

**PATRONIZINGLY  
CHALLENGED  
BEWARE!**

**ST  
Super  
patrol**

**New Writing by the  
North West Disabled Writers Workshop**

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# INTRODUCTION

The North West Disabled Writers Workshop provided a safe environment where disabled people could meet together in the sure knowledge that our individual differences were catered for, enabling us to concentrate on what we wanted to do most - to write! Writing is an intensely powerful source of expression and provides an ideal opportunity to unleash our creativity which, for too long, has remained invisible. This collection goes some way towards revealing the multitude of talent out there waiting to be tapped.

For myself, facilitating the workshop has been a very rewarding experience on a personal level and an astounding success on a creative level. The participants' enthusiasm has permeated this collection of writings produced at the end of their first year of operation. They present a colourful array of poems and short stories to be savoured and enjoyed, whilst also providing a challenge to the stereotypical images of helplessness and powerlessness presented to us daily. Here is an opportunity to taste the hopes, joys, aspirations of our communities - serving to affirm our identities and to renew our strength in a celebration of our uniqueness.

**Permjit Loomba**  
(Workshop Co-ordinator)

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## BREAD AND BUTTER

### Permjit Loomba

The kettle bubbled swirling steam across the path of my hand as I reached for the bread. The heat burnt my wrist. 'Ouch!' I shouted as I writhed in pain, releasing the slice of bread in my hand. I watched it toss in the air and then hit the floor with a thud. Reaching to pick it up, my eyes dimmed with a recollection, a flicker of a memory that lured me back into my chair by the breakfast table. I looked at the bread in my hand. The bright sun shone through the window across my vision, taking me back to that hot summers morning. The summer of 1975.

I looked at myself in the tall mirror of the Victorian wardrobe in my mother's bedroom. There, in front of me, stood a small sixteen year old girl, five foot in height if that, black shoulder-length hair and brown face turned a shiny bronze in the heat.

I struggled with the zip on the back of my dress, forcing it up. The bodice tightened around my waist. I twirled to see the full skirt float around me. It was the first dress I felt good in, even beautiful, I dared to think. Checked in different shades of grey, the dress had a round neck with red piping. There were pockets so I could place my skeletal right arm in a comfortable position rather than allowing it to hang loosely by my side. Around my shoulders I placed a black cardigan. The right sole of my grey shoes was raised an extra inch to balance my walk. They went perfectly with the dress. My heart was full of joy. A chuckle escaped my lips as I admired myself.

'Ten-thirty, the personnel officer said,' my sister, Surinder's voice came booming up the stairs. 'We'd better hurry.'

I glided downstairs to where she was standing. She nodded at me approvingly. Then, tossing her long wavy hair, she led the way out of the house. Three years older than me, she was my best friend. I grabbed her right arm as we walked quickly to the bus stop. This was situated on the main road around the corner, not more than two hundred metres away from home. Already my ankles ached. A stitch pierced my right side. The sight of a bus approaching in the distance encouraged me to push the pain to the back of my mind.

'Next please,' roared a voice from the office from which Kirit emerged. Kirit was a friend from my college who had told me about the vacancies at the Ross Service station. He grinned at me as he passed through the waiting room.

I walked in, my sister behind me. Seating ourselves I looked across the untidy desk to a bowed head, balding and tanned, engrossed in recording the details of the previous interview. A cheerful face looked up, revealing a set of perfect teeth and a dimpled chin. I felt immediately at ease.

'Hello, I'm Mr Mace. We're looking for kitchen staff for the summer,' he said. 'If you're ready to start immediately I'll take you through to the kitchen supervisor.'

'What will we be doing?' Surinder asked, surprised at the Personnel officer's instant appointment.

'Oh, making sandwiches, salads etcetera.'

As he rose from his chair, I blushed violently. 'I have a paralysed arm,' I revealed.

He looked at me with keen interest. I held out my floppy arm for him to inspect.

'Oh, that's alright,' he said. 'I'm sure you'll manage.'

I couldn't believe his dismissal of my disability. I hurried after him and Surinder through a dark, dismal corridor. The hot sunlight poured through the small high-set windows, spotlighting a million specks of dust floating gently into a cooler veiled existence in the shade. A musty odour lingered around the heavy brown curtains that lined the tiny windows.

As we approached the kitchen bright lights pierced my eyes. The clang of pans and cutlery, the whirring and whizzing of electric mixers, blasted my ears. A sudden heatwave wrapped my face and brought immediate sweat balls to my forehead. I wished I could run back into the relative coolness of the dark corridor we had just left behind.

'Miss Thompson, I have two lovely girls here for you, Surinder and Permjit, is that right?' He turned, seeking reassurance as to his pronunciation of our names. Catching our smiles he continued, 'I'll leave you with Mrs Thompson, she'll show you what to do.'

Mrs Thompson was a large woman with a round red face and curly brown hair. Her stern expression oozed authority. She scuttled forward, directing Surinder into one part of the kitchen, and beckoned me to follow. Looking over my shoulder, I caught sight of Surinder's tight eyebrows. I smiled at her reassuringly. The supervisor led me through frenzied activity to the far end of the kitchen. She stood me in front of a machine the like of which I had never seen. It looked like the obsolete creation of a mad scientist. She proceeded to demonstrate the task of operating the machine. Picking up a slice of bread, she placed it on the surface to the right of the machine. This surface turned out to be a mini conveyor-belt which fed the bread through some roller rather like a mangle. This buttered the bread on one side and then threw it out the other side, where she neatly caught it with her left hand.

'See how you get on with that,' she said. I stood there in deep contemplation. 'It's easy.' But before I could say anything she scuttled off to another part of the kitchen.

'I can't do it,' I thought. A deep sigh escaped my lips as I picked up a slice of bread with my left hand and placed it on the belt which fed it through the mangle. Generously buttered, it spat the bread out. In a split second, I had expertly moved my left hand round to quickly catch it before it fell on to the floor. I tried a few more slices and managed to catch each one. The vigorous twisting caused my thighs to ache intently. I tried to ignore my discomfort. 'I've got a job,' I heard myself say. My thoughts turned to Kirit in appreciation. I wondered what Surinder was doing. She was nowhere to be seen, but she would be doing fine, I thought. I smiled to myself as I caught the last slice from the packet. I paused to watch the machine shunting away. The supervisor was nowhere to be seen either. Looking around, my eyes fell on a row of shelves filled with bread. I picked up a packet and began feeding the slices through the machine. This bread is much better I thought. Firmer, and the butter not so squidgy. I was pleased with having used my initiative. Suddenly, through the structure of the machine, I noticed a man standing on the other side of the kitchen, watching me. He had a note pad in his hand on which he was writing vigorously. He was tall, red and shaking. Before I realised what had happened, a piece of bread flew off the conveyor, slapping the floor buttered side down. Flushed, I rushed around and picked it up. Hurriedly, I fed another through. The man moved closer. In my panic I couldn't turn fast enough to catch the slice, which fell neatly at his feet.

'Mrs Thompson!' he bellowed. Mrs Thompson rushed forward from nowhere and stood between the man and myself. She looked at the slice on the floor and inspected the neat pile of buttered slices.

'This bread is for toasting, not sandwiches,' she said in a low voice and removed all evidence of my effort.

'When did she start?' demanded the tall man.

'Only this morning.'

'Where is Mr Mace? Who does he think we are - we have to run a business here, not a charity!' With that he barged off out of the kitchen.

My head throbbed. I gritted my teeth and took a deep breath, then another, in an attempt to diffuse the anger that surged up in my stomach. I felt like hitting out. Instead my eyes stung with tears. Mrs Thompson put her arm around my shoulder. 'Come along love.' She led me back through the corridor and to the waiting room. There I sat waiting. I could hear loud voices from behind the office door, then a stream of abuse as it swung open.

'She had better be out of here before I come back!' said the tall man before he abruptly marched out.

Mr Mace emerged. He crouched beside me and looked into my eyes. I could not look up. 'Unfortunately, today happened to be the day we had the company health inspectors in. I'm sorry, I'm going to have to let you go.' He patted my hands.

'I'll have to tell my sister,' I said. Mr Mace went to get Surinder. I sat there, stiff, unable to move.

Mr Mace returned with Surinder. 'I'll have to go as well,' I heard her explain. As she stood beside me I pulled myself up, linking arms we walked out into the bright sunlight. My careers teacher's voice rung loud in my ears: 'You want to be a lawyer? I don't think so, young girl. You'd better bring your aspirations down a little. I have just the job for you - Mrs Brown, your cookery teacher, is seeking a kitchen hand.'

The clock chimed, announcing the hour. Nine o'clock. My heart skipped a beat as I rushed to gather the papers relating to the unfair dismissal hearing I had that morning. I looked again at the slice of bread on the table and thought, I know how my bread is buttered.

## WINTER

### Aspen

The knife of illness  
whittles my life  
to harsh loss  
sharply pruned  
honed  
to bare beauty  
spirit tied  
to a post  
in the wind,  
my root  
is growing  
unseen

I know winter,  
its cruel ravishment,  
its hard seductive  
numbing stare -  
winter the portal  
demanding payment  
suspends life  
and strips me  
of greed

My choice is leaving  
fear at the gates  
healing seeds  
enchanted growth  
making possible  
exultant songs  
for spring

## NEW LAMBS AT EARBY

### Aspen

Dog in field  
stalks, sheep alert  
canine delicately nips  
something bloody  
eyes fixed warily  
on ewe, long slab  
of afterbirth slides  
down its throat.

Two yards away  
postcard sunshine  
frolics across  
another bloody mother  
licking her brown bundle  
cord still attached.

Robin's shrill  
painful and sharp,  
willow warblers sing  
long waterfalls  
children in playground  
inadvertently cheer  
as lamb totters,  
eager for milk, wobbling  
through dandelions  
to suck mother's armpit.  
No soft motherly muzzle  
guides - ewe moves off,  
sends offspring sprawling.

Lamb staggers up  
long ears blown back  
falls into grasp  
of farmer with aerosol  
spraying mouth  
first taste bitter -  
heir to milk, grass,  
and antibiotics  
before the mint sauce.

## HEN STORY

### Marion Boote

My mother used to make meals for the tramps that came round. She used to put food on the wall outside the house. Home-made bread and home-made jam and real butter. It was home-made food because we didn't have that much in the house at all. Potatoes, swedes - things like that. No meat. They were all mashed up together. Everything was cooked in the oven next to the fireplace. I remember once we had no money but we had some onions and we fried them up with potatoes to make hash. Oh it did taste good! When we did have meat it was sheep's heads. That was cooked with onions and carrots and potatoes all together. That food was free. The butchers used to give the heads to us. We used to make potted meat out of the bones that came from the butchers too. It was lovely. We lived very cheaply.

I had a hen called Purple. I had her till she was dead. I was heartbroken when she died. She was very very old. I'd had her ten years at least. She was in charge of all the other hens. She used to waddle her bottom everywhere she went. When there were chicks in the barn, she'd play mother to them.

Purple was light in colour with brown feathers all over her. She would come out of the kitchen and see me. She did look smart with her purple plastic ring round her claw. I've never eaten any poultry since she died. When she died I said I'd never eat any more. I buried her in the top field.

We eventually had a hundred hens and cocks. We went with the eggs every Sunday to sell them to the surrounding places. It took me all day. We carried them in bags that had been made out of other bags - flour bags, that sort of thing. There weren't any bags in the market because at this time the war was still on.

The hens and geese meant a lot to me. I went every day to pick the eggs up out of the boxes. I'd go first thing in the morning. I got to know the hens well. I got to know where they'd lay their eggs. They used to lay them everywhere. In the hay on the floor, but also in the most peculiar places. I'd put the eggs in the basket.

The barn was very big. It had a roof on it. It had two horses in it and loads and loads of pigs as well as the hens. But it wasn't smelly because my father used to muck the place out regularly.



It was nice living on a farm because there was a swing in the barn. It was a rope with a piece of wood knotted on the end of it. That was the only toy my father got for me.

Marion Boote

## THE CIRCUS TAMER

Mikel Fellowes

These emotions are surly beasts  
Sullen, slow moving  
Snarl at my whip and refuse  
To return to their cages.

## UNTITLED

Pete Kalu

We are the flurry of heads  
tracking conversations.  
the talking hands  
like underwater communicators  
without movement, the beached whales

We are the echo-dome destroyers  
the amplifier employers  
the soft wall seekers  
the consonant searchers

we are the bell towers  
(the inner ringers)  
the silent movie lovers  
the voices of strange plants

Touch sense of the forever lover  
AND the all-in wrestler  
Scent-sense of the society debutante  
snouts of sniffer dogs  
Taste-zones of the gusto gourmets  
Eat-zest of the truffling hogs  
Optics of the bug-eyed fly  
Chroma of the refugee  
Who are we? We are the deaf.

## CAP STORY

### Marion Boote

We got up one morning. I was nearly ready when Mother decided I needed my leggings. They were difficult to get on. They were leather and they had buttons all up the front and you had to do them up with a long thing like a coat hanger. I had clogs too. They were leather and you had to do them up with a button hook. I was three years old, so it took a long time.

It was winter. There was snow and ice on the ground. We had to walk to the tram. It was a long walk. We ran all the way. Both brothers had hold of my hands and slid me all the way down to the stop. We were very excited about going because it was a long way from Scouthead to Waterhead.

We got on the tram. You should have seen us. That was a picture in itself. We all sat on the seat that fits three and my mother sat on the back. It was an adventure to us. We'd come from the farm to the civilised world. There was snow on the ground, but we didn't see anything. We were going for new caps.

When we got to the shop, we were dithering with excitement. The shop was called Dunn's. They had caps in the windows and all the caps had a penny on them. We went in. It was old-fashioned. There was a machine for taking the money and giving change. You put your money in a long metal tube and then you sent it spinning up a long line into another room. When it stopped, a bell rang. The money was taken out and counted and the change was put in and the metal tube sent back. And the change was always perfect.

The man who ran the shop was little and fat with a bald head. There was a counter made of polished wood. It had glass windows and inside you could see caps and caps and caps. It seemed to me that the whole world was full of caps! My two brothers picked out theirs. Peter chose a purple one and it had Dunn's printed on the label inside. Edward chose a green one. The caps were lovely. They cost 2/6d each and the pennies that were on them belonged to the boys.

Then Edward chose to have a fit over by the window. We'd seen him having fits before. He had them all the time and it was always on our own doorstep. But he chose to have one in the shop and that caused a fuss. We were all astounded because he'd never had a fit in front of other people. To think that caps will do that to you!

## DAWN

### Bev Burkitt

The breaking of another day  
The sun rising from below  
It lights up the decay  
And puts it on show.

## LOST LOVE

### Bev Burkitt

Saw an old friend the other day  
she asked about the family  
and then about you and me  
she said why did you part?  
I didn't know where to start  
I told her about us laughing  
smiling, joking, pinching, poking  
of our pillow fights and making love all night  
I said 'he taught me to cook  
and to love the way I look'  
she looked more surprised  
probably thought I'd lied  
but then I began to cry  
and tried to remember why  
I recalled all the good days  
the good nights  
the holidays  
the bad days  
the sad days  
too many hurting days

## FUNNY HOW THINGS TURN OUT

Bev Burkitt

I thought I put a sparkle in your eyes  
but it turned out to be...  
the light reflecting on your contact lenses

I thought you made the earth move for me  
but it turned out to be...  
a few dodgy bed springs and an unsteady bed

## 'IN THE SMALL STONE CIRCLE'

Marion Wood

In the small stone circle at Torhouse  
I walked without a stick  
I marked it off as a memorable day  
The wind blew  
I did not fall over  
I knew I would walk again!

## 'MIRROR, MIRROR'

Marion Wood

Mirror, mirror on the wall.  
Who is the fairest of us all?  
That's the usual one to ask, isn't it?  
Before you answer  
Can I ask another?  
Why do you lie off centre to the wall?  
Does it matter?

## WHAT OTHER IMPERATIVES ARE THERE?

Marion Wood

Without a firm commitment  
you will fly in the wind  
and not hold on to anything in particular.  
Women who make a mark hold steady and resolutely through.  
They don't stop working by saying this is crap and tearing up the page  
In my head I wonder where feminism can go from here.  
It surely can't just celebrate what women did against  
all the odds in the past.  
I was there too.  
I fought some of the battles,  
went on some of the marches, stopped and looked around.  
Wondered what my daughters would do,  
Wonder what I will do before I die?  
Perhaps there is nothing new to be done,  
So it's like the kitchen floor  
always there to be cleaned whether you did it  
yesterday or on Tuesday before.

## 'LIVES CAN BE BOUGHT SO CHEAPLY'

Marion Wood

Lives can be bought so cheaply  
Do people really care?  
When their worry is to fill themselves  
With tempting food or fare.  
Considerable skills go into judging  
the various merits of tea rooms  
How often have you told us how your choice is made?  
Only one question need be asked  
Do they have real milk there?

## 'THERE'S NO PAY, BUT THE EXPERIENCE COULD LEAVE YOU QUITE A BIT RICHER.'

Marion Wood

An invitation it could be difficult to refuse,  
if you are a man who fancies running his fingers  
up the back of a naked young woman.  
She's at home  
expecting the visitor to call.  
Perhaps an outing  
with no clothes on.  
So he can gently make her better  
using his special skills,  
Zipping her up with his expertise.  
A very rich experience.  
She can hardly wait.

*Inspired by an advert for The Multiple Sclerosis Society:*



WE'RE LOOKING TO ATTRACT  
THE SERVICES  
OF PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE.  
THERE'S NO PAY BUT THE  
EXPERIENCE COULD LEAVE YOU  
QUITE A BIT RICHER.

## DOG STORY

Marion Boote

The dogs we had - one was called Laddie. He was the big dog. He was shaggy and black. The other dog was little. She was the smallest dog you've ever seen and we called her Binky. She was pale chocolate coloured. Laddie was Peter's dog. Binky was my dog. I didn't buy her. My mother bought her and I loved her from the moment I saw her. I was asleep when she brought her up to me. It was half past eleven at night. She left her with me and I made a name up for her. Binky. She slept in my arms that night and every night. She was mine from the first moment I saw her. It didn't matter about my mother.

I would say I was five or six. I'd been on my own before. Now I had a dog. It was a lovely thing to have a dog which you'd named yourself. She slept in the kitchen afterwards when she got older. She slept on the chair. I took her everywhere I went. I used to say, 'Binky! Here!' and she went everywhere with me. When I went to school I used to tell her to stay on the sofa or chair in the kitchen and when I came home she skipped off the sofa into my arms. It was a nice thing to think I was going home to a dog. She was my only friend.

Laddie used to sleep on a raised board that was made for him and there was a lead that tied him to the sewing machine. He was a working dog. He used to go out with Peter when he did his jobs. Peter used to help my father on the farm. Me and him and Edward were very hard worked at that time.

I was with Peter when he thought Laddie was missing. He went and looked for him with my mother. While they were out I was thinking about them. Eventually - ten o'clock that night - they came back with the dog in their arms. He'd been knocked down. I'd never seen a dog deader than him. Peter decided to bury him near to the well. He buried him that night. Binky was the only dog from then on.

My father was very jealous of Binky. There was two men in my mother's life and it was the other man who bought the dog for her. My father killed Binky. I was eight years old. I came home to that. It was me that found her and it was me that buried her. She was laid outside on the flags. He'd hit her on the head with a brick or a stone. He'd done it whilst my mother was out. I was crying, but it was up to me to bury her. I buried her near the other dog.

I couldn't do with my father after that. I thought a lot of my father before, but after that my feelings had gone. I cried and cried and cried over that dog. My mother said, 'There's nothing we can do about it now.'

Then I got the message that I must do well at school to pass my exams. I never ever wanted to see that again in my life. That cruelty. I wanted to get out. My father was cruel to all of us in those times. He was cruel to each of my brothers in a different way. He was cruel to my mother as well.

## THE WICKED QUEEN

JANUARY

Aspen

Chris Murray

The Queen was sitting at an open window, regarding the countryside with a thoughtful air.

'Will you teach me your magic arts?' I asked respectfully, unable to keep the urgency and eagerness from my voice.

She turned to look at me slowly. She narrowed her knowledgeable eyes. Her look lingered on my wheelchair. 'What you call my "magic arts" are skills hard-won against the odds, girl.' She sighed. 'I could be so much more effective if I didn't have to worry about Snow White wasting her energy trying to get a boyfriend and finding men to do housework for. She's a class one pain in the bum.'

'I have always thought so,' I agreed. 'She's so sweet and prim and dependent on men's approval. Secretly I always hoped I might learn from you. Do you think we could install a lift for the castle and make the woods accessible?'

'I can't concentrate for worrying that she'll come to a bad end.'

'I know, you just can't protect some women. They seem hell-bent on self-destruction.' Hell, let her self-destruct, I thought nastily.

'Well, I've tried everything - sending her off into the forest to get in tune with nature, putting her into suspended animation. However, the prince will probably think the more passive she is the better. A kiss will do it. The girl lacks ambition.'

'Don't blame yourself, Majesty. She hasn't yet seen the drawbacks.'

'You're right, of course. I've been delaying my true work trying to keep her from her stupid plight. People think I'm evil because of my hump but I guess you know all about that. Yes, I think we could work together.'

## JANUARY

Chris Murray

A bleak sombre day with lashings of rain,  
rattling its chains against the window pane,  
with a howling banshee of a wind -  
when will winter's weather ever mend?

Not a hope in hell for many moody weeks,  
locked in jagged January's teeth,  
a rough beast with little ruth or mercy,  
a stone-cold heart, an eye that's icy.

## PARANOIA

Chris Murray

Sensitive to every sound  
A bus ride is a burden  
What with wheels and brakes and things.

At the bottom of the garden,  
Hard-as-iron trains gobble steel,  
Startling and unnerving me.

Embankment catastrophes  
Loom like headline news  
And I am a statistic.

The voice of a loved one  
Is suddenly harsh and ugly -  
I have to flee forever.

The phone rings - is it for me?  
Are they coming, at least, for me?  
Coming to take me away, ha ha?

In the matrix of my room,  
Safe from buses, trains, voices  
And electrical wonders,

As the full moon menaces,  
I recall the connection:  
Moon - lunar - lunatic.

## SCENES FROM THE SPACE CENTRE

Chris Murray

I'm talking about not being able,  
the fundamentals so complicated,  
ergo my life was a monstrous fable,  
the monster, me, would not be placated.

So that urination and defecation  
became a dangerous daytime nightmare  
(I hardly dare mention masturbation)  
with eyes and spies and cameras everywhere.

When Mary came bearing pies and puddings,  
the little old lady yelled 'Feed the nerves!'  
but I could not make sense of anything,  
especially Mary's sexual curves.

The nights I spent smoking in the day-room  
(the room in which I couldn't sleep was hell)  
eldritch visions visited me like doom,  
that spelled the death of health, the end of well.

Then dawn-dread with its dazzle of daylight,  
the awakenings of rested spacers  
queuing up for drugs and ECT -  
society's wasters and head cases.

## BUS FARE

Permjit Loomba

I shouldn't have stopped off at the market to pick up the groceries, thought Lasata, as she plunged her large hot hands deep into her pockets for any sign of change. No, she had spent three pounds to the last penny. Her appointment at the Advice Bureau was at 10.30am. It was 10.20am now and there was no sign of the Number 32. The flimsy white carrier bag began to weigh heavy on her arm. The tightening white plastic began to cut into her fingers. Her weary arm allowed the carrier to sit on the ground. She peered into her black handbag. Holding her breath, she picked out her clipper card. It still had five clips remaining, each clip worth 15p. She breathed a sigh of relief. That was enough to get her to the bureau and back home. She looked up to see the Number 32 approaching. She snapped shut her bag, swung it over her shoulder, picked up her carrier bag and waited to mount.

The bus screeched to a halt in front of her, smacking her face with a dusty heat which brought pearls of sweat to her forehead. A large black hand wiped away the glistening diamonds over her brow. Mounting, she clipped her card twice into the mouth of the awaiting machine attached to the right of the platform and went for the first seat she saw. Her large frame squeezed between two seats towards the front on the left hand row and sat slightly crouched, but nevertheless comfortable, next to the window.

The July morning was unusually hot. Determined rays darted in between the high rises, touching her smooth face with their warmth. Lee won't mind me being ten minutes late, she thought, and this time I must ask her about the back gate. It's been off its hinges since I moved in. Her neck became tense, a frown crept over her brow as she thought about her house. She had managed to get a house on a new council estate after being moved off the run-down Trinity estate. It was rumoured that the Trinity estate was being demolished, but actually Wimpeys were buying it up to renovate into luxury apartments and sell off at extortionate prices. Not one of the original residents could afford to buy them and they were being shunted off to estates on the outskirts of the city. She was one of the lucky ones. Her house was one of a neat row of eight. Only her immediate neighbour and herself had erected a fence along the front, giving an air of pseudo privacy, but it hadn't stopped the local hooligans splashing a can of paint across the front, covering Lasata's bedroom window, the front door and the new fence.

The thick white curd dripped mockingly, leaving not a single square foot free of its clinging tentacles. She remembered the hurt pounding the pit of her

stomach like a clenched fist as she opened the front door in the morning. Tears surged to her eyes. 'Why?' they pleaded to the thick menacing substance.

Lee had said it was the council's responsibility to remove it. Every day a painful reminder. She hoped Lee could get them to remove it this week. She had been continually harassed in her flat in Trinity but somehow she thought the new house would bring with it a new beginning. It was not to be.

'Oh, I've missed my stop!' she heard herself say. Rising up, she hung onto the bar, waiting for the bus to stop. She gazed out of the front window ahead, thinking of how much further she would have to lug her bag. She noticed the driver turn to look at her. His cold blue eyes pierced her heart. Her body froze.

'Where did you get on?' he blared.

'At the precinct,' she replied. He faced forward again, his body leaning back as he brought the bus to a halt. The automatic doors swung open and an elderly couple mounted, placing 40p in the black plastic tray before the driver.

'Two to Eccles please,' said the old man. A bony white finger tapped out two tickets. Lasata edged forward to get off.

'You owe me 5p,' said the driver.

'I don't have any money.'

'The fare from the precinct is 35p. You owe me 5p,' his voice heavily stressed each word he spoke.

'I'll clip my card again.'

'It's 5p you owe me.' His stare had Lasata cornered like a frightened animal.

'I've clipped my card again worth 15p, in fact you owe me 10p.' She stepped forward and snatched a 10p piece from the small black tray.

The man got up from his seat. Towering over her, he grabbed her arm whilst he opened the gate of his seat to get onto the platform. 'What do you think you're doing, you stupid bitch?' His thin pale face came ever closer to hers.

She saw the naked anger surge to his face like a red wave. She gritted her teeth, took a deep breath, shouted, 'What do you think you're doing?' and pushed him with all her might. The unexpected response had him sprawling at the feet of the elderly couple, cornered by the heated exchange. Stunned by the violent invasion, they scrambled off the bus. Lasata hurriedly picked her way forward but the driver recovered his posture and grabbed her arm. Twisting it behind her back, he reached for the radio and called the bus depot to send for the police.

'Let her go!' shouted someone from the back. The handful of people stared blankly at the performance, giving not a hint as to the source of the voice in the wilderness.

'Let me go!' Lasata swung a hopeless strike around her back with the other arm, but the driver pushed her clutched arm higher, causing a ripping pain in her shoulder. Her body paralysed, the last bit of strength swelled to her throat. 'You evil man,' she cried. 'God will punish you!'

She turned her head and spat in his face. He screamed a trail of abuse and pushed her against the tough glass. Dazed, she felt her head throb and a warm trickle tickled her cheek. Her misty eyes caught the white police car coming from the opposite direction. It signalled right and came to park smoothly in front of the bus.

The driver pulled her out onto the pavement, in front of the approaching officers. Lasata's large frame struggled. The driver garbled something about fare jumping and stealing.

'I clipped my card, I paid more than the fare...'

'Let her go, sir,' said one of the officers. The other led Lasata a few yards away whilst the first spoke to the driver. She could not make out what was being said, but the skinny arms waving about frantically demonstrated his version of events.

The other officer came back to where they were standing and said, 'Let's take her to the station.'

Lasata's stomach jumped. Her heart racing, she screamed, 'What for?' She forced herself free from their hold and swung her arms at the two faceless Bobbies. The two officers grabbed her and pushed her into the car.



At the station, she sat on a wooden bench against the wall across from the Charge Officer. Her face, as hard as a stone monument, gazed into the floor, not aware of the slightest sound or movement about her. Her head throbbed, her thighs felt as if they were sitting on a wet towel. Sweat dripped into the small of her back, underneath the cotton dress covered by the large khaki raincoat. The duty solicitor had interviewed her but, after half an hour, shook his head and sighed heavily when her response consisted of three monotonous sentences. 'I clipped my card again. This is what they do to you in this country... I have to get home to pick up Inga from school. Who's going to pick my baby up?'

A different officer came into the room and placed a piece of paper in front of the Charge Officer. 'Can you come here, love?' he said. 'We're ready now.'

His round face searched hers. 'The inspector has looked at your case and has decided to charge you.' His eyes fixed on her face for a response. There was none. The officer who came into the room stood next to her and began reading from the piece of paper he had brought in.

'You have been charged with the offence of using Threatening Behaviour under section 4 of the Public Order Act 1986 and the theft of 10p under section 1 of the Theft Act 1962. You are hereby ordered to appear before the Eccles Magistrates Court at 10am on 2nd September 1992.'

Lasata did not hear or understand a word. The officer led her out of the Charge Room and into what looked like an old cell with thick rusting bars and a wet concrete floor. Her face photographed and hands fingerprinted, she was led back into the Charge Room. 'You can go now.'

She looked at the Charge Officer, not quite believing what she heard. She blinked as the words registered a few seconds later and she looked around as if waking from a dream. Her tense body relaxed, but only for a few moments. She had realised something.

'I don't have enough bus fare to get home.'

## PATRONIZINGLY CHALLENGED BEWARE

(short play to be performed by disabled people only)

**Bev Burkitt**

**Scene:** Bus stop. Queue of four or five people. One of them is a disabled person minding her own business. Mr Joe Public (patronizingly challenged) arrives at the bus stop and spots the disabled person, coughs loudly and looks at everyone to draw attention to himself.

**Mr Joe Public:** (thinks - *aha a handicapped person. I'll go and talk to her, she probably needs cheering up*)

On your own love? (looks around for a carer)

**Disabled Woman:** (thinks - *oh no go away*)

Yes!

**Mr Joe Public:** (thinks - *aah, she's on her own, shame*)

Waiting for a bus then?

**Disabled Woman:** (thinks - *obviously I'm waiting for a bus*)

Yes... that's why I'm waiting at the bus stop

**Mr Joe Public:** (looks at others at the bus stop, smiles smugly and nods for their approval of his talking to the disabled woman.)

Going somewhere nice then?

**Disabled Woman:** (thinks - *if I look away he'll get the message*)

The day centre.

**Mr Joe Public:** Aah, that's nice. Will you be making something nice with your friends?

**Disabled Woman:** (thinks - *oh, piss off you prat*)

No, I'm attending a meeting to shut the place down... it's full of patronizingly challenged people making disabled people do basket-weaving... it's crap!

**Mr Joe Public:** (looks round at others in queue, bemused and embarrassed, coughs. Thinks - *she can't help it, she's handicapped. She's probably confused and mentally disturbed*)

Oh that's nice.

(Disabled Woman looks at others and sighs heavily, shaking her head. Bus arrives. Mr Joe Public rushes to front of queue and orders everyone to step aside with hand gestures.)

**Mr Joe Public:** (loudly) Move aside everyone - can't you see she's handicapped?

**Disabled Woman:** (looks at driver) 75p to the day centre.

(Mr Joe Public tries to grab her to assist her onto the bus)

**Bus Driver:** Aah, that's nice. Will you be meeting your friends there?

## WHEN I WAS FIVE

### Marion Boote

I used to have a chair outside the back of the barn where I used to rock and rock in the fresh air. I used to get a book from the library and spend hours on the chair reading it. I was on my own a lot in those days.

Once, I came across a hedgehog in the grass and I took it home. But it was full of fleas. It must have had a flea on every quill, because the fleas went all over the house. When Father came home he couldn't miss them. They were everywhere. I had to tell him I'd brought the hedgehog home. 'Get it out!' he said.

I started really noticing animals around me then. One day, when I was reading in my chair, I saw some baby rats in the grass. There were four of them. They were about half an inch long and pink and furless. I took those home too. My father used to get cross with me. I don't know what he did this time, but he wasn't too pleased.

Another day, I'd come past the new houses in Scout End. They were like a little village. I went into the pub on my own. But there was a rule in those days that children were always welcome. Mr Haigh owned the pub. I talked a little while with him - in those days that was the standard practice - and when I came out, I could see all these holes in the ground with little hills of earth. I tried to count them, but I couldn't. There were that many. There were moles. Lots and lots of them. They were a black inky colour. Little creatures that came out after dark. I only ever found them in one place. Up at Scout Head. I'd never seen that many before. Once, when I was coming back over the fields when it was very dark, I saw a mole. It was smelling around. In the daytime you never saw them.

There was a woman who lived in one of the new houses. She was called Mrs Shepherd. She was a little lady with grey hair and blue eyes that used to twinkle all over the place. She lived in a lovely little cottage with flowers growing all up the front. She was a school teacher at Scout Head where I went. I wasn't in her class, but with it being such a little school - there were twenty five pupils - you always walked past her class. I knew her very well. We all did.

My mother walked past her house one day and noticed that she hadn't got up for school. She went to the door and knocked and got no answer, so she went up to her bedroom on a ladder and looked through the window. Mrs Shepherd

was dead in her bed. We were all shocked. We were shattered. She wasn't old. We'd all loved her.

My mother decided to go to the funeral. Lots of children from the school went. But I was in rags so I couldn't go. Not in my old skirt and woollen jumper. I wanted to go. I must have really wanted to say goodbye to her because that memory really sticks in my mind.

There was a man at the school who used to clean up. I remember his little boy. His name was Russell. He was only about three. He used to live at the school. He was a lovely boy and his hair was white as snow. But he died too. Meningitis. It was awful. He'd got the virus and was dead in a week. When he died, the whole school was in sorrow. He was buried in the churchyard next to the school. I was only a child, but I couldn't understand why he should die and I should live.

I remember my brother digging up some things from the ground. They were white flowers growing in clusters and they had long stalks with nuts on the bottom. They were pignuts. They were plentiful there, up on the moorland near Scout Head. They were well known in the country in those days. We used to eat them. They were a delicacy then. They still are. They're very expensive to buy today, but we used to eat them all the time in summer. I haven't had pignuts for a long time now.

Five was a very important age for me. I'd grown up that year. I understood my poverty. I'd learnt about death. I could see things were bad at home and I wanted to get away. I decided then to become a nurse. I wanted to care for other people. When I grew up, I followed that ambition.

## CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

### Suna Polio

'Hello - Gdssfdlerkglesft' - I instantly recognise the breathless I've-just-had-to-run-for-the-bus voice of my local District Care Organizer, but what on earth was that she said?

'What?' I feel irritation leaking into my voice. 'I didn't understand any of that.'

Ronnie tries again, slower this time. 'I know you said you weren't happy about volunteers, but I've arranged for someone from a local church to cover you at 6.30 on the Tuesday and Wednesday.'

Blood rushes to my head, rendering me temporarily speechless.

My partner, Ann, is going away for not quite two days, taking our four year old son, leaving me alone. I have sent Ronnie a list of my minimum requirements for support during that time. She has taken to ringing me every day to give me a blow-by-blow account of how she is doing, what she cannot offer me, and how hard it is to find cover. I have not been sympathetic.

Now I am furious. How bloody dare she. The 6.30 visit is to help me get out of bed after my afternoon lie-down, make me something to eat, fresh hot-water bottles, etcetera. I will be on my own in the house. Vulnerable. It's bad enough having to negotiate first encounters with perfect strangers, as they bustle into my bedroom with their coats on, to find me lying flat on my back in bed. The fact that I know that they are being paid to do a job at least lends a little dignity to the situation. Putting up with this from someone moved to do it out of the goodness of their christian heart would be too much to bear. And what guarantee would I have that the 'volunteer' wouldn't be a villain in sheep's clothing, ready to bash me over the head and steal all my worldly's? And what's all this about a church? I can't believe that Ronnie has pursued this option. My eyes stray to the minora on a shelf across the room from where I sit.

'That's completely unacceptable,' I say firmly, with only a hint of rage.

Ronnie mumbles that she'll have to cancel the arrangement. She is huffy, put out.

The next day my friend Dawn and I are chatting over a cup of tea, when the phone rings. I don't recognize the voice or the name given but I do recognize

the name of our local Evangelist Church: The Beacon. It is the volunteer whose services I have rejected, ringing me anyway.

'Is there anything you need, anything we can do for you?'

I am caught between two contradictory pulls which makes my lips purse, my voice come out strained. I mean, for Christ's sake, there's loads of things I need, a not-quite-abys of unmet need. Perhaps it would be alright to have a nice volunteer doing some things for me. Perhaps I should twitter, 'Oh yes, that would be lovely.' Perhaps she's a really nice woman that I'd love to get to know. I might get to know lots of other nice people through her. Briefly my mind teems with images of happy laughing people on sunlit afternoons. Perhaps I could be one of them.

I get a grip on myself. Some situations just cannot be tolerated and, anyway, why on earth is this woman telephoning me? Ronnie was supposed to have cancelled her and her help. Then the questions start.

'Are you a churchgoer?'

'No.'

'Well you must have used some of our facilities then?'

'No.'

'Well, that's odd. We haven't contacted Social Services. I really don't understand why they got in touch with us.'

'No, neither do I.'

Unexpectedly, we share a point of view. I soften a little. Venture to show my real self, opinions and all.

'I think she was completely out of order, getting in touch with you.'

'Oh I'm sure she was doing it for the best, dear.' I instantly regret my openness, mutter a concluding remark into the mouthpiece and put the receiver down. Rolling my eyes heavenward, I sigh gustily. Dawn has only to incline her head slightly, raise her eyebrows a fraction and the story tumbles out of me.

She is astonished by my account of Ronnie's behaviour.

'She must have given your phone number to that woman.'

I nod absently, too involved with my indignation to absorb what she is saying, the implications of which don't hit me for another three days. When they do, I am indignant all over again. But now Dawn is asking me something:

'Have you seen that magazine they've brought out? It was that church, The Beacon.'

I shrug dismissively.

'Mmm, I remember it vaguely.'

I hadn't read any of it, though. It had gone straight in to the wastepaper basket with the other piles of tedious junk mail that flow into the house through the letter box and out again to the wheelie bin, scarcely touched by human hand. I remember the title though; 'JIM', each letter picked out in a different primary colour. And the posters outside The Beacon - 'Jim is coming' - the letters picked out in the same bright colours. Obviously something religious, but who on earth is Jim?

Unlike me, Dawn has read her copy and has found an interesting story on the back page. She leans forward in her seat to tell me.

'It's about a gay young man who gets religion and is converted to heterosexuality. He starts going out with girls.'

My eyes have practically popped out of my head.

'Jeeesus!'

My District Care Organizer has been trying to fix me up with volunteers from a homophobic organisation. How would they have taken to the 'Sisterhood Feels Good' poster over my bed? Would I have been fair game for conversion or revulsion? What is the world coming to when an atheist lesbian with a jewish heritage is expected to accept evangelist christian strangers into the most private parts of her home, because a local authority officer thinks it's a good idea and because she happens to be disabled. It's enough to make you start chanting 'Rights not Charity' on the spot. But as it happens, all I manage to do is bluster.

It's a dull warmish afternoon, but I'm out with Ann and that makes it special. It's special because I've managed to get out of the house into the space and

air and bustle of Chorlton Village, because I can whiz and whirr in my new powered chair and because Ann and I are alone together and able to give our attention to each other. We don't have to worry that our four year-old son is going to dash into the road, pick an apple off a stall and walk off munching it, or empty the sugar bowl onto the table in the cafe. We are together at a time when we have energy, instead of the fag-end of the day when we are limp with fatigue and can only manage to flick the telly on.

It's also special because we are indulging in the luxury of pre-Easter shopping. I buy chocolate eggs, she buys a chocolate bunny. I buy some tiny yellow fluff balls with little beaks and wings. We buy narcissi to delight the eye and hot-cross buns to delight the tummy.

We nip into the accessible cafe in the precinct and lean our heads together conspiratorially over our steaming cups of tea. We talk about campaigning together for disabled people's rights to cash, so that we can employ our own personal assistants. It feels as though we are both suddenly living on the same planet, that a gate in her heart and a gate in mine have opened, allowing us at last to embrace. We hold hands across the formica-topped table.

Outside we stroll, taking in the sights.

Shoulders hunched as he hugs a sheaf of newspapers to his chest, a young man lurches at Ann. It takes me a few seconds to realise that he is not a drunk picking a fight, but an enthusiast with something to sell. I recognize the red, yellow and blue letters: JIM. Then I hear Ann's voice, raised in mock outrage.

'It's awful, it's got a story about a nice young gay man who starts going out with girls!'

'Yes,' stumbles the enthusiast, bewildered by this tack. 'He's converted.'

'It's terrible. Poor thing,' proclaims Ann righteously.

Then we both whiz off, giggling like schoolgirls, leaving him gawping and pinned to the spot.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### Aspen

Aspen is a political disabled lesbian - passionate about life, love, friendship and positive change.

### Marion Boote

I was very, very poor when I was a child. I made my mind up to be a nurse when I was five years old. I passed my exams. I had to prove myself cleverer than anyone else. It was a bugger to show it. I'm sixty years old. I've been writing two years. It was very, very hard for me to say the words at first, but it gets better and better.

### Bev Burkitt

I was born 31 years ago and through social battles developed into a disabled activist, a fiercely independent feminist and a proud single parent. My dad aptly describes me as 'the mighty atom bomb'. I love travelling, freedom, mother nature, my home, family and above all my beautiful daughter, Jasmine Lee. Poetry is the words of my soul.

### Mikel Fellowes

I am of mixed Indian and English descent and have been deaf since 1991. I work full time but I am also involved in a disabled people's theatre company. Currently I am writing a fantasy novel which is influenced by Jungian theory. Themes of alienation, non-connection and the psychological aspects of disability colour my writing.

### Pete Kalu

In 1990 Pete hammered out *Afrogoth* for Radio Four. Top-ranking black fiction publishers, X-Press, published his first novel, the urban thriller, *Lick Shot*, in November 1993. He finds poetry a catalyst for his general writing skills. His ambition is to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

### Permjit Loomba

I am an Asian woman and a mother of two daughters aged seven and four. I have a disability which was the result of polio. Born in India, I was brought up in the Highfields area of Leicester. My work has largely been confined to the voluntary sector where I worked in race relations, in a law centre and as an immigration counsellor. My work and my writing are deeply rooted in the resistance to social injustice experienced by black and disabled people daily. I have a deep passion for people, their hopes, fears, joys, pains, their loves and laughter. It is this passion that fuels my desire to write.

**Chris Murray**

I was born in Manchester in 1949 and read my first book when I was about fourteen. Before that it was comics; my favourites were the *Beano* and *Dandy*. Although I suffer from schizophrenia, I try to make the best of a bad thing; indeed my illness has inspired many poems - for which I thank God.

**Suna Polio**

Suna Polio was born in London in 1948 and has hopped northwards on two occasions - once to Birmingham and nine years ago to Manchester. She now lives with her partner and their child in the almost suburbs of South Manchester. Whilst seeming to spend inordinate amounts of time sitting in her arm chair she still manages to be actively involved in the disabled people's movement, which helps to keep her 'sane'.

**Marion Wood**

I am a fifty-two year old lesbian. I was born in Glasgow and have lived in Manchester since the early seventies. During this time I was married, had two children, was a teacher and became politically active in women's politics. Dealing as well with long term illness, I am now involved in Disability Rights campaigning.

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