingless Dreamer Love of Art book and a Black Bear, Eagle and Fox in Haden Valley in Winamop.
JL Bogenschneider has had work featured in a number of print and online journals, including Cosmonauts Avenue, The Interpreter’s House, Necessary Fiction, PANK and Ambit.
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! BOYS AND GIRLS! WELCOME TO MY HAUNTED HOUSE!

After Alden Nowlan’s, ‘We found him kneeling’

All night, it fell. The first time we saw snow.

We dived in drifts, savoured being numb. Our heads were wild with sweat and glee. We pelted each other with poorly packed fists; howled as ice hit hard, high on the delights of discovery.

We walked home through unacknowledged back streets, taking the route less trodden to walk in the untouched snow. To hear the soft crunch of gently yielding ground and feel ourselves sink with each step.

*

We found him grey-haired and kneeling, one ear pressed to a wall, listening to the sounds on the other side. He had a plastic bag that contained sheet music. I thought he might have been some kind of musician, some sort of man. He left an instrument behind: an accordion, or flute, his dead skin forever gracing keys.

The police said he’d been there all night. That he’d died before it snowed and hadn’t felt a thing.

I believed them, then.

Now, every night I stand and pray: let us die of mere starvation, let us die of simple death. But don’t let us die kneeling, listening to the sounds on the other side.

By JL Bogenschneider
"Penned In," is a poetry pamphlet written by Karen Mooney & Gaynor Kane, and published by the Hedgehog Poetry Press. It is a collection of poems written since March 2020 in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on society and everyday life.

Prompted by experience and observation, Karen and Gaynor have considered the impact from both a global and a deeply personal perspective.

All profits from signed author copies* of "Penned In" will be donated to Action Cancer, Northern Ireland’s leading, local cancer charity.

The charity’s mission is to save lives and support local people through cancer awareness, prevention, detection and support.

*Please note that this only applies to sales via http://gaynorkane.com/penned-in/ and not to those via Amazon or the publisher.

You can listen to some of the poems here:

- **I touched you** by Karen Mooney
- **Learning BSL during lockdown** by Gaynor Kane