**Tony Holden ‘Selected poems May 2022’**

This edition published May 2022 by Tony Holden 83 Staples Road Loughton Essex IG10 1HR [c] Tony Holden 2022 > Feel free to quote but reference [www.tonyandbarbaraholden.com](http://www.tonyandbarbaraholden.com)

**[1] Sixty years +**

I wrote my first poem aged 20 in 1960 and settled into writing and writing poems during my 5 years in Leeds and Cambridge Universities; on into marriage with Barbara; then within our working-lives and commitments; and then during our long retirement in Loughton on the edge of London. For many years I’ve used the words ‘suffering, joy and struggle’ as my ‘go-to’ description of being human on planet earth.

**[2] Barbara**

Barbara commented many decades ago that writing was “part of my way of being in the world.” She wrote as a foreword to a booklet of selected poems: “Many’s the time I’ve come home to find a piece of paper pinned to a door or, as now, to the end of the kitchen shelves. Living with someone who writes for his job is one thing. Being proof-reader for ‘fun’ is another. But living with someone who has written poems all the time I’ve known him has given a particular and added flavour to our marriage.”

**[3] Editing at 80+**

So, in 2022, with personal and world difficulties far beyond those of simply ageing, I decided to edit my complete poems and to edit from the viewpoint of my current self: we’ve kept the numbering and dates written and added ◙ ◙ statements to do with our context, place, dates, our work, our lives. This version is a personal selection.

**[4] Title**

The title ‘Poems on paper’ comes from my desire to have a paper copy. For much of these years the poems were ‘on paper’ and I still enjoy, as with reading, a book in my hands. Thanks to digital technology my poems and drawings and much more are on the PC, our iPad, a saver stick, the cloud, and, not least at www.tonyandbarbaraholden.com

**[5] Wordsmith and poet**

I have felt and known that my poems are sometimes more ‘wordsmith’ than ‘poet!’ But it is only in editing that I have adopted the style [prose poem] for some of them. Wikipedia has: “Prose poetry is poetry written in prose form instead of verse form, while preserving poetic qualities such as heightened imagery, parataxis, and emotional effects.” My poems and prose poems are personal, complex, short, direct, visual and felt. Although I ‘speak’ them sometimes when writing I regard them as ‘written on the page’. Whilst I know they are written for me I have also always wanted them to communicate.

**[6] More than one aspect**

Whilst working for 40 years I had come to regard the poems as an alternative to my public voice which as a Methodist Church Minister was both written and spoken. And over the years they became a second diary. Then in retirement they overlapped with the drawing that also became important for me. In looking back, and reading through, I think this has been a serious and worthwhile project within my life which has, I’m pleased to say, many other valued aspects and strands.

◙ ◙ 1958 – 1961 I was born in Nelson Lancashire in 1940 and went to University in Leeds to do an arts degree in Geography, English Literature, Psychology and Biblical Studies.

**001 Francois Truffaut film 1959 ‘Four hundred blows’, Leeds 1960**

\*

Isolate man boy

Subjected to hopelessness

Living in parental strife

Innocence impinged by evil

Evil of need: need to live.

\*

Society imprisons him

Unconforming misfit

Parents reject him

Disinherited child,

\*

Can he escape now?

Escape to the sea

Is there no way now?

It might have been me.

**003 Factory in Nelson, 1960**

\*

The belts and shafts and straps for power

Hang still, as the warp and weft of snapped fibres.

The mill is silent from the shatter

Since the looms have been smashed, by order.

**005 Until tomorrow: Winwick Psychiatric Hospital, 1961**

\*

I worked as an untrained nurse mostly in the men’s medical ward for one summer between Leeds University which included psychology and Cambridge University which was also training for the Methodist Church Ministry – this verse is from the longer poem and referencing 006.

\*

From the window see the wall

And the square edge around the lawn.

They walk forever, striding

Some alone some together

Arms folded, arms behind backs,

An unending walk.

◙ ◙ 1961-1963 The Methodist Church placed me in Cambridge University to do a degree in theology and my ministerial training.

**009 Cambridge: Tranquillity, 1962**

\*

Still – as smoke dreaming its way through leaves

Which fish-like move beside the river in a park -

The music floats across the lawn

Echoing down avenues of trees

This mood of quietness now softens

My harshness in calm candlelight.

**012 Cambridge in winter, 1962**

\*

In that winter with the bridges standing in ice

To watch the skaters playing

Colours skimmed the water

With the cracking ready to tumble

Everyone into the cold:

In that Breughel framed by eyes,

Exhilarated with white joy,

In that winter, life was frozen still.

◙ ◙ 1963-1966 My first Methodist Church appointment was to five valley churches in South Wales where I met and married Barbara of Nelson South Wales who was born in 1944.

**014 John F. Kennedy, 1964**

\*

An assassin waits

For the already dead man

Who is buried in a telescopic-sight.

Hides to send him falling, like a nightmare,

Screaming through boards on a pier.

The sudden shot spins life into tragedy,

A room into darkness - a world into mourning,

An assassin escapes, only to be captured,

Only to be murdered in a moment of carelessness

Which sends everyone wheeling

Into a kind of shame - this short-lived sorrow.

**015 A man lies in the street, 1964**

\*

A man lies in the street

Head down in mud and water

His back is whipped

His face is broken.

A moth comes out

And enters through his eye.

A moth moves out of the lotus-flower

Across the crushed fingers

Into the flame of this cramped fire,

Until he is pained into forgetfulness.

**018 Know all that has fathered me, 1964**

\*

All my life is in me now

The leaf within the tree

All that is past

The blossoms within the leaf

All those memories in the blood

The fruit within the blossom

The seed within the fruit.

**020 But nothing can be done: a winter funeral, 1964**

\*

A woman screaming for her dead son

Lies curled within her man's grief.

\*

Her words fall through silent, weeping people

Who stand watching the fingers fling

Desperation stumbling up the stairs

Like some punished child, carefully

Friends guard the pain

Lest it spills over.

\*

Through the window she fights to stare

Between the curtains,

But her eyes can only see the car

Braking-breaking, bring back my son,

But nothing can be done.

**022 Desire, 1965**

\*

The waves clash across the rocks

Streaming them with sweat

Wild as the colour of blood

Cold as icicles

Unlike the heat of our new-found desire.

**026 I walk at times behind dark glasses, 1965**

\*

I walk at times behind dark glasses

Along the streets of hurrying people

Who populate the unfamiliar cities

Of my unending search.

\*

I want to know one thing perfectly

To be fulfilled by complete possession:

But a grain of sand is too vast for me

And a woman's love always asks for more.

◙ ◙ We married in 1965 and lived in Barbara’s home for one year before the Methodist Church system moved us on.

**027 Lines and rhymes and things in Wales, 1965 – verse [9]**

\*

This sudden spate of rhyming

Is rather like regaining

One's voice from choice.

It's a gurgle and a giggle in the throat

A tickle and a tremor which might choke,

It's the helpless harmless laughter

Of a child who's running faster

Than he's ever, ever run before.

**030 In life also, 1966**

\*

Side by side in stone they lie

These effigies whose eyes and hands

Point only to the sky.

\*

Beyond the monumental tomb,

As flags to long-since faded glory,

A mist of arches hang.

\*

Gargoyles look down from out this height

Upon their shrunken stature.

\*

Man and wife in death apart

Are frozen in their lifeless stare

Lovers separate in their bed

Are turned to stone by anger.

**032 Today I heard of yet another war: Vietnam, 1966**

\*

Today I heard of yet another war

Which started through impatient fear:

I see again those hills of pain

Where names are lost on littered bodies.

Today and many times before

People have called war

By other names than violence,

And sometimes I feel I ought to join that line

Of poets and other men who only murmur

That this way leads but to the grave.

**035 In Winter, 1966**

\*

I have swallowed the sun

For my eyes glare as the sand

Strokes deep the sea-skin hands

Of your smooth body's tree:

And the naked ground is dry

In the blue and yellow thirst

And though I faint as I try

I can't remember these.

◙ ◙ 1966 – 1971 Accrington was our first Methodist appointment after marriage [and back to Lancashire for me]. We were there for five years. Barbara studied at Chorley College [Lancaster University] completing her ‘Teacher-Social-work’ qualifications and practice.

**038 When moving house, August 1966**

\*

We are moving our boxes and string and things

To unknown streets and new habits.

We travel light with portable roots in suitcases

Put down over night, nomadic.

The changed address is spoken

Phoned or sent, to ‘keep in touch’,

To people who have chosen to remain strangers

And is not said to friends to whom we turn

Quietly with a ‘see you again.’

**044 Words, 1970**

\*

I have looked around for words

With which to see my life

[I have tried to draw, to play, to dance, to love]

But only words whisper to me

Endlessly, I know the words

[Set within my linear western logic-asking mind],

They move as images of a film

They should come easily ‘as leaves’

Or as least as life, but if I could

If I could only use the words I know,

I would tell you many things.

◙ ◙ 1971 – 1976 Bilston-Wolverhampton was my next five-year appointment. Twins Sian and Adam were born in 1973. Barbara developed her language teaching and counselling in schools and then in Bilston Further Education College.

\*

**048 Ireland, 1971**

\*

My wife, [who is Welsh],

Says that I, an Englishman,

Have very little sympathy

For the Irish at war.

It is simply that I find I cannot

Live through a war in slow-motion

In which every single casualty

Is recorded, numbered, named,

And mourned.

**052 Sian and Adam: birth, 14 November 1973**

\*

If after death

I do not know that I am I

And you are you

Then our life is even more

Extraordinary

In its here and nowness

And in its oddness

Than I could ever imagine.

**054 Intensity of awareness, 1974 {published Methodist Church Ambleside in-service training and Methodist Church annual conference}**

“I find it happens before sleep or when I meditate – ‘ask, breathe, see.’ I find it happens in awakening dreams [hypnagogic dreams] when in a moment I see amazing things. It is a sense of well-being, meditative-focus, an intensity of awareness and peace of mind which is utterly describable and fulfilling.”

\*

This poem is made of words

Which feel their way

Across the page -

And when I say

This is it I've got it,

You always say

Let go forget it.

◙ ◙ 1976 – 1987 We gave great care and attention to our next move and decided that, whatever else, “we definitely wouldn’t go to London!” The decision to move to London proved momentous – we never left! We lived in the London Borough of Newham in a church house in Forest Gate with our twins Sian and Adam [born 1973]. My work was at Stratford Methodist Church and Bow Mission including regional and then national anti-racism projects. Barbara moved from teaching and a community school in Forest Gate to managing a third of the London Borough of Newham Adult Community Education and Youth Work.

**056 Vocation, November 1976**

\*

I worked as a Methodist Minister in local churches from 1963 to 1987 [South Wales, Accrington Lancashire, Bilston-Wolverhampton, Stratford E 15 East London]. Although the London work led to regional and then national appointments I wrote-up the east London time and that was published as ‘Keeping Faith’ in 1988 when I started the national appointment. Previously our work at Zebra Project and for Christians against racism and fascism [CARAF] [amongst many articles and booklets and reports] was published as ‘People. Churches and multi-racial projects’ 1985.

\*

People used to say, what do you want to be

When you grow up? And I’d say,

I don't know.

\*

People now say, what do you do?

And I answer, I'm a minister,

I'm a person, I don't know.

\*

It's not very easy to be tenth-rate

When all are pushed to be successful,

We need to be ourselves.

**058 Dinosaurs and chips: for Siân and Adam, November 1978**

\*

Adam and Sian are almost five:

It's been a long time

Since dinosaurs were alive.

But we feed our children old worlds

When the chips are down,

And yet our lives are imprinted

With micro-circuits for the future.

**060 Without going outside, 1980**

\*

“Without going outside, you may know the whole world. / Without looking through the window, you may see the ways of heaven. / The farther you go, the less you know. // Thus, the sage knows without travelling; / S/he sees without looking; / S/he works without doing [Lao Tzu, ‘Tao Te Ching’ 47].”

\*

Sometimes

I quite submerge myself

In words and information.

It has become

A spontaneous discipline

Which lets me

Recognise myself

And listen to what I see

In other people.

\*

Then I put it all down:

I look and quest and ask

Again, I focus

On what is given to me

Freely.

I take the step within,

And walk around

The silent spaces

Where I really live.

**063 Drawing still, 1980**

\*

I draw without thinking

With certainty,

Direct on the paper

Using the shape of the page,

Choosing to frame it,

Using ink and colours,

The lettering as sure

As the experience.

The words voice

One still, short, glance,

Selected and worked through.

**067 Death is stunning, June 1981**

\*

I remember as now

Your neighbour standing

In his garden,

The flowers are growing.

\*

I remember as now

A near friend sitting

On a hill walk,

The pain is now flowing.

\*

I remember as now

The peasants falling

So long ago,

The rule is unchanging.

\*

I remember as now

The children dying

In Soweto,

The day is still dawning.

**073 Where were your grandparents born?, Christmas 1981**

\*

We took a rock from Llangorse Lake

It was a talisman from the past

Holding a vein of lost wisdom

Perhaps, shaped by the water's unknown forces,

One day it will fall and break open

And maybe inside there will be an ammonite fossil

Or a fierce dragon, a living creature, or a flying saucer.

So, be your history and your future

Let words and actions form and grow

Let actions flow unforced,

Move easily, bend sufficiently, strive effortlessly.

**082 Our children, May 1982**

\*

When I look into the eyes

Of our children,

Who are now eight years old and more,

When I look into our shared lives

I want to mark my passing -

If not with wisdom

Or with acknowledged creativity:

If not with laughter or with tested love -

At least with words which record

The passion of our journey.

**085 Falkland’s War: Prayer for today, June 1982**

\*

We thank you for this day

For all the space and all the time within it:

Space for joy and struggle

Time for routine and passion

Space and time enough

For self, people and God.

We thank you for the life we live

And the Kingdom in which we share.

We thank you for this day

At its beginning and at its end.

**090 Seven stones: Barbara North India, 1983**

\*

I chose seven stones and I have drawn them

I've lived with them for seven weeks:

\*

[1] Standing stones -

High and alone beyond the people

Flowing along a city's streets,

\*

[2] Celtic stones -

Joy stained in ordinariness

Making a cross upon a wall,

\*

[3] Stones in a Zen garden -

The music from their raked silence

Imprinting a blue and brilliant light,

\*

[4] Tantric stones -

Without violence or show

Fitting together a sexual energy which excites,

\*

[5] Sculptured stones -

Made and shaped from ancient rock

Bending the metal to a modern need,

\*

[6] Stones on a beach -

Dried in the moving sun

Feeling the sea's sound,

\*

[7] Stones of flame -

If I could place seven such stones

To mark my passing

We would release enough ecstasy

To inflame the world.

**093 Lullaby, July 1983**

\*

When the time comes each evening for me to rest

I go to our sleeping children and say goodnight.

I touch them, name them and at the end of each day's living

They bless me yet know nothing of it.

**094 No sight of a brave new day, October 1983**

\*

I do not think I can read any more

I do not feel I can hear more of this catalogue

Of poverty and endless stress.

It is too late for such pain

I am too tired for such scenes

Which switch off hope and foreclose the future.

Violence and injustice and boredom corrode

Our best resolve, today we sweat

Inside the skin of our own helplessness.

It is all true, but it will falsely

Take our life away, it is all fact

But it will betray all that we value.

There is no sound of running feet

There is no sight of a brave new day.

**095 Visiting art galleries, November 1983**

\*

First, I do the shopping

Then travel on the Underground

To a coffee and I plan my day.

In the subway a young busker

Plays classical violin with energy and skill,

The waiter smiles and then looks

Disappointed when I order a drink

Rather than breakfast.

It is business as usual in the city.

**101 Drawing, September 1984**

\*

Sometimes when I draw

The drawing feels to be done directly

As though I by-pass the usual processes

Of mind and reasoning and language:

There is a rightness in it.

**105 Almost in Glasgow: before St. Valentine's Day, February 1986**

\*

Blue sky and the sun's light bright on the snow,

Icicles waterfall down hillsides and heather bracken

Like glass stalactites,

Snow shows in lines through the fir trees

Like the many partings in plaited Afro-hair,

The train gathers speed up and over the pass,

Fast past the trucks on the roads

Quite slow compared with the plane

Drawing lines across the blue sky.

**109 Loving sex, June 1987**

\*

Our generation didn’t say much about sex:

But I do remember turning towards each other,

Our bodies locking and I remember

The feelings of safety and excitement

The quietness of the dark and sleep

And wakening-up in the morning

To breakfast and the children -

And then, years later, the need to write it down.

**110 Writing the book ‘Ways Through’, July 1987**

\*

I greatly valued the sabbaticals as part of our Methodist Church in-service training system. I used most of mine to write in my study at home: published 1990.

\*

I have tried for very many years

To put this writing down,

I wanted so much to end it

But it remained notes and files.

Now it is over and finished,

The words are formed and crafted

And during about fifty days

I have let go of 10 years of waiting,

And beyond the present making

I have caught up with myself

I have completed this part of me.

◙ ◙ 1987 – 1993 whilst Barbara continued to work in the London Borough of Newham Tony moved to a national Methodist Church post [until 1999] but we stayed in the same church-house until 1993.

**113 Up Llanfabon: for Francis Sarah Steer, died 10 October 1987**

\*

I had started my work for the national Methodist Church [1987-1999] and Barbara’s mother died back home in Nelson South Wales.

\*

The ritual and the people bring comfort

Like so many unexpected gifts.

The ashes from the cremation flames

Are placed in the side of the family-grave.

The hilltop cemetery is without its usual rain

Though a hurricane stormed across England.

The marble slabs and vases of flowers combat

The weeds and the absence of forgotten visits.

A grave digger shovels soil into a recent burial.

As our small family shapes its bereavement.

**117 Travelling the London Underground, February 1988**

\*

I read that there are about 100 suicides a year

On the London Underground.

The announcer says: we regret the delay

But there is a hold-up because

There is ‘a person under a train’.

And then I think

Did they fall, jump, or were they pushed?

**121 She’ll be home tomorrow, July 1988**

\*

Sometimes when we are apart

As I keep busy with activity

Filling the days with work and food and reading

I wonder what would happen if you did not come back.

Our few days holiday together was a time

Of ease and friendship, of loving and close living,

But when we are apart

For you in India or now - for me in travel with my job,

I wonder what would happen if you did not come back.

I find it hard even to begin to imagine

Such bereaved and empty spaces in my life.

**123 Colwyn Bay beach, August 1988**

\*

I like to sit on a beach

Preferably in the sunshine

Feeling the air on my skin,

Touching and building some stones,

Hearing, in the distance,

The sea's waves and the voices of children.

Then the cry of gulls stops

The clouds move more slowly

My book remains open at the same page.

I like to sit on this beach

Breathing the years I have collected

And now put down

As concentrated words.

**131 Desire to write, October 1988**

\*

Tonight the desire to write is enough,

I discover the words among the weeds of my tiredness

And the discarded litter of my working hours.

They have the vigour

Of a painting seen with new eyes

Of a sculpture visited again with pleasure.

**135 It is autumn again, November 1988**

\*

Yesterday I gathered up the leaves in our garden -

I remember leaving home when I was eighteen

To go to university. Then I was leaving Leeds

To start at theological college. Next leaving Cambridge

To begin my work as a Minister of Religion.

We left South Wales married and a first job in Accrington.

Then Wolverhampton when my contract was not renewed.

And now, I would leave London, unwillingly.

**137 They say there is no poverty in Britain, 1989 {published the Methodist Church national magazine ‘Now’}**

\*

Some people have no food today

Others are under nourished and ill,

You dine out again.

\*

Some wear rags and discarded clothes

Others buy yesterday's outfits second-hand,

You select high fashion.

\*

Some are homeless beneath cardboard boxes

Others shelter in grim rooms,

You have more than one address.

\*

Some are unemployed young and old

Others are low-paid in jobs which damage them,

You manage wealth.

\*

Some reject school and never attend

Others fail to achieve anything much,

You expect higher education for your children.

\*

Some beg on the streets

Others, with no savings, live off counter payments and debt,

You have portfolios in the money market.

\*

Some have no choices left

Others miss out on options like mobility, health, leisure,

You are free to do whatever you please.

**139 Flying to Shetland, October 1989**

\*

When we are on the earth, we forget

That the sky is always blue,

We move above the arctic of the clouds

Like birds hunting the sea.

**143 Desire, February 1990**

\*

We choose to stand against a hidden wall

Within the house,

We press hard and meet hard

Soft hands, breath, lips, kisses, breasts, bodies:

Let's go to bed now, one says,

And afterwards, I really wanted you.

**149 St. James’ Park in the sunshine again, May 1990**

\*

On the lake

Birds of brilliant variety nest with their young,

At the art gallery

Unique words and collage hang without apology,

On the paths

Tourists and workers walk or lounge with spring energy.

**151 Drawing and Wanstead Park, May 1990**

\*

Look at that beautiful tree - draw it

See that branch with its leaves

Imagine all the leaves on all the trees

That ever grew or will bud,

Draw just one leaf accurately.

**158 Energised after Los Angeles, September 1990**

\*

In my national MC work I only went out of the UK a few times – Germany, Switzerland, America. I went to New York and Los Angeles to do ‘Broad-based community organising’ training [Citizens UK]. I was there at the 50th anniversary of Saul Alinski starting the work [‘Reveille for Radicals’] - only to discover that it happened the day I was born!

\*

The places we visit –

Cathedrals, galleries, cities, rivers

The rocks we position carefully

The drawings we attempt tentatively

Are all part of the feast.

They fit like books on a reorganized shelf,

They tune our lives and fuel our songs.

**162 Reading another novel, November 1990**

\*

The sense of pleasure builds quietly

As the book's story encircles me and fills me:

Dramatic world events are distanced

And my own restlessness is switched off.

I have been too busy – and now

I have become stopped, and utterly content.

**165 Barcelona Cathedral, Easter 1991**

\*

In the cathedral, the pillars

Make space for the candles

And the Easter day prayers.

\*

In the square, the dancers

Step up into the sardana

With raised arms and lifted breasts.

\*

In my head, the stillness

Is physical as when the sun's rays

Strike between the eyes.

\*

In these words, the sense

Is shaped among the crowds and cafes,

The musicians, beggars, sellers.

**172 Exploring beginnings with NASA’S COBE project, April 1992**

\*

And so, from our very first beginning

Through all the galaxies of space

And all the stars exploding into light

We carry the DNA memory of our cosmic past

In ourselves and in our blood

We see the sunrise breakthrough of a human future,

Without lies, without killing.

**175 Barbara Hepworth’s Garden St Ives, July 1992**

\*

We remember certain places

For the smell of honeysuckle,

The sharp call of seagulls,

Leaves sounding in the garden.

We revisit them, to see

The light which forms itself

Around the sculptured shapes.

**177 Portugal Cascais pleasures, August 1992**

\*

Pleasures should be taken discreetly

Among this abundance of palms and flowers:

A piece of grilled fish

And a small black-coffee

A tiled-palace with a fountain

And one painting in a gallery.

And also making-love whilst

The white and blue sunshine

Heats the coloured boats on the sea.

**182 St. James’ Park London again, December 1992**

\*

I walk in the rain through an empty park

Looking at the water with its fountains, seeing

The trees and grass, the wild-fowls, and squirrels.

I slow down until the seconds expand

Into a space within my head

I slowly turn, turn round.

**183 Valentine: Wanstead Park, February 1993**

\*

In the woodland, among the fallen-trees fungi grow -

We do not know their names

Yet view their shape and colour.

\*

By the water along the island's edge, herons stand -

We do not speak their language

But we watch them fish and fly.

\*

In the world, among the many peoples, love lasts -

We do not grasp its spirit

We sense its peace and joy.

◙ ◙ 1993 – 1999 during the second phase of my national Methodist Church appointment we moved to a Methodist Church house in Loughton Essex whilst Barbara continued her work in the London Borough of Newham and joined Loughton Methodist Church.

**193 Summer: for Adam and Siân, 1993**

\*

Once you have seen

That the world is beautiful there is no more

Repetition, boredom, or despair,

Each kiss, mountain, note, meal

Is sufficient, until the next.

**198 David Hockney, Saltaire, and extravagance, October 1993**

\*

Every time I visit this gallery

I am stunned by the sound of opera

And the sight of such images.

Each new series

Augers the birth of a different artist.

Each picture invites the onlooker

To make an exhibition of themselves,

They say don't stop - fill up the whole view

Like waves of the sea around a house.

**201 Recognizing dangerous people, January 1994**

\*

I remember two small boys knocking me to the ground,

A drunk unsheathing his knife,

A friend being struck on the head with a brick,

A man laughing as I suggested he wished to harm me.

I remember the thud of fists on flesh in the school toilets.

It is wise to anticipate danger – if you can.

**208 Churches: Greensted, Thaxted, Saffron Walden, February 1994**

\*

Churches stand still

In the frozen waiting ground,

The fields' soil is furrowed

The town's history ribbons

Along the main street

The fine buildings pose

Around the market square.

Churches open their doors

To display immense spaces

Ancient treasures

Windows stained with light

And candles ignited by hope.

Such churches are stone-rainbows,

Such churches switch energy.

**213 Greece: Marathon tree, April 1994**

\*

The mimosa tree grows

Between the white church and the sea,

The small church has its garden, walls, and bell

The sea sounds and swells under the Greek sky.

Nearby, a stream cuts through the beach

Falling over the hesitant stepping-stones

Whilst around the roots tiny spring flowers

Scatter colours in the sand.

And the tree, the tree is a solitary mimosa

All swollen yellow and heroic branches.

**216 South Africa’s elections in London, April 1994**

\*

Today, in the sunshine, there is a queue of people

Around Central Hall Westminster London,

They are filing-in through the doors

To a room marked 'South African Embassy,'

And there they vote.

**221 Chance meeting, July 1994**

\*

The green woodpecker, the grey squirrel and the blackbird

Met on the lawn the morning after the rain

The day following the feast of sunshine,

Then they were gone.

**225 Constructions, September 1994**

\*

The violin music follows the path of the butterfly

Across the green lawns, shadowed in the palest sunlight,

Over the mountains of the mind beyond the reach of sense

Lies an abstract landscape, all colours, images and emotion,

\*

So, we gather the ideas and visions:

Like the roots of dead weeds or fresh spring flowers -

Many ways are complex, tortuous, strange, even bizarre

Yet we can choose the direct route to truth,

\*

Each day we reinvent and form our self, we piece ourselves

Together from what we can remember and save,

Each day we focus upon our self, we reconstruct ourselves

From our dreams and our continuing treasures.

**228 Lines at the end of a sabbatical, September 1994**

\*

As part of my Methodist Church work we were granted sabbaticals – wonderful, and on all but one I chose to write.

\*

There has come to me during this long hot summer

Such energy, such joy in living, such a sense of wholeness.

It goes beyond anxiety about my remaining days

It goes beyond fear that it might all be lost -

I could leap across the stars -

I could even, in this hospitable silence, be still.

**231 Siân [1] Female Line: Twin poems for a 21st, 14 November 1994**

\*

Your great-grandmother -

So, your grandmother said

So, your mother says -

Was Welsh-speaking

A member of Salem Chapel

Played violin in an orchestra

Belonged to the Co-op and the ILP

Was a pacifist and a suffragette:

All this in one small village

All this in one small woman,

See, here is her dove-of-peace badge.

\*

You, firstborn and free from a brother's energy,

Took in -

Food

Love

Friendship

Art

Music

Books

Rugby

Films

And more

You digested them slowly

Processed them with care and thought,

Now you reach out to control the future,

You steady yourself ready to fly - all

Responsive, assertive, female.

**232 Adam [2] Musician: Twin poems for a 21st, 14 November 1994**

\*

Play some chords with fine tunes to them

Write a poem with a certain guile

Tell a tale with some heart to it,

Let the audience hear and smile.

\*

Finger some notes with style to them

Sing a verse of the purest air

Speak a yarn with some fire to it,

Let the listeners hear and care.

\*

Make some spaces with calm to them

Check the flow with a skilful hand

Voice a song with some truth to it,

Let the people hear and stand.

\*

Play some music which is your sound then

Send the beat throughout the darkest night

Shout a message with some hope in it,

Let all lovers hear and delight.

**239 Netsuke: a surprise present, January 1995**

\*

When I opened this parcel, I found something so

Utterly surprising that I had to smile, be glad,

Be happy, be generous and gracious, welcome it.

For inside the Christmas paper was a small metal box,

Inside the box a netsuke toggle.

It's a small brownish carved ivory - a century old or more -

A child, a baby even, a child with hands touching, curled

Around a braided cushion, the fabric decorated,

And there is a rat along the shoulder. The child

Is asleep and smiling. It's an object to play with

Something to handle and caress with your fingers.

**240 I wonder at hypnagogic images, January 1995**

\*

My brain and consciousness

Scan and focus my attention, so I see

Black geometric-shapes

Filling the total field of my vision,

People passing by and

Little people or giants standing around,

It doesn't seem to matter, and then there are

Pure direct abstracts - even circles -

And I wonder at hypnagogic images.

**244 Photos of Shetland, March 1995**

\*

I look out of the gallery window

Beyond the mobile of figures turning,

Outside the sun strikes the snow and the peat

The light vibrates from the lake beyond the wooden stile

Like pollen dusted from a spring flower

Like a dog shaking-off the sea,

The clouds reflect the voe

And oyster catchers gather.

**246 Compassionate detachment, Easter 1995**

\*

Move into meditative-focus

Choose to enter the still-centre

Of spacious joy, endure

The razor-sharp blows

Turn around and come alive,

Do it - make the play.

**248 Celebrating success: for Adam and Sian, June 1995**

\*

This is a strange poem and a hard text

\*

Do not be distracted by the noise of information or power

Or even the screams of violence and the thud of blows

\*

Let the giants and other dream-creatures pass by

And greet them as they go

\*

Do not be distracted by the archetypal images which extend

Through the wall and beyond the room

\*

Do not tell people many things

Rather show them one door which is open

\*

Focus and breathe,

Strike the nail with the hammer

Fit the word to the meaning

Sense the feeling of complete joy and know

This is it.

**253 Double glazing, August 1995**

\*

“We can no longer take language for granted as a medium of communication its transparency has gone. We are like people who for a long time look out of a window without noticing the glass - and then one day began to notice this too [Iris Murdoch ‘Sartre Romantic Rationalist’ 1961].”

\*

Often we look through lenses

Which, however polished, tend to distort,

But planet earth is out there

Changing and turning. Sometimes

Our words break open

Or become opaque, they split open:

And our minds fuse as the shards of light

Rend our inner vision, their sound hesitates,

Their energy gets disconnected from sense,

Yet still we act and speak.

**259 Humans kill, November 1995 [prose poem] -** We humans kill and die. We've lost the mediaeval disturbing fear of death and in its place have spawned a vocabulary of extermination. Here’s the list - death from - miscarriage abortion premature birth birthing disease accident natural disaster suicide switching off machines euthanasia old age brain dead comas war terrorist attack assassination execution murder. We practice dying, we do not learn to stop killing - it's all there in today's papers and TV. Do not say I exaggerate, don't make out that I'm making it up, it is too much to bear - we will not suffer it, we will resist or we shall go mad.

**263 English love-poem on reading R S Thomas, 14 Feb 1996**

\*

I would make a gentle joyful song,

More Victorian-garden or cooling fountain

I would have its sound play in the city and walk with female grace.

The memories are all of meals and people, stories and places,

The smell is passion

The taste perfumed candle-flame

The words caress and stroke: cherish and excite

The images fuse into one photograph, marking

The beginning and the high plateau of our love.

**267 Three hypnagogic women, June 1996**

\*

My eyes open and a woman is arched across above me

I see her like a Chagall painting - a flying stretched-out lover.

My eyes open and a clothed woman is standing there

I avert my eyes in confusion not out of coolness.

I open my eyes to a woman standing there facing me

I reach forward and push my hands through her body.

They arrive on different nights unrecognized but welcome

Each appears separate and quite out of touch

Unlike the close stirring of sexual dream-partners

Then each goes, as the others do, without speaking,

Till the next time.

**268 Only interpretations differ: Blackpool Methodist Conference, June 1996**

\*

“Ummon asked: The world is such a wide world, why do you answer a bell and don ceremonial robes? [Paul Reps 'Zen Flesh Zen Bones' 1957/ 1971].”

\*

All tribes gather in crowded rooms or open fields,

We rehearse our sacred-stories and enact the rituals

We exercise discipline and wrap ourselves in coded words.

Outside the sun is brilliant across the incoming sea

And people go about their daily lives.

**275 Westward by rail, October 1996**

\*

More beautiful than the estuary and the sea-shore's waves

More beautiful than the fiery setting star-sun

My eyes are open and the physical weight presses

Breathes through the mind sending

Fountains of light streaming deep down into the heart.

**276 Fry Art Gallery Saffron Walden, November 1996**

\*

Repeat it, say it again, you can print it one more time,

We went to the Fry Gallery in Saffron Walden

And looked at the pictures for sale,

We walked through the green-bushed Victorian gardens,

Repeat it, print it out, number it, try to set it down again,

The journey, all North-Essex countryside

And cloud-filled motorway without sunset,

Into history, artistic lives and this medieval place.

**282 Zero icon, March 1997**

\*

“How to be human now that is my main business [John Robinson].”

\*

Be whole: be one person, one world

Well-being and the common good

This is [it] Stop, let go, “drop the raft”

Intend - quest.

**288 Freesias, June 1997.**

\*

The white flowers stand white,

Almost wax, slowly moving, growing in intensity,

Standing still, many headed with long green stems

In the squared glass-vase of water.

I wait patiently and breathe without limit: breathe

The perfume of solitude and space not loneliness or noise.

**294 One moment, October 1997**

\*

A fox walks down the garden path,

Turns into the bushes and, is gone

Like some forgotten feeling, gone

Beyond the boundary-fence of words.

**296 Making sense, New Year 1998 [prose poem] -** [1] We move away - the waves wash in and out we hear the drag roar under stones shells sand. We come back into focus giving attention to myself. [2] So attend-intend, in <> out, the journey inward so often stops at the frontier-post of authority. Who knows? Who can we ask? [3] Persist, listen to the dreams, your hardest ideas, your brightest laughter, your intimacies with people, the comfortable solitude won through discipline. [4] Ask, breathe, see the edges between self and other shift, sense the movement between personal and public, reject the false dualism we have been given, seek wholeness.

**298 Love song for Valentine’s Day, 1998**

\*

We won’t intend any more tomorrows

Like making babies in our youth

For in this loving we complete the future

And this passion is our truth.

**301 Old woman’s memories: Eva Holden and Clarence Holden, March 1998 [prose poem and a version at poem 300] -** I look beyond my failing eyes. // I walk slowly within this song so that I can find you, my love. // We’ve held our hands and spun our days. // I will visit your dreams, // We watched as you grew and flowered, now I see you strong and hopeful, I sense your best selves. // I wish I could help people more. // My ears are deaf to all but love I have trusted God. // Eternity resides between us calling out its own hidden name, I am real.

**306 Key-text, July 1998**

\*

“If you lose the spirit of repetition your practice will become quite difficult, but it will not be difficult if you are full of strength and vitality [Shunryu Suzuki 1970].”

\*

Many times, I’ve tried to write a poem

About my daily practice,

So, go to, rest in, use well-being,

Breathe that ordinary ecstasy that walks around

The limits of your brain-mind and

Flowers like still-silence.

**311 Hengrave Hall Library, January 1999**

\*

I often read books and some feed my hunger

But now I am writing for myself

In this winter-sunshine of textured silence

I am standing alone in the flat-landscape of sky

I am reading someone else’s book

Here in this Tudor religious building

Here with Paul Auster.

**314 Shunryu Suzuki: ‘Zen mind, beginner’s mind’, April 1999**

\*

“[Zen] A sense of serenity, a sense of flow, and a sense of rightness in all action, these are three of the symptoms of awakening Zen [Christmas Humphreys ‘Zen Buddhism’ 1949/ 1957 with 17 illustrations some by his wife Hasuko].”

\*

The book is fading, the glue cracks

The yellowed words fall to the floor

I cannot bear it: I cannot suffer it

So, let it drop, throw it away.

**316 July heat, 1999**

\*

[1]

When I was a young-boy I slept in the hot sunshine

Played cricket all the hours of the day with friends

Ran fast home to eat, then back again,

I travelled, beyond my own horizons,

In books films paintings and my first sexual stirrings.

[2]

In those times attention was effortless like

The wind moving in an enclosed garden

And the light striking a turning ornament.

Now it is harder won, but still delicious

As a fine cold wine or a remembered dream.

◙ ◙ 1999 – 2003 – My final work position was a second term in Stratford Methodist Church and the London Borough of Newham though by then we had moved into our own home here in Loughton – Barbara continued her work to 2006.

**319 Certainties, October 1999, December 1999 {our Christmas letter}**

\*

“The scale of this loss – the loss of the text [we have retained the language (of a religious and cultural tradition) but lost the text] may not be fully apparent yet, but it is tragic [George Szirtes ‘Modern Painters’ magazine Autumn 1999].”

\*

Between my birth and death

Within this skin on this planet

In this landscape on this planet

In this city with strangers and friends,

We use language, see images, hear music, tell stories

We dream dreams uncover ecstasy attend to silence,

I filter select translate I abstract organise think meditate

And so, release the unconscious like sighs or laughter

From the cradle-bands of sleep -

Into these words and this writing.

**323 Four walks, February 2000**

\*

I walk along the city’s streets

Past buildings, traffic, people, noise

I walk along the forest’s paths

Through silence, travellers, horses, trees

I walk within the dreamscape-forms

Of memories, colours, voices, sleep

I walk inside these words,

And each time I come home.

**330 Away from home again, June 2000**

\*

I wake from sleep

As five small children wave and smile,

I wake from sleep and put my hand

Through distorted women’s faces,

Sleep drains the tiredness away

I am alone and away from home,

Strange poem and stranger feelings.

**332 Celebrating in the London Serpentine, August 2000**

\*

People walk in the expansive park

And children climb the pirate ship,

Herons stand by the sunken garden

Whilst videos show Iranian art,

Food is eaten in the orangery

And we walk to Whitley’s shopping-centre.

Meanwhile - monuments and trees, grass, and sky

Do business as usual, like the ice cream sellers.

◙ ◙ Tony Holden ‘Stones and Marks: collected poems’ [1960-2000] – our son Adam Holden wrote: for Tony, Happy Birthday. For your 60th birthday, I wanted to collect and bind your poems 1960-2000. It seems a good way to hold fast the moment. From time to time, not least in the process of collating and binding this edition, I’ve come upon these ‘stones that mark the way’ [‘Ways Through’ 1990]. We have not taken the same steps, but I recognize the purpose, the tread, the fleet of foot. And I am glad to follow this writing life. It is a way of friendship and love.

**333 Dragonflies in August, August 2000**

\*

Epping Forest hosts Europe’s densest concentration of dragonflies, or is it the most sorts, types, classes, categories, tribes, anyhow, they fly backwards and forwards at sixty miles per hour.

\*

One, was settled on the bench as I sat down at ‘our’ pond

Others fly with a backdrop of water, vegetation, stones, sky.

In our garden these Vietnam-helicopters dart over the fences

They criss-cross quietly unlike the planes overhead.

Once I touched a red dragonfly, gently beneath its wings,

Stroked it even, and then it flew away.

**336 Desirous of meeting, October 2000**

\*

In the restaurant on the sea-sand shore

They sit, as passionate-lovers touching.

In their talk they meet at least with care,

She journeys-down through layers of feeling

To that place when asking is enough

And voices whisper: be intimates, be whole

But they did not.

**342 Greatly loved, January 2001**

\*

For Clarence Holden born 4 May 1908 died December 1997 aged 89 years and Eva Holden born 28 May 1905 died January 2001 aged 95 years.

\*

Our game is being human on planet earth

This gate, journey, interval where we

Adapt to the scale of time-space and consciousness,

Here we take account of the mysterious and our ignorance,

Here ‘suffering, joy and struggle’ are always worthwhile.

Though there are ‘no explanations’

Though we are breathless at the sense of ‘Otherness,’

At best we are filled, name it as you wish, with ‘Well-being’

And when fortunate we are greatly loved.

**347 Valentine: from Cornwall, February 2001 verse [1]**

\*

By the harbour boats and people sit

Clear in the bright and pulsating light,

In the garden Hepworth sculptures stand

Still among the paths and palms and plants,

In the new Tate Gallery, building and art vie

With the sea’s pull and the flat sand-beach,

Whilst on the moor bird and gorse rise

And that evening we go to an art show.

Next day it rains, grey and misty, and

As I wake an orange lotus flowers.

**352 Gorse in a cold springtime, April 2001**

\*

Photograph the gorse bush

All branch and trunk and thorns

Green leaved and yellow-tipped flower -

They are banked on the edge of the forest

Between the road and the forest.

Photograph the gorse tree

Put it close to your heart,

Yellow, brilliant yellow, restoring the sun.

**355 Loved but never met, June 2001**

\*

“I love him more than any other person I have never met [Adrian Mitchell ‘William Blake’ Omnibus BBC1 TV November 2000].”

\*

[1]

I read the many different texts

I look at art in galleries and books

I watch the films now mostly on TV

I hear the music often at a slant,

[2]

Sometimes it’s all so good it hurts,

You squeeze your eyes quite tight

As though against the brilliant sun

And then words hurl you into ecstasy,

[3]

It’s not simply their sheer new radiance

Or how they take and overpower me

I meet them beyond some faltering talk

My interpretation stands alone,

[4]

They awaken my hunger to write

They force re-entry to my ‘self,’

These writers loved but never met

Reach out across the years.

**362 New York, 11 September 2001**

\*

Strafford E 15 and we walked out of the café

Talking, past some young men, we smiled at them,

We looked up at a new street-TV-screen

There was a skyscraper on fire! Later

I spent hours watching TV trying to make sense

Afterwards it became multi-viewed, endlessly imagined.

**366 Desirous of meeting, November 2001**

\*

Still we meet, you and I,

Still I desire more, but

Do not come too close

Do not try to take me over or

I will choose to step away.

**370 Advent reading, December 2001 [prose poem] -** Each book is today’s book and the text has within it every text I have read. All the stories offer pleasure and favourite writers re-assert their influence and friendship. For the English language [dreamt, thought, read, written] is as close to my ‘self’ as breathing. Only in words is the gap closed and overcome. Words are total, authentic and can carry my whole weight.

**371 Affectionate mirror: Barbara, Christmas 2001**

\*

[1] Identity: Front-runner for women, peace and faith,

With a twist of Wales and generous hospitality

[2] Talker: Telephone woman extraordinaire together

With being a people watcher and people listener

[3] Worker: Sharp East End manager

But never Essex-girl

[4] Parent: Adult mother of adult twins

And imagined grandchildren

[5] Gardener: Surprised planter and

Green-fingered clematis-lover

[6] Traveller: Unstoppable traveller

Needful of new planets

[7] Lover and Friend: The best of.

**378 Keys for Siân, February 2002**

\*

“I find myself saying briefly and prosaically that it is much more important to be oneself than anything else Virginia Woolf ‘A room of one’s own’ 1929.”

\*

It is a good and necessary hunger

To have a room of your own,

For more than fiction

We need living breathing desiring space,

Room enough, to unlock the space within.

There we can travel that vast imagined country

Where we are desirous of meeting and

You have the keys to unlock the door.

**381 A duet of poems, March 2002**

\*

[1] Hengrave Hall

This Tudor house and these pollarded trees

All of the people through so many years,

Now prayers are uttered in Jesus’ name

As skies encircle and lit candles flame -

Each moment is precious: this space is mine

So let us be still now and all will be fine.

\*

[2] Spiritual retreats

This stubborn landlocked gem of resistance

Stone set in grey-green turf and lake and sky,

She entraps with panelled-wood and stained glass

With lemon-scented beds and private graves -

But layered silence waits in hiding

To strip naked the mindful-heart.

**383 Pendle Hill, March 2002**

\*

When I was a young man sunshine filled the whole sky

Whilst my family, church and school crammed all my doing,

I lived without sight of Pendle Hill from the end of our street

Rather distant and sleek-flanked like some desirable girl.

**385 Being-reality, March 2002 [prose poem] -** Sometimes I am utterly lost somewhere, I am without sense. Then the hunger begins for writing, for meditative-focus, for people even, and I start out on the path again. I reach for suchness. I bang against thisness. I know Is-ness. I am still breathing – I reach for being ‘empty and marvellous.’ I reach for survival and fulfilment – here and now all is being-reality.

**389 Extravagant lines from 1962, April 2002**

\*

To walk around Cambridge in the spring sunshine

Is enough for one life-time,

All else is to do with the making of lists

And the taking of photographs

Starting with Kings College Chapel,

Until you reach the highest note

Sounded by the East Anglian sky.

**393 Driving through the forest, April 2002**

\*

The colours and shapes go by

The floor has patches of water

And small ponds, the leaves

Match the season, and the light shines

At the blossom and yellow gorse, and

Further down the road the city breathes.

**398. Gainsborough House Sudbury, at the Queen’s Golden Jubilee weekend, June 2002**

\*

I sit in the garden with its gently scented air

Looking through the flowers at the yellow house

And the Philip King sculptures,

I try to attend to one thing:

[I think and feel my way into my own thinking],

I my ‘self’ and a small Gainsborough head of a youth,

All else falls away.

**403 Eating out, summer 2002**

\*

Two glasses of not too dry white wine

Six oysters on ice with hot sausages

Four types of marinated herring

Three of smoked salmon

Brown and white coarse bread and butter,

All shared between us two

And, coffee for one.

**405 Josef Pyrz: ‘Annunciation’, Durham Cathedral, July 2002**

\*

Within the massive cathedral visitors group and look

Cuthbert and Bede - ceiling and pillar

Ancient belief and even more ancient silence

Are all set solid in almost golden sandstone.

In the Galilee chapel with the Bede tomb

There stands a carved woman

Her contemplative head invites prayer.

**412 Day out in London, August 2002**

\*

Track across this vast peopled city

Go to an exhibition, walk,

Till you find yourselves in a side-street café,

Sit and eat and talk with someone you care about,

And be at home there.

**419 Framing views, October 2002**

\*

“When you are philosophizing you have to descend into primeval chaos and feel at home there [Ludwig Wittgenstein in George Steiner ‘Real Presences’ 1986].”

\*

[1]

From Tate Modern art gallery

Across the boat-ploughed Thames

Beyond the steel sunshine-lit bridge

Set within buildings and cranes,

St Paul’s Cathedral still stands.

[2]

A plane tracks horizontally

A mother and child bend to talk to each other

Then run to the edge of the balcony

At the sound of a helicopter then

They come back in through the door,

[3]

Past me with my London-priced strong coffee,

Past me writing this, and

At the bottom of the page, in the depth,

Primeval chaos welcomes me home.

**422 Hereford Cathedral: ‘Mappa Mundi’, October 2002**

\*

Effigies of knights tend to leave me cold

But Sir Richard Pembridge, Order of the Garter,

Fought at Poitiers 1356, died 1375,

Lies in Hereford Cathedral

Like a Henry Moore fallen-warrior

Laid to rest in detailed ivory-like stone

With his own map of the world long since lost

Whilst he remains for all to see.

**429 Orchids at the New Year, January 2003**

\*

As your chosen magenta-spray of orchids

Or a particular winter-sunset above the forest ridge,

So meditative-focus sees directly and greets

Imagination in language.

**431 Awake, January 2003**

\*

I wake to see a female-figure close and threatening

I strike at her with my hand and she is gone:

My friend, the unconscious, kisses me gently on the lips,

I write ‘life is difficult’.

**432 United Nations, January 2003**

\*

The sun’s going down colours planet-earth,

I hunger to write words

That do not require violence or high-tech weapons

I go to words that for the time being set-aside my dying

I wait for the morning with memory as a bowl in my hands

I stand-still over against the silence longing for a truthful peace.

**435 Present, February 2003**

\*

I want you to understand that everything is all right.

I open my eyes there is an image moving

And then another one replaces it,

They are three-dimensional, complex, solid, in this case golden,

They are utterly new, surreal, wonderful, altered states

They visit from the many dimensions of human consciousness.

I no longer need more or repeated space-time

This is necessary and sufficient for all that is life-affirming,

They are present, they present themselves, they are a present

This ultimate reality is what you are as a human being, valued.

**438 Five lines in Malta, March 2003**

\*

The sky is light blue, sun kindling

The sea is dark blue, myth making

The sea is sea green, boat rocking

The surf is foam white, shore-crashing

And then five rock layers, house cradling.

**439 Outcomes of war in Iraq, March 2003**

\*

As I watch, for hours, the prosecution of the war against Iraq on TV, I am struck by how hard it is to look, be it at war wounds, the large tree outside our house, the pages of a book, Malta, photographs of Malta, let alone at myself.

\*

We humans are slow to learn and so we practice killing,

The fighting has now begun against Iraq

And the violence goes on immovable, frozen, stuck.

I can’t see how to do anything that will make a difference,

So, I watch war and diplomacy on TV

But, in my dreams, bodies are torn-apart.

**440 Contemplation and resistance, March 2003**

\*

Let me look directly without the veils

Of mythology, religion and interpretation,

Let me write directly striking at truth

Let me sit in the sun and know its heat.

**449 Dying and killing, May 2003**

\*

TV gives a lot of attention to dying and killing -

You don’t need to be paranoid to fear the sniper’s bullet

Or to seek defence against the most recent virus

Or to hope to avoid the chance accident or disaster.

You’d have thought that humans, given all this,

Might desist killing one another: but we don’t.

Nowadays suicide and murder are joined at the hip

In terrorist bombings and body-parts have to be

Scooped up like dog-shit in a children’s playground.

**453 Let’s write a poem:** **Siân and Andy wedding, June 2003**

\*

Let’s write a poem

Out of my brain-mind’s hunger and desire

Out of my dream-work’s best images and silent songs,

\*

Let’s write a poem in spite of all:

Whilst difficulties gather

Whilst I struggle to continue myself,

Let’s write for certainty’s sake

So that I feel good

So that I have done something of value

So as to turn the tide of the world,

\*

Yes, let’s write a poem for a wedding

With a full stomach and a glass of wine

With friends nearby and lovers to bed

Let the poem be a constant blessing

Let the poem, like your love, go on.

**456 Keeping going 1957: a poem at retirement, July 2003**

\*

On the top road

After the hard climb through the housing estate

The runner felt the pain of the long tarmac stretch,

Then came the ankle testing descent

Over clumped grass and rough hills, back through

The houses with dogs barking and chasing

And the final up-gradient run-in -

Up the path into the school grounds.

**463 Recognizing people, August 2003**

\*

Seeing you again requires an effort of my memory,

I look afresh at you

Through all the layers and times of meeting,

There is a moment of eye contact

As energy is exchanged

At best we face a true encounter of our lives

In parting we wish each other well.

◙ ◙ 2003 I retired. We were already in our own home in Loughton. Barbara continued her work in the London Borough of Newham Community Education and Youth Service until 2006. Our church focus shifted to Loughton Methodist Church. In ◙ ◙ 2003 September daughter Siân and Andy wedding and ◙ ◙ 2004 September son Adam and Kate wedding.

**467 Oh by the way so and so has died, September 2003**

\*

I still can’t get the hang of it when someone says,

Oh by the way, have you heard so and so has died,

Hours later you realize how much or little you cared.

**470 Palimpsest, September 2003**

\*

The garden’s light and colours shed anxieties like petals

Unlike a painting whose light and colours remain layered,

But every poem surrenders earlier versions

You can’t read the drafts or draw attention

To what is discarded veiled or simply left out

All such are nowhere to be seen.

**471 Eating fish, September 2003**

\*

You see the plate with ice and squeeze the lemon

Then the liquid and the touch of the hard shell

And six swallowed oysters - sensuous,

You pause with white wine,

Next a whole trout pink and delicately flavoured

With an earthy under-taste: earth from river-water

With the black-skin burnt and strong

The mustard-sauce sweet

You combine them in a forkful,

Oh yes and the fish was hot

As was the espresso coffee.

**475 I will not give up on words, October 2003**

\*

I will not give up on words

Neither because of the noise and screams of violence

Nor at the delight of many various images

Nor yet when, in caring love, I seek another person,

I will not give up on words.

**478 Hibernate, February 2004**

\*

I am turning down the noise of the world

So as to stop it you’ve really to drop it

I am switching off the unwelcome other

It’s best to dim all and then not be on call

I don’t cast-off skin but parts of my self

It has to be said switch it on in your head

I make up this ‘self’ free from masks and cosmetics,

Stay there in the heart that most silent of parts

**482 Resist, March 2004**

\*

Years ago I slipped and struck my thin bony fingers

Straight-on against the staircase-step.

I lay there crying, hurt, and bruised,

Today I have in mind a poem.

**484 And have we been passionate: Barbara at 60, May 2004**

\*

And have ‘we’ been passionate? You ask

As in ‘enthusiastic’, ‘adoring’, ‘romantic’, well

We had our caring yet reticent parents,

Screen-idols swooned,

Freud and others told their stories,

We met courted and married,

There is no doubt we were desirous of meeting

Certainly, we meet in private within our vast city

Still, we play the arts of sex and love

And if child-making is passed this earthy-passion

Still shocks my very self with pleasure.

**486 Ask, breathe, see, May 2004**

\*

I thank you for this day

For all the energy and possibilities in it:

I value those I love and who care for me

I value all those who influence me for good

I remember my childhood

And the ensuing journey with all its laughter

I remember my parents

And all those whose death has brought me to tears,

Now I am desirous of meeting

I ask, breathe, see:

Let peace begin with me.

**488 Barbara’s Garden: a public poem at 60, May 2004**

\*

At the back of our white-painted house

The sun’s-heat strikes into your garden

As planes drone overhead and

A few white-clouds move across the blue sky,

House martins swoop and nest

Birds call and mate, insects hover,

The flamingo-shrub shakes with light

And, in the garden’s beds and pots,

Flowers [iris, acer, rose, olive, clematis] bloom.

Today fox, hedgehog, squirrel, and cat are absent

No doubt resting somewhere in the shade.

Meanwhile the summer-house and flagstones

Square-up to the shadows that pass across them.

Over the fence, trees move their leaves in the breeze

And in the distance a massive conifer stands watch.

Now the silence vibrates as the heat

And the crashing sea breathes

As it sucks at waves and pebbles on the beach,

Beyond there is the forest, then India, and then the world.

**495 Jerusalem, August 2004**

\*

I’ve tried to write this poem many times before, it begins

Jerusalem the city whose foundations are peace.

But I back-off because of the history, and my anger.

**497 Beslan school siege, September 2004**

\*

I remember the funeral of a child in Wales

Knocked down by a car,

There was grief, anger, singing at the graveside

And the rain sheeting down,

Now TV shows the Russian school-siege

And many funerals.

**499 If I could choose: for Adam and Kate, September 2004**

\*

If I chose one image from out your wedding day

More than ritual, food, people, joy, or even play

It was the butterfly upon the altar-wall

As you were exchanging your rings and love and all,

Then you flew off to Venice and the butterfly

Is here now in our garden,

**507 Star-child, January 2005**

\*

I wake to see a child

Standing alone beside my bed

His hands are filled with strawberries.

\*

I say thank you to this

Dream-child called from my unconscious

Made from the carbon of the stars.

\*

I play with him again

Since youth and age are one for him

And his name once more is star-child.

**509 Painting Pendle Hill: for Donald Holden, January 2005**

\*

Your painting of the whaleback hill is dark and strong

It is rich with greens, yellows, browns, greys and purples,

You can see the earth, stone walls, grasses, fir trees

Wooden fences, the sky, and threatening blue clouds,

And at the centre there are reflections in a cold lake

Oh yes, and humans are absent,

‘Penhille Celtic 1296’ the inscription reads,

Admitting a language, culture and people –

The white border gives space and light and life,

You can hear the silence, you can see this poem.

**515 I do love London, June 2005**

\*

Photographing London is like

Stroking the skin of a beautiful woman

Or feeling the sun’s heat with the scent

Rising from gardens across the Thames.

All your previous walks are remembered

You translate movement into still photographs.

This is a world-class city with world-class arts

So, you stand in front of a painting or sculpture

And there is sheer excitement at this city,

And the people, the buildings, the parks, the river.

So then you go for coffee in an art gallery and later

Sit and write this poem beside the Serpentine Lake.

And then I walk to Holborn and the tube-train home.

**518 Against helplessness, August 2005**

\*

I cannot lift the stone or open the jar without the right tools

This machine isn’t working and I don’t know how to fix it,

There’s a 50/50 chance she will miscarry, the doctor said

My dying-mother doesn’t know me, all I do is weep,

Ideas and feelings get stuck in a web of interpretations

The sheer weight of information blocks creativity

We are lost and have no torch with which to read the map

No one will listen to me, yet I persist.

**522 Damaged-wholeness, October 2005 [prose poem] -** I feel a list coming on, oh no not another list, here’s another list: this is the list: sick, broken, shattered, disabled, wounded, suffering, oppressed, violated. It’s the energy between givenness and randomness that makes the game worth playing. It is in choice that we engage the sheer back-breaking weight of human options.

**525 Re-positioning, November 2005**

\*

Some days I wonder how closely I have placed myself to anyone

My ‘self’ in relation to the other: my identity in relation to others,

After all we only know stories as they are told

By other people of their dreams, orgasms, pain, thoughts even.

◙ ◙ 2006 found us both retired in our own home in Loughton Essex [a London suburban commuter town]. Barbara retired from her London Borough of Newham post as manager for adult Community Education and Youth Service after 30 years working in the Borough.

**529 Take care, I love you, Valentine’s Day 2006**

\*

Some words do not wear out with time or use

They live between us,

Not hidden in any secret place, but

Displayed like matching amber

Made over by our hearts and actions.

**530 Philip’s baptism: ‘loved, valued and named’ Newcastle-Gateshead, 19 February 2006 [prose poem] -** When Adam and Siân were young I used to make up adventures about Fred the dinosaur. So, once upon a time for this special occasion, Fred the dinosaur, accompanied by Adam and Kate, Siân and Andy and all of you, came out of his cave, down the bank, across the river and into the forest: to be continued!!

**538 Siân and Andy: all earth’s people, at the birth of their daughter Joanna, September-November 2006 {Joanna’s welcome 18 November 2006} – after a brief ‘speech’ I read the poem.**

\*

For many a year and in many lands

Once mothers give birth then both parents stand

They seek good advice from kin and the tribe

The elders then choose - it’s they who decide.

\*

But the sun rises on this valued morn

We’ve waited nine months but now you are born,

All of earth’s people feel good when they rhyme

This place is our home, for all of the time:

\*

You are our daughter we think you’re just great

We’ll cradle and rock, whatever it takes,

We’ll make you joyful we certainly will

And we will teach you, that gives us a thrill.

\*

I breathe for my ‘self’ and think on my own

I have a fine name by which to be known

Please give me some food and a coat to wear,

I want to grow up: to be happy and care.

**545 World War 2, March 2007**

\*

I don’t remember ‘the War’

Being born in August 1940,

Today I value -

Hard ideas, deep texts, vivid images,

Raw and primary emotions

[With a befriended ‘un-conscious’],

Forbearance, in spite of all,

And perhaps [more than anything

Save my own self-identity and consciousness],

Words that are set in silence and space.

**549 A small sphere moving, April 2007**

\*

Sometimes there are fountains of light or

Fields of colour seen with closed or even open eyes, often

I dream and I see awakening-dreams or hypnagogic-images -

I close my eyes and see, in some sequence, bright colours

Reds, oranges, blues, greens, yellows -

They are somehow deeply satisfying,

Then I open my eyes and the white ceiling is now

Yellow and then green or pale blue or grids or lines

So, I breathe, moving in and out, between

The colours and the shapes and I see

A small sphere moving and my eyes re-focus on it.

**551 Rhymes for baby Judith, summer 2007**

\*

[1]

Tunes and songs are flying through the morning air

Can you see them landing in your shining hair

[2]

Tales and rhymes are leaping down the wooden stair

Can you hear them whispering, ‘Please, please, do take care’

[3]

Cows and bees are gathering round the forest pond

Can you taste them feeding with your magic-wand

[4]

Pigs and ducks are drinking from the farmer’s hose

Can you smell them sleeping with your urban nose

[5]

Games and toys are sitting in their painted box

Can you touch them playing, ‘Watch out there’s a fox,’

[6]

This new child is starting on her hopeful way

Can you sense her smiling: she is yours this day.

**557 With an intake of breath: Tate Modern London, July 2007**

\*

Explaining everything is difficult since

The world is so large, complex, diverse and, not least, puzzling:

Things change faster than imagination

People crowd escalators whilst populations and cities grow

And overflow with their wealth and violence, meanwhile

The sheer weight of information overloads

[And the news throbs, texts saturate, technology burgeons] -

There is just so much: and you sit-down for a coffee

With an intake of breath.

**559 Philip at two, August-September 2007**

\*

When I was small

We went to the movies

Then I grew tall

And we all watched TV

Next I used e-mail

To send you a photo

Now I can call

And see you on screen.

**560 Joanna at one: dragonflies, September 2007**

\*

There are dragonflies by the pond

There they wiz and there they hover

They don’t cause us any bother,

Some are bronze and some are blue

You can see a red one too

You can watch them in the air

Try to catch one if you care,

Sometimes you can see them land

There is one upon your hand.

**562 My chair, September 2007**

\*

When we chose to buy this house

On a wet day late in 1998

I sat in this spot this space,

I then looked right and left

And said, ‘I can live here,’

And we have done, since June 1999.

Now I sit in my chair and turn left

To look down into the small-garden,

I sit in this chair and turn right

To look across the room,

This is my place

My starting-out point

It forms and maps

My triangle of

Self, Epping Forest, London

Self, other, otherness -

I sit and read

I breathe happiness as

The sun-formed shadows

Reach deep into the room.

**565 Stet: Happy New Year, January 2008**

\*

In proof-reading [when wanting to change a deletion] ‘Stet’ means ‘let it stand’ – and I think of Diane Athill and her [2000] memoir.

\*

When in my sleep

I fly or run

When in my dreams

I play or die

I then recall

When I was young

And focus hard

To start the day,

\*

We do our work

And greet the world

I walk the paths

In winter’s sun

I read this book

Or watch that film

We talk once more

Then have a love

\*

I look at art

And write a poem

I travel in

To inner-space

And here and now

I find such joy

It is enough -

Let it stand.

**567 Looking at Epping Forest, February 2008**

\*

At the top there’s blue sky and white clouds

Then the rise of the forest as a green-backdrop,

Around the clearing’s edge stand lines of tree trunks

Next there’s a semi-circle of large handsome trees

With black-bark and yellow-green lichens in the sunshine,

In the foreground a low-bed of bushes crouches in front of

This bench, with it’s overhanging bough and the rubbish

Of a broken beer-bottle, paper and fag-ends

And me, with all my layers, writing these words.

**570 Sarah Elizabeth: five wishes, 12 April / 9 August 2008**

\*

Some poems are brief like haiku

Whilst some prose sounds like a manifesto

These words make five wishes,

They are toys to play with

Paints in primary colours

Plants to grow and nurture

A five-finger music-exercise: so

[1] Know yourself to be loved

[2] Be at home in your family and city

[3] Choose and desire wisely

[4] Be creative in act and dream

[5] Be your own true-self.

**573 Iris Murdoch: ‘there may be no deep structure,’ May 2008 [prose poem] -** There may be no deep structure, still we need our very best efforts to scratch the surface. It is deep enough for us to sink or to rise very high and so complex as to require a lifetime’s re-working. So, eschew violence, lying, greed, self-harm in all their repetitive stupidity; look rather into the playful-eyes and kisses of your grandchildren; push your hands into the soil of the forest, the city, the person you love; drink deep of joy and sex and art and whatever fills you up and there uncover your own visions, dreams and archetypes. Thickness may be relative but it’s also to do with difference, diversity, complexity, analysis and interpretation - you meet it head-on, eyeball to eyeball, so that you hear, smell, taste, finger it. Somehow, I sense, at levels between my ‘self’ and language and images, I sense movement, networking, changes.

**576 Amsterdam for Rembrandt and Vermeer, June 2008**

\*

No art is only representational

Since some artist stands behind it in the light,

But the gallery has many exhibits and

People talk and move and get in the way, whilst I intend

To see one thing: I desire to get past interpretations

And to place my ‘self’ here and now, so I am happy -

I am alone with one painting and some words.

**583 If at first you don’t succeed, September 2008**

\*

“All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better [Samuel Beckett ‘Worstward Ho’ 1983].”

\*

[1]

There is so much out there

Noise and energy: life and action

Some days the world slips through our fingers

Most days we baulk at its complexity and scale

And every day, death happens

[2]

But then you come across one thing:

A sentence, image, dream, emotion, person, event

And, though you know that life is more than

Language or text or reading,

It sets you off writing, and that writing

Fills you up with the sense of being alive –

[3]

And so we go on, we struggle, we try again

And fail and work hard to fail better, so

As the poem and I merge and

I find joy and sufficient-success

I act over against this single moment.

**587 Sarah at 1 year old, January-April 2009**

\*

Round the park there we go

On the swings to and fro,

Squirrels squirt up the trees

Pigeons race against the breeze,

Singing songs as we walk

Playing games as we talk,

If you move when you’re one

What can’t you do once one is gone?

**589 Our house has seven steps, March 2009**

\*

Beyond the oak the beech trees slope up the hill

Seven stone steps go down from the street

The back-garden runs steeply to the fence

1 Stop, let go, drop it

2 Wait for the noise and violence to cease

3 Be still and balanced

4 Feel the layers of silence

5 See the blue and green Mandala

6 Enter your inner-world of space

7 Breathe this focussed-life, again.

**591 This is [it], July 2009**

\*

As I walked in the dream, so I came

To stand over against the people and the sea,

As I gazed in the dream, so I read the text

Printed on his face - look, nothing is familiar,

I do not recognize it; I have no memory; look

I place my ‘self’ before it: This is [it] –

Being; is-ness; suchness; thus-ness - this is [it]

Empty and marvellous,

Sitting quietly doing nothing,

Here there is serenity, flow and rightness

Here is that ultimate reality showing us to be human.

**593 It will happen, October 2009**

\*

“When you are ready, it will happen. But you must want to be ready; you must put yourself patiently, again and again, in a position for it to happen. You must study, and meditate, and travel, above all perhaps travel, so that you will meet someone who can give you what I can only tell you about” [Andrew Harvey 'A Journey in Ladakh' 1983].”

\*

Sometimes a poem seeps slowly into consciousness

It comes and goes, now it retreats and then advances

It forms and rises like some feeling or a dream,

It arrives unbidden, yet is brutally persistent -

It’s hard to hear and very difficult to write

This singular desire, - this new-yet-tested

Happening, this long journey to my present self,

To be here; now; utterly; and in clear-focus

So [whack the table], there it is: - “this is [it].”

**595 Miroslav Balka at Tate Modern, October 2009**

\*

“We do not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making the darkness conscious [Carl Jung ‘The Philosophical Tree’ 1945].”

\*

The installation is an enormous black metal box on stilts.

You walk up a ramp into its ‘utter’ darkness and blackness.

A group of kids were shrieking loudly as they ran under it

With brown paper-bags over their heads.

Given my uneasy sense of balance

I entered cautiously.

**599 Only imagination, November 2009**

\*

“[William Blake] knew his visions [in a trance-like state ‘without pre-meditation and even against my will’] were self-created. Asked by a lady where he saw them, he replied ‘Here Madam,’ touching his forehead. But to the charge that it was ‘only imagination then,’ he’d have responded that in the context ‘only’ had no meaning, since imagination was the highest human attribute and the sole means of perceiving truth [‘The Independent on Sunday’ 15 October 2000 and Adrian Mitchell BBC1 Omnibus November 2000].”

\*

I stand in the Courtauld Gallery in London

The day and the Thames are grey with heavy rain

I am looking at a wall, green with Cezanne’s light

And behind me are two matchless Gauguin scenes

And my desire to engage them opens up

My capacity to reflect and interpret kicks in

My imagination is all process, flux, change, energy

And I reach for the language of a poem

It is here and now unconscionable yet imagined

This palimpsest of text: this archaeology of consciousness

With all its layers and states and structures,

Here we say [here I say touching my forehead]

Here my world and the entire world meet

And everything ‘comes to mind’

In words and images: ideas and emotions.

**601 Joanna: it’s not a snail, January 2010 [prose poem] -** Our 3-year-old grand-daughter Joanna was looking, not for the first time, at our large Vasarely print ‘Sun and Sky.’ It was one of the 1972 Munich Olympic symbols. Like most Vasarely it is optical art! Within the black background there is a multi-coloured Mandala-spiral [in oranges and blues] that sometimes leads you visually into its centre and sometimes stands out in relief. She looked at it and said, ‘It’s not a snail.’

**603 Grey poem: a late Valentine, February 2010**

\*

On these grey days when

Sky and cloud are seen as one

Grey poems are written

To set down the winter’s cold,

It’s wise in England

To enjoy the colour ‘grey’ –

Grey reigns supreme until

The sunlight streams once more.

**605 Grandchildren: smiles and chips, May Day 2010**

\*

Here are four children posed upon a bed

There you all sit, as if you’re on a sledge,

Each one’s got a smile right-across their face

And when the sun shines you can have a race.

There you are seated in your age-order

Who will be biggest when you grow taller?

When you’re together there will be chips! Both

On your northern-beach and on your London-trips.

**609 Cumbria shootings, June 2010**

\*

“Cumbria - Shooting rampage that left 12 dead and 11 injured.”

\*

Our world is as it is with all its wonder and terror

The wonder we welcome and drink-in like sunshine

The terror we address as suffering and struggle: we name it

As illness, disasters, accidents, contingency, unfairness,

It often headlines as war, genocide, terrorism, and yet

‘Taking a life’ stands at the apex of human bad-faith as

Serial murder once again dominates our news-coverage.

**611 Stories for grandchildren, August 2010**

\*

Tell me a story

Here’s one that I know,

Read me a story

You choose the next book,

This science is hard

See, here’s what it means,

This doesn’t make sense

There’s more than one view -

I’ve written a story

You work at the text,

I’ll make a difference

Use love and compassion,

I want to be happy

Live like this, not that.

◙ ◙ 2010 Being 70 led us to do a version of ‘Selected poems’ and to send it, as an A 4 printed version, to friends [what we call the yellow-cover version!]. One of my presents was a website that included this poem-selection, back copies of our e-mail recommend a book project [RAB], and some Holden information! My thanks to Henry, Kate, Adam, Sian all of whom somehow were persuaded, at one time or another, to make it work!

**615 Café Poem, January 2011**

\*

A tiny baby takes my eye in our mirrored Café Rouge

She smiles, confident that life is possible

[Unaware that violence and oppression continue

Unaware of our poisonous inhumanity -

As though accidents, disasters, disease

Let alone contingency, loss and death

Cause insufficient anxieties and pain],

So, we sit in our café, with coffee and hot chocolate

We sit face to face and drink deep

Us 2: I drink my cappuccino and, in my age,

Happiness once more surfaces.

**622 Primary orthostatic tremor, May 2011**

\*

This is a poem not an explanation!

The explanation for [my]

Rare neurological movement disorder

Is much longer -

It’s standing still that makes you ill:

Keep on the move and you won’t lose

Your way.

**623 Turning towards the sun again, May 2011**

\*

“It’s a matter of turning the mind in the right direction, as a sunflower turns to catch the sun. Well, mystics work on the assumption that the sun is always there, and it’s only a matter of turning in the right direction [Colin Wilson ‘The Glass Cage’ 1966].”

\*

All my selves are one and we turn towards the sun

When we attend to silence then awareness has begun

When we intend to focus, ecstasy can find its tongue.

All my selves are one and we turn towards the sun

I turn to all I value, as I do now.

**624 Viewing History, May 2011 {Loughton Historical Society’s 50th}**

\*

“For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on un-historic acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs [George Eliot ‘Middlemarch’ 1871].”

\*

I remember when ‘50 years’ sounded a very long time

Now such a span simply calls for thanks and celebrations;

Meanwhile our made-up clocks, calendars and instruments

Calculate universes, geology, archaeology, cultures, science

Meanwhile ‘History’ records powerful people and headline events

As competing-truths strain and stretch: omit and airbrush;

But some historians bend-down and attend to whispers

They listen to local memories, voices, letters, diaries, research -

So, may Loughton, with all its differing people, tell our story

And reach for the common good.

**627 Philip and Judith at South Shields beach, July 2011**

\*

When we visit Gateshead, we go there on the train

We want to see some Baltic-art and hope it doesn’t rain,

When we trip to South Shields we go there in the car

Soon we are eating fish and chips in Colman’s famous ‘bar,’

We drive down to the waiting beach and play on a Munoz sculpture,

A lighthouse guards the river’s end and boats appear around the bend

We walk across the sandy shore and listen to the crash of waves

We build a house with bits of wood: we’d stay for ever, if we could.

**629 Joanna and Sarah: Mermaids and Pirates, September 2011**

\*

You cannot be a pirate

You cannot sail a boat

You cannot climb a masthead

Unless you wear your coat -

You cannot be a mermaid

You cannot be a whale

You cannot be a dolphin

Unless you have a tail,

A tale to tell.

**630 Ten years on, 11 September 2011**

\*

Ten years on from 9/11 and as I watch the TV news

I think back to 2001: years when my life has re-formed

Remodelled itself through retirement and ageing.

\*

I go out and walk in the September English sunshine

Between London and Epping Forest, and most strangely

Asimov’s ‘Three Laws of Robotics’ comes to mind.

\*

And I ask myself, what do 3-laws for humans look like?

What’s at our Olympian-heights rather than at Ground-zero?

What’s our best rather than our [stupid, repetitive, violent] worst?

**637 Suffering, joy and struggle, March 2012**

\*

All my selves are one and we turn towards the sun

I turn as in meeting to everything that I value

So that this day, in spite of every difficulty,

I sustain my love of life

With all its suffering, joy and struggle.

**639 Grandchildren and Olympic trees, May Day 2012**

\*

We live by Epping Forest

With its many ancient trees

Beeches oak and hornbeam

All display their new-born leaves

Just down the road in Stratford

London-city shows its face,

Urban trees are planted

And the Olympics will take place.

**640 Damson blossom, May 2012**

\*

“Dennis Potter has died and extraordinarily his wife died only last week. The TV programme was one of the great interviews of all time. He was so utterly brave and human. I only saw it after his death at the second showing. I'm not sure I could have born it first time round. The BBC text is brilliant: “the blossomiest” of blossoms. – “That now-ness becomes so vivid to me now, that in a perverse sort of way, I'm almost serene, I can celebrate life. [Melvyn Bragg an interview with Dennis Potter Channel 4 1994].”

\*

Every year damson trees overhang our small garden,

For a short-time their blossom is an intense-white

[The ‘blossomiest of blossoms,’ to borrow a phrase],

Then they fade and snowflake to the ground, yet

The fruits persist and the annual cycle repeats -

So we attend to this earth with all its interdependent-life

So we use our technology to explore cells and universes;

And you [friend and lover] flourish with your passion for life

With all your commitment and with energy to spare.

**646 Reading not speaking, January 2013**

\*

Some lyricists play

Their own songs,

Some poets read

Aloud their work,

My words imprint

The white space,

For I think and write

I touch and type

On a digital page –

Here my poems fit

My ideas sit

Waiting to be read,

For the rhythm and rhyme

Is in the line

And the meaning –

Heedless of earlier drafts -

Waterfalls down the page:

And so I say

Never doubt our human appetite

For cruelty and killing,

Never doubt our human capacity

For laughter and compassion.

**655 Foxtrot, December 2013**

\*

I was walking to our High Road

Not doing any harm

When a fox shot-past beside me

And made me quite alarmed,

She didn’t have a bright waist-coat

She didn’t have a hat

But she dived into a garden

Faster than a bat.

**656 Guildford Cathedral at Christmas, January 2014**

\*

Come and walk through

These wildflower-meadows,

Stride up the hill to the sky,

Step inside and kneel-down to pray,

Feel this deep-down sense of place,

Live for justice come and worship.

**660 Shopping, St David’s Day 2014 [1] Westfield ‘Eastern Market’ Stratford, London E15**

\*

As I watch the people walking

Shoppers ascend, they are talking -

Food shops, Foyles and Café Grind

Are the stalls that come to mind,

Some wear hard-hats: some have hair

Many smile but others stare

Some push prams whilst others hurry

Children pass and most look merry,

People stride and people hug

Have you got the shopping bug?

**668 Candles of silence, September 2014**

\*

“You embark upon the exercise [of meditation, contemplation, prayer, worship, the Christian Eucharist, the rituals of all religious faiths] not for yourself alone but for the welfare of creation of which you are a part, that any transformation you may experience will redound to the benefit of the world [the words are Anthony de Mello SJ, India, 1931-1987 – the bracketed description of the ‘exercise’ is mine].”

\*

Let-go the despairing news of violence and of loss

Breathe out the words and images

Held in memories, archetypes and dreams

Make-still the inner-dialogue of brain and mind

Switch-off the pulsing of those deep desires,

And then light a candle of silence in your heart.

**671 Jesus of the Gospels texts, December 2014 [Prose poem]** – in my life’s work I’ve tried many times to give a minimum description of the Jesus of the Gospels – this is part of one such. Now, in my age [sixty years on], this is what I can say - human history is long, complex and overwhelming. Millennia of cultures, like layers of rock, only permit limited exploration. But translated-words make meaning present - and, [3] This is what I can say - He is the Jesus of the Gospels and his parables, stories, sayings, metaphors stick in the mind as iconic-images. He formed a group offering all who met him choices, shared-food and hospitality. He addressed the Jewish religion of his day as a radical-rabbi and wise-teacher. He was a Kingdom of God prophet in the multi-lingual-world of Middle-eastern politics demanding non-violence, justice and peace. He cared about wholeness showing ways to heal bodies and minds. He included women, the poor, the wretched and taught forgiveness and love. He endured suffering and death - so, [4] This is what I can say - There are no edicts, laws or rituals in these texts requiring followers of a Christ-like way to shut out, take revenge, hate, torture or kill - Yes, this is what I can say – these texts hold my attention: they feed and enliven me now.

**674 Grandchildren: Good advice for St David’s Day 2015**

\*

Don’t stop playing

Just because you’re getting older,

Keep on growing

So your lives become much bolder;

Let your high-tech learning

Give responsibility

Let your love and caring

Give you empathy.

**676 Our Golden Wedding Anniversary, 12 June 2015**

\*

So then we met! And

Quite soon our best-hopes were set

Unearthing dreams and desires,

For many years we worked hard

For the common creative good

Mixing life with joys and fears,

Now we pause somewhat in shock

At the passing five-decades

As we once again take stock,

Here our memories are revisited

As we step-out as friends

Whose love and laughter rings, and

Still our transforming journey sings.

**680 Water-table, July 2015**

\*

Today, unusually for dry Essex,

Our back garden is streaming wet.

Through the rain-smirched window

I look down at a small-green-plastic-table.

Its top is a Celtic design patterned by rain

I look again, as heavy raindrops repeatedly hit

Whilst circles form and pulse, flow and ripple

Like some breathing creature, like

Some unconscious memory set free to surface.

**682 Window-cleaning, September 2015**

\*

“We can no longer take language for granted as a medium of communication its transparency has gone. We are like people who for a long time look out of a window without noticing the glass - and then one day began to notice this too [Iris Murdoch ‘Sartre Romantic Rationalist’ 1961].”

\*

Reading is a life-long ascesis, where you learn that

Language works as it moves between

Consciousness and communication, it’s a

Retrieved-memory, a shared dictionary,

A signpost to meaning: my words

These words are direct, focussed, vivid

Passionate and truth-telling -

I am shaping this story for your attention

I am inviting you to press your face to the glass.

**688 Oak tree, January 2016**

\*

London, with its diverse millions

Is layered with human history

And though not out of mind

It is certainly out of sight.

\*

But here ancient Epping Forest

Edges our daily walks

Changing form and colour:

Dropping leaves and wetness.

\*

Today I look up beyond our steep-garden

To see ‘our’ oak tree shining

All filigree-gold branches,

All ecstatic, against the winter-blue sky.

**691 Mimosa tree, February 2016**

\*

There is a mimosa tree

On a beach at Marathon in Greece,

It is 1994 and I walk to it by myself,

I walk from our holiday-hotel, I walk

This short distance each day over several days.

Nearby, at least in the poem I wrote, a stream

Cuts through the beach and drains across the sand.

I can feel the sea, and the warmth, and the shape

And yellow of the tree, they stand-out

And every time I look this photograph

Pulses with light and life.

**692 Grandchildren: living wages, May Day 2016**

\*

May Day is an ancient Spring Festival, and it is also International Worker’s Day.

\*

Fox in the garden

Magpies up the tree

When you keep on looking

It’s marvellous what you see:

May Day is for workers

May Day is for all

Who throughout the ages

Strive for living-wages,

Those who would walk tall.

**697 Reading books, August 2016**

\*

The sense rises from the page like a complex perfume

Whilst the meaning of the words

Switches from what is written to what is read,

The narrative tracks through my brain-mind

Like traffic along the streets of a much-loved city –

I am amazed at the beauty we find

Damaged by the horrors of war, cruelty and violence

Breathless at the stories we tell: and sometimes

There comes a moment as I read

When I am the words on the page.

**700 I’d forgotten, October 2016**

\*

I remember from when I was a ‘priest’

Many deaths where the causes given

Were natural, accidental, or malicious.

People would say: ‘It was only at the funeral

That I realized’ - ‘We’ve known each other

For many years’ – ‘We often met and talked and

I’d say I feel I know them very well;’ But

I’d forgotten their child had died.

**702 Heron, November 2016**

\*

As the day’s unexpected sunlight cools

The grey heron took off

From the neighbouring-roof like

Some slow-moving swimmer,

The heavy wings - the powerhouse

The extended legs – the rudder

And the bird flies past our window,

And then is gone.

**704 Keeping going, February 2017**

\*

I won’t turn away from all that is here and now

Or from the view that lies beyond my dying -

Rather I breathe in and out deeply,

I touch and taste I smell and hear and see,

I am embodied in my well-worn senses

And in my undimmed desire to love life,

My hunger to meet people places and selves,

Keep going I whisper – don’t give up!

**707 ‘Sitting quietly doing nothing’, May 2017**

\*

I sit still in my chair

Seeing through the patio-glass

Watching beyond our small garden

Looking above our neighbours’ trees

Where clouds form and drift -

The moon is out of sight

The sun is shining elsewhere

The sky and light are fading,

And I, ‘sit quietly doing nothing’ -

As night dawns.

**710 Dreams and awakening dreams, July 2017**

\*

[1]

I am dreaming and tripping-over raw emotions

Dreaming and doing reflective dreamwork,

[2]

I am running at zen-speed over a great distance

Running with excitement through crowds of people,

[3]

I am drawing with my careful re-found skills

Drawing as a way of seeing with visual memory,

[4]

I am awake and the room is criss-crossed by strangers

Awake and there is a horrific face far too-close,

[5]

I am talking with my long-dead parents

Talking and remembering and feeling at home,

[6]

I am seeing a mandala within a ceiling of star-light

Seeing that everything is one thing,

[7]

I am sleeping for a third of my life

Sleeping and intensely alive,

[8]

And then, I am writing of worlds

Writing with minimum words formed from hope.

**714 An earthwork of hope, December 2017**

\*

[1]

I am running fast in my dreams as

My adolescent-strides eat up the cross-country road,

But the poem writes slowly,

[2]

I work hard at this palimpsest of words,

As though drawing layers of colour, as when

Shedding loneliness and embracing solitude,

[3]

Nowadays I write because I must

I write out of the hiraeth of memory

Out of a stubborn resistance to loss and ageing,

[4]

And so, because my life is slowing-down

In imbalance and deafness,

I write these poems as a catalyst for goodness,

[5]

And so, because the world-news

Is filled with hatred and oppression and violence,

I write these poems as an earthwork of hope.

**718 Barbara happy birthday, 4 May 2018**

\*

I’m writing a verse for a birthday occasion

I’m hoping the words will sing-out an ovation,

It needs to be active and full to the rim

It certainly knows how to garden and swim,

I’ve given this greeting over many a year

But today – as always – it’s intensely sincere.

**720 Embodied, June 2018**

\*

“It is otherwise with the patient [I would say person!] in the second half of life who no longer needs to educate his conscious will, but who, to understand the meaning of his individual life, must learn to experience his own inner being. Social usefulness is no longer an aim for him, although he does not question its desirability [Carl Jung ‘Modem Man in search of a soul’ 1933].”

\*

If I could I would show you earlier drafts,

I would rewrite marginal notes, if I could,

I would retype verses and change ideas.

As it is - I move carefully

Between inner and outer -

I filter memories that are

Chock-full with meaning -

I catch dreams that illuminate

My unconscious store -

And, at my strongest,

I attend in meditative-focus –

As it is, all places are here

And all times are now.

**721 Meditative-focus in five steps, June 2018**

\*

I didn’t always know that I cannot intend visual memories and that therefore visualizing meditation is not possible for me. But, I have worked at [very simple] breathing and [somewhat complex] language meditation for a very long time and here attempted a poem version.

\*

[1] This day, this is it, go to, rest in, use meditative-focus

[2] Start from breathing stillness and the absence of noise, anxieties, pain

[3] Listen to the silence

[4] Sense the peace, oneness, happiness, joy, ordinary ecstasy

[5] Know that sometimes [as now] meditative-focus is realized.

**724 Unstuck, October 2018**

\*

In the daily business of living and moving

I sometimes get physically stuck!

But in my dreams, I am often running -

There I go through cities and past people,

There I flow with the speed of the 100 metres

And the staying power of marathons.

\*

In the lifelong business of writing

Sometimes I get personally stuck!

Maybe that August-poem was my very last

For ideas surface neither slow nor fast

But when imagination starts-up again

We know the clear focus of awakening zen.

**728 Theories of everything, January 2019**

\*

Words sometimes whisper

And sometimes shout:

Words such as

God, nature, humanity,

Science, evolution, money

Are stand-ins,

For our ‘theories of everything.’

Meanwhile,

Within my brain-mind

Words and images surface -

They are waiting to interpret

Our theories of everything.

**729 Running, February 2019**

\*

In my dream I am running very fast,

I am speeding through night-time streets

Through vast, complex, diverse, modern cities.

Here I am dodging past people

There I go whispering through shadows

Then I am into my long-distance pace

Now I am at my full-energy stretch.

As I run, I dig-deep, breathing-in

Desire, key-words and images, intensity

Then I am wide-awake, wholly alive.

**730 All the years, Valentine’s Day 2019**

\*

All the years and yet

Each day together is marvellous

All the struggles and yet I still see your

Laughter and songs: persistence and hope,

All the past and yet [beyond our memories]

I treasure tomorrow with you.

**737 Eighty next year, August 2019**

\*

“Tell me what makes you enraged – what makes you feel truly diminished - and I will tell you what you believe, what you want to believe about yourself. What, that is, you imagine you need to protect to sustain your love of life [Adam Phillips ‘The beast in the nursery’ 1998].” And “I find myself saying briefly and prosaically that it is much more important to be oneself than anything else [Virginia Woolf ‘A room of one’s own’ 1929].”

\*

I was young in school – being born late August

It was said [at a reunion 50-years on]

That I was always very quiet

Feeling edgy in photos, groups, actions.

Back then, I waited impatiently for a glimpse

Of some meaningful-whole, so much [as I recall]

Felt veiled, hesitant and unknown

I hoped that, when I had matured and grown,

It would all add-up, make-sense, be true; and now

I hope [in my age] that it will all add up.

**739 Secular and Christian, October 2019**

\*

I don’t want this poem to be

About loss or fear or powerlessness,

No, rather I want to hold-on to words

Words like meditative-focus:

That state of consciousness, language and being-reality

Which does similar work to the word ‘God’ –

Rather I want to reach for words

That question and examine the meaning

Of the word ‘God’ within life as lived.

Such, in-spite-of everything, sustain my love of life.

**740 Change and flux, Advent-December 2019**

\*

“And one day we’ll appear in our children’s memories among their grandchildren and people not yet born [Annie Ernaux ‘The Years’ - translated by Alison L. Strayer 2017].”

\*

The universe reads ever older and bigger

The microscopic appears ever stranger and smaller

Lichen, unicorns and consciousness all puzzle

Whilst imagination and dreams continue to dazzle

Human-children are counted in billions

And we interface with IT and its zillions

Meanwhile, our past-history keeps on changing

And the hidden-future lies in wait - amazing!

◙ ◙ 2020 I’d hoped my 80th would be celebratory! In fact, Covid-19 impacted on us, as on the world. We also had our own version of “events dear boy” in which too many things went wrong. It made living extremely difficult and made our decision to remain here in our home ‘hopeful.’ But we live with “suffering, joy and struggle.”

**741 Lord in your mercy - Hear our prayer, January 2020**

**\***

Hard times and yet, our lives have continued. And yet I express my creativity-spirituality [my ‘self’], at least in part, through writing poems.

\*

This worship-space is our meeting-place

It is a time for listening and waiting on God,

May we learn truth-telling and kindness.

“Lord in your mercy”

[Response] Hear our prayer,

\*

This healing-space is our stopping-place

It is a time for questioning and nurturing each life,

May we seek self-realization and compassion.

“Lord in your mercy”

[Response] Hear our prayer,

\*

This quiet-space is our caring-place

It is a time for fellowship and reflecting together,

May we find comfort and encouragement.

“Lord in your mercy”

[Response] Hear our prayer,

\*

This breathing-space is our shared place

It is a time for commitment and purpose once again,

May we work for justice and transforming-peace.

“Lord in your mercy”

[Response] Hear our prayer, amen.

◙ ◙ 2020 We started a new website in 2020 02 thanks to Henry Williamson on his Duke of Edinburgh scheme and then daughter Sian took over managing and advising and, as with all our small family, supporting me.

**743 Four strings to my bow, January 2020**

\*

[1] Poems

Lyrical or minimalist I have kept drafting

Poems – I speak them quietly to myself

And then they are finished and numbered.

It all started when I was a young man

And now in my age as I make up the verses,

I become the song.

\*

[2] Writing

Reading always worked for me and

Writing - somehow between the idea

And the typing, imagination and energy spark.

It all started when I was a young man

And now in my age as I make up the paragraphs,

I become the meaning.

\*

[3] Drawing

Art was deeply important to me and

Drawing – so, now I look and attend

And use my utmost skill and line.

It all started when I was a young man

And now in my age as I make up the picture,

I become the frame.

\*

[4] Being human

Life is big, old, mysterious and

Human – I choose peace, justice and creativity

I commit to grace, compassion and forgiveness.

It all started when I was a young man

And now in my age as I make up the years,

I become the story.

**746 Futures, April 2020**

\*

During the plague and the daily deaths

The skies were often cloudless

Without planes or sound or pollution.

They were cerulean blue, and our small garden

Echoed the greens of the ancient-forest oaks.

Along our road, bird-song took over

The empty school-playground – and then

We waited, for our tears to wash away the tree-pollen

And then we waited, for humans and cities

To become more careful and more caring.

**747 Covid-19, May 2020**

\*

[1]

I had settled down to dying

[I preferred later rather than sooner!],

And then Covid-19 kick-started us

Into living daily – into being mindful.

[2]

So now, I select my poem’s words with extra care

I highlight words like vulnerable, damaged, precarious -

You see, poems offer safe places beyond the abyss

Of deafness, vertigo, immobility or madness!

[3]

Meanwhile I practice my own spirituality and creativity,

And, reaching-out, I work for peace and justice

I value those friendships that burn bright.

I celebrate our life together – and then,

[4]

I remember a night some time ago

A dream-woman said: ‘The transformed-life is yours,

You are almost there’ – in fact,

We are here, right now.

**748 ‘Calon lân’ for Barbara, June 2020**

\*

Calon lân is Welsh for 'a Pure Heart' - “the words in the 1890’s by Daniel James and a tune by John Hughes. It is in the British Methodist ‘Hymns and Psalms’ to the lyrics ‘I will Sing the Wondrous Story’ by P. P. Bliss [Wikipedia].” This is the first time I have written words to a tune.

\*

[1]

Sing the songs your people taught you

Tell the stories learnt by heart,

Weave the memories that you knew

Till it wakens every part.

[2]

Read the photos of those old days

Through the people that you see,

Feel the pleasure of the new ways

As they nurture every deed.

[3]

Now the words are getting stronger

And the passion is not spent,

We can sing this song together

Even though the earth be rent.

[4]

Calon lân is now our refrain

Here’s a chorus that we bring

It’s a tune that’s set to remain

Let us make the heavens ring -

Calon lân is now our refrain,

Here’s a chorus that we bring,

It’s a tune that’s set to remain -

Let us make, the heavens ring.

**749 Used words – for my 80th birthday, August 2020**

\*

“We must use words as they are used or stand aside from life” [Ivy Compton-Burnett ‘Mother and Son’ 1955].”

\*

Mostly I sit, as our world lives through another plague-day,

Previously, neither disease, earthquake, war nor random-killing

Have hit me in the face or ravaged our families; and yet

Here we are, between our daily routine and ordinary-ecstasy,

Here we are questioning, examining, being creative; until

Imagination and meaning fuse into blunt sense.

It is true – I do so desire to say and write this clearly,

To use these words [“as they are used”] – “do no harm,

Love your neighbour, be kind, let peace begin with me.”

**752 ‘Signposts’, December 2020**

Dear Philip, Joanna, Judith, and Sarah – 2020 has been strange and difficult especially because of Covid-19. We wanted to share some of the positive things we feel – some of the ‘signposts’ that keep us going. And to wish you our grandkids well for 2021. Tony has written one of his poems and it has come out of our shared life which began in September 1963. Love from us G-Barbara.

\*

[1] Imagine

The universes, cosmos, our planet,

[2] Investigate

And respect our diverse human home -

[3] Know

That life is fiercely strange and difficult.

[4] Learn

The well-springs of change and process,

[5] Value

All that you have been given and all you choose -

[6] Include

Those who are strangers, poor or disadvantaged.

[7] Thrive

Within the 5000-years of human-writing,

[8] Question

Your ‘self:’ breathe-out and connect in every way –

[9] Practise

To use each day with care and calm-resolve

To be creative, passionate, and committed.

**753 Wrote and write for Siân and Adam, January 2021**

\*

“Without going outside, you may know the whole world. / Without looking through the window, you may see the ways of heaven. / The farther you go, the less you know. // Thus, the sage knows without travelling; / S/he sees without looking; / S/he works without doing [Lao Tzu, ‘Tao Te Ching’ 47].”

\*

In 1980 I wrote a poem, but ignored these words:

I went outside, I looked beyond the windows, I travelled

I was intent on seeing and working and doing,

Well, at forty, there was so much I desired to achieve,

Just imagine --- knowing the truth of one thing.

\*

In 2020 I write a poem, and I live these words:

I stay inside, I examine myself, I accept loss, I do not travel

I attend [in silence], writing, drawing, meeting, meditating,

I work [at full-stretch], struggling to change the world,

Just imagine --- transforming your ageing-self.

◙ ◙ 2021 April - now all our four grandchildren are teenagers.

**756 Writing myself, April 2021**

\*

“Sometimes I feel that each morning it is necessary to write myself into being [Hilary Mantel ‘Memoir giving up the ghost’’ 2003].” - “Poetry that most intense and unstable of art forms [Andrew Marr ‘A short book about painting’ 2017]:”

\*

I find it pleasing to have a poem, as it were,

In my back pocket – on the back burner,

Waiting, for sense and feelings to surface,

Sometimes I recognize quite clearly

That my inner, life-long, journey is

Greatly to do with ‘writing myself’ – so

I sit and type here at this computer.

And the noise and anxieties and suffering of life

Abate. And as I touch the world through my fingers

I, to borrow a phrase, ‘write myself into being’ -

Into being alive, focussed, creative, smiling even,

Smiling for this and another day.

**758 Surely not, July 2021 {Loughton Methodist Church October exhibition as part of a drawing}**

\*

Through the window

The oak-tree leaves

Veil the blue sky -

And I again remember

That, ‘everything is real.’

So, I sit and question:

Will there be a time

Without a part-written poem,

Will there be a day when

Images fade and stop?

Will our friendships

Or this astonishing

World, simply end

[At least for me]?

Surely not.

**759 Late poems, August 2021**

\*

In my art reading and viewing I notice reference to the ‘Late Works’ of famous artists – and so, as I keep going, searching for meaning, I wonder about ‘my’ late poems.

\*

When you sit down to type your final poems

It must be like moving out of your parent’s home

Walking into retirement [away from colleagues and work]

Not being able to travel into London’s art-galleries,

Grieving, at the death of a loved one,

Leaving, [as I once wrote before], life itself.

But consider - stillness and silence,

Our small greatly-cared-for garden, think of

Peace, justice, commitments, creativity -

Don’t waste energy on stupidity, frenzy or violence,

But rather: nurture your own intensity of awareness

Shape your own transforming friendships.

**763 Lifelong, February 2022**

\*

“Platonic thought became part of Christianity, and Christianity, even for non-Christians, has directed our thoughts for centuries in the West.” // “Plato famously thanked heaven he was not born a woman or a slave. Aristotle described women as inferior beings and deformed males. I admit that I love reading Aristotle. I return to him often, but I am acutely aware the Greeks, Aristotle among them, were misogynistic and their legacy is alive among us. The mind/body split haunts contemporary ideas just as it dominated Greek thought [Siri Hustvedt ‘Mothers, Fathers, and Others - New essays’ 2021].”

\*

[1]

The longer I learn, the stranger I find

Being human on planet earth – it is all

Astonishing, complex, diverse, shifting -

It’s all unlikely and, [what’s the word?], ‘strange’ –

[2]

And yet - we live in neighbourhoods and communities,

We use our basic interdependence and connectedness

We strive, at the very least, to ‘do no harm’ and then

We act, at our best, with kindness and compassion,

[3]

And yet – we continue to use our hard-worked experiences,

We persist in meeting life and each other head-on

We encourage and nourish the people we know and love

We strive to grace the texture of our daily living.

**765 Stop killing: Russia-Ukraine, March 2022 [prose poem]** - People say: “I’m not often lost for words.” I feel that about this terrible and wicked Russian war against Ukraine! I know it’s complex not simple, historical as well as current, the responsibility of many not one or a few. I understand that limiting, let alone ending, human-violence is proving a massive [impossible?] task. And yet, as someone who ‘tries very hard to live without violence’, I say: “we humans need to stop killing one another.” “Do no harm.” “Let peace begin with me.”

**766 Autobiography at 81, March 2022**

\*

“[Autobiographies give] not only an understanding of the ways in which lives have been lived but the most fundamental accounts of what it means to be a self in the world [Laura Marcus ‘Autobiography a very short introduction’ 2018].”

\*

In our small garden there was a spider’s web linking

The bronzed metal dragonfly to the earth,

There were white lily-flowers bending beneath the weight

Of sunshine and our remembrance of the dead -

\*

There is a difference between falling over

And letting go [“stop, let go, drop it,” we say], well

I won’t allow my drawings to scribble over my words or

My words delete my drawn [but un-visualized] lines.

\*

I’m careful lest my night-dreams or awakening-images

[Stuff of the unconscious and questioning ‘self’] – lest

My daytime writing and breathing-stillness are

Hurt and damaged by loss and violence.

\*

I do indeed work hard at ‘sustaining my love of life,’

We [you and I] do care for friendships and community.

\*

And so it is that I privilege, choose and savour –

Words such as: ‘consciousness, language, being-reality’

Words such as ‘suffering, joy and struggle’ – words and actions

Like meditative-focus, creativity, justice and peace-making.