

# WRITE ON 17

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Writing by local writers' groups

Commonword

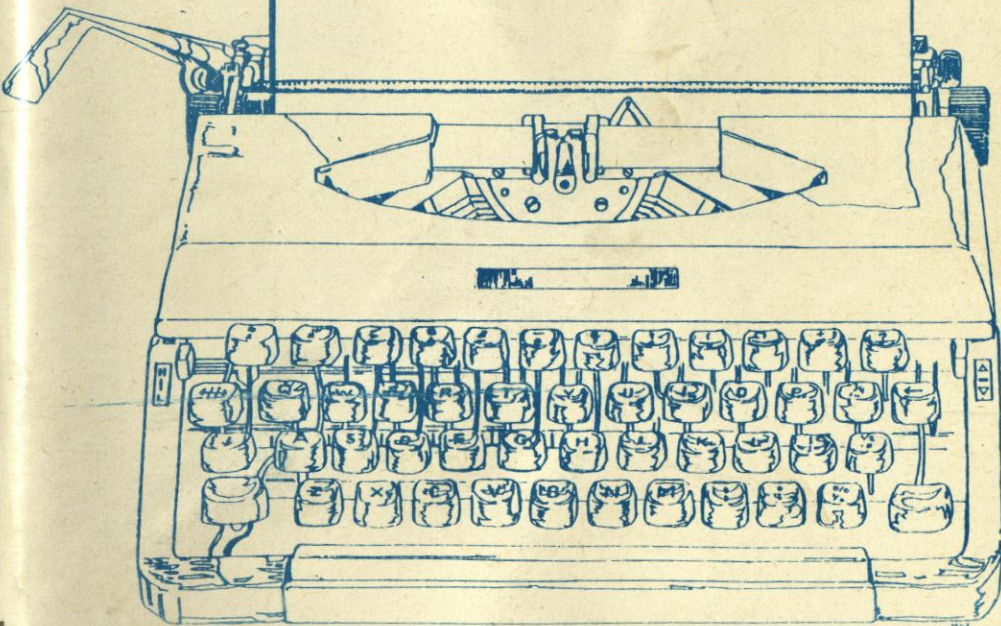
Home Truths

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Working Class Poems, Stories & Autobiography



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Introduction

# WRITE ON 17

COMMONWORD WORKSHOPS

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# INTRODUCTION

When the first *Write On* came out, almost five years ago, it was a few duplicated sheets of poetry and prose, put together by a small group of writers who met regularly to discuss their work. Over the years, that group has spread out into a cluster of writers' workshops in the Greater Manchester area. All of them have the same basic purpose - to say as loudly and clearly as possible that all of us are entitled to write and to be heard. You don't have to go to college to be a writer. Working mothers, pensioners, people on the dole, busdrivers, toilet attendants - all of us can be writers.

We've run women's groups and a group for eleven to eighteen year olds, as well as doing work with specific groups, such as disabled people, battered women and the NSPCC. A gay writers' group is planned to start soon. Groups cover Stretford and Longsight, Rochdale and Wythenshawe; that leaves plenty of people who are missing out because they live too far away from a group, or can't afford the bus fare. *Commonword* is there to help anyone who would like to start a writers' workshop in their area, and we hope that new groups will come to us for backing.

The amount of work that we publish has grown alongside the increasing scope of our activities. So far, it includes an anthology of women's writing an autobiographical novel and the first collection of short stories to be published by a worker writer group. Unlike commercial publishers, we don't see ourselves as a limited money-spinning venture. Our books are a means not only of getting a readership



for ourselves, but of encouraging other working class people to come forward with their writing. Whenever a new *Write On* comes out, there are a number of new people who turn up at our workshops after picking it up in a paper shop, or seeing it at a friend's.

We deliberately split this *Write On* into sections representing each member group because we wanted to stress that Commonword really is a conglomeration of groups. By diversifying, we've catered to our individual interests, but sometimes at the expense of working together as a whole. We still tend to identify Commonword with the original Monday night workshop, rather than seeing it as a forum and a resource for all kinds of different activities related to working class writing, reading and publishing. Because of this, we are planning a gathering of the groups in March.

This will be an opportunity to talk about why we write, and what we hope to get from our writing; ways in which to spread the worker writer movement still further and strengthen the involvement of people who are already part of it. It will also be an occasion to look at *Write On* 17 and decide how best we can use *Write On* to promote writing by working people. This will, we hope, be just the first of such events, when we can draw closer together, while also looking outwards, towards growth. We will grow in the end by finding the connection between celebrating our differences and re-stating what we have in common.

**AILSA COX**

## Mum's the Word!

### Victoria

One lovely day in October, Victoria takes a trip into town. With a nip in the air, and the sun shining brightly, the autumn leaves with their gorgeous colours lay scattered on the ground.

Travelling alone quite happily and hugging her bag, like grim death - in it lay a little secret she had kept, also a small snack (be it only crackers and cheese) in case she felt peckish before she arrives back. Food to Victoria is a giver of life, the figure she sports being proof in itself.

As the bus speeds along, and the miles lie behind, by this time her thoughts all in a whirl, of the quest she is pursuing. Have confidence! Victoria tells herself, time and time again, with knees now trembling, trying to look brave and wearing a smile by all means too big for her face. With determination overflowing to carry on, and not turn around and take the journey back, before revealing her secret with pride.

At last the bus grinds to a halt! and the long journey ends, Victoria in her eagerness, descends the steps two by two, and gets a horrible feeling, this really is the end. Only a short walk now. The kindly bus driver said, "Good luck" he called as if he guessed, she was feeling fit to drop. With gathered wits she trudges on. Now she sees the sign, in letters big and bold! Gosh! she whispers to herself, so this is it!

Victoria stood and gazed in awe at the strange building, so depressing it looks on this lovely day. This was something far from her mind's eye as she had travelled on her way. A kind of sadness now takes place but with determination to the fore she presses the bell. An eternity seems to elapse. But now she hears a pleasant voice, and a girl with a charming manner invite



invites her in. Victoria stares around in amazement as she steps into the hall, she feels this dismal place is beyond her, and to now have doubts. But hadn't the girl confirmed that this is the place she had been seeking? Down the hall they tread, to a room where Victoria can sit, to wait for 'the lady in charge' to arrive. Again she stares around ( with eyes by now beginning to ache ) at curtains drawn, and fires unlit in the sparsely furnished room.

Her spirits begin to rise as she catches a glimpse of a girl sitting there. She must be on the same mission as me Victoria thinks as gingerly she sits on a chair. It didn't take long for both girls to be chatting away - with secrets overflowing. By this time Victoria is really convinced how brilliant and courageous her companion must be, and truly hopes that she will be successful with her ideal.

A tap on the door. The 'lady in charge' arrives, followed by other girls too. Victoria listens intently, as each girl her story unfolds, how interesting the stories really sound, and she just gets carried away, almost forgetting she too has a little secret to be told. Now all of a splutter she dips in her bag, the poems to reveal, by this time not quite sure, whether to join the writer's world.

On her homeward journey, Victoria makes track - and feels it wasn't time wasted. The dismal place of no importance, only the skill and wit of the writers. Confidence! Confidence! her friends had roared, when waving her 'goodbye'. To Victoria this sounds foreign, but maybe - there could be a tomorrow!

**ETHEL VERNON**

*Ethel wrote VICTORIA after coming to MUM'S THE WORD! for the first time. It gives some idea of how it feels to pluck up the courage to join a writers' group - something most of us at Commonword have gone through.*

**Mum's the Word!**

## **For My Mother**

I've lost you, somewhere between the generation gap and your marriage.

You ask me for help, in fact you beg for pity, crying out in your lost, unwanted voice, Condemning me for not caring enough, trying to make me feel guilty.

Who bought you flowers?

Who listened when you were low or happy?

I could have sworn it was me.

Still you push me in corners, wanting more than I can give, I'm only a daughter and it makes me only flesh and blood.

You force me into the ungrateful role for the things you've sacrificed.

I tell myself I never asked you to love my father nor to seek the reconciliation you sought.

You asked me and I told you it was your life in a non-committal way.

He's my father, that's all I know and I still say (To myself)

You were wrong to take him back.

But, who listens to me?

I only buy you flowers.

**ELAINE POWELL**



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Mum's the Word!

## The Hired Hero

She left the craft warily. "Be careful honey, don't fall", a voice called. This belonged to Sam Sure. Sam Sure was her hired hero from the hire a hero agency and so far he'd done nothing but bore her for the two hour journey.

Now Lucy Lugworm had warned Stacy, warning about the dangers of putting the galaxy to rights and had insisted that she hired a hero to protect her.

So far, for the astronomical amount he had been paid, he'd done only one heroic thing, that being the warning that he'd just issued. But it must be said that his head was remarkably the same size as Stacy's, so he'd proven a good dummy for moulding one's super hero's mask head dress on. She'd left that back on the craft as it wasn't really ready yet. The craft it must be admitted was past its best and had been for many years, so it was with ginger footsteps that Stacy walked bravely towards Terra-Firma, or in this case Demma Firma. The ground was covered in a red mud that clung to her boots. A quick look around proved that they were indeed alone.

"It's alright Sam Sure, you can come down, it's safe." He nodded, or she assumed that the head movement was intended as such. He began to stride manfully down. The dual suns behind him threw a dramatic effect against his crisp, white suit.

"It's easy when you know h....." The unspoken last word hung in the air, to be replaced with a manful scream and a loud thud. Stacy stared in disbelief as her hired hero lost his footing on the loose stair and tumbled across the broken bar to land in a crumpled heap by her side. She smiled kindly, offering him a helping hand.

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"Well, that's one way to get down."

"Just testing the secondary emergency exit," he said in a firm voice.

Stacy peered around, weapon in hand, alert for any noise. A moan filled the air. She turned, her nerves alive with fear. It was Sam Sure. He had walked a little way from her now and his hands were trying to dust the red mud from his manful, sensual, super body-hugging jumpsuit.

"What's wrong Sam?" Stacy asked, "Did you hurt your self?"

"No, just look at my outfit," he sighed and his large blue eyes filled with tears, "It's ruined and I paid 200 delmarks for it."

Stacy sighed and fought an urge to use the weapon on him anyway.

"Never mind, maybe it will wash off."

"This? never.." he said with despair.

"Let's begin the journey, the sooner we find the Professor Neverready, the sooner we can leave", she said sternly.

Sam Sure made one last ditch effort to clean his suit, then gave up with a whimper. Combing back his blond locks with his always handy comb he smiled. He'd caught his rather stunning reflection in the dull sheen of the craft.

"Alright young woman, let us boldly go where no woman has been before."

"But Professor Neverready is a woman."

"That could just be a rumour." He strode purposely off taking Stacy manfully by the left hand.

"Hadn't we better close your craft first?"

"O-Yeh, just testing you again Miss Stacy.."

They closed the craft and strode off.

They'd been walking across muddy, barren terrain for sixty minutes or so when Sam stopped.

"I think there's a tribe of dangerous primitives near by, Miss Stacy."

"How can you tell?" Stacy asked, much impressed. Was she at last seeing the super hero she'd paid for?

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"Because, Miss Stacy, there are hundreds of them just behind us."

Stacy turned her head to be met by the said hundreds of natives. There was in all, four rather glamorously dressed males, in gowns of rainbow colours, they carried silver guns and wore black pendants. Sam Sure stepped closer to Stacy, for his own protection.

"Stay very still or we will use this high powered, super charger laser on you," the elder of the group informed them, in a soft, lilting voice.

"They're very effective", the fair haired man by his side continued, "They burn a very nasty hole in your body and you'll die in excruciating pain". He smiled. "I'd appreciate it if you would leave out the messy bits, I do know just what a Laser can do," Sam Sure replied, "We're giving up right now." He threw his Laser onto the floor, yet Stacy kept hers by her side he noted with fear.

"You can also give up your weapon, my lady," the elder male ordered softly. Stacy stared at him, Sam reached over and grabbed her weapon from it's holster, throwing it across to land by the primitives feet.

"A wise move", the elder murmured. Sam grinned, "I kinda thought so at the time." Stacy sighed, was this what life held from now on, two years of uninterrupted missions with this fool.

"Follow us, try to escape and we shall destroy you," the elder informed them. The four surrounded them and led them east towards the red woodlands.

They reached the village ten minutes after the beginning of a downpour. Everyone was soaked. Stacy and Sam were thrown into a hut.

"Dry yourselves. Be comfortable. Our leader shall send for you later," the elder instructed as he closed the wooden doors.

The hut was warm and cosy, lit by seven candles and a fire that occupied the middle of the room.

Stacy stared about the hut then strode across the room to the fire and proceeded to peel off her jumpsuit. Sam rushed across trying unsuccessfully to

control a blush.

"Miss Stacy, what do you think you are doing....."? He let his words hang, upon seeing that she intended to continue he said, "Don't you realise that I'm only a hot blooded male?"

Stacy stepped out of her soggy outfit and reached across for a fur blanket. "What has that got to do with it?" Sam stepped even closer to her, their shoulders touched.

"You're a woman and I'm a man, it's one part you and one part me, it's chemistry baby." He bent his head and his left hand tilted her head upwards, his arms came around her, the candles flickered to give a romantic light. She bent her head abruptly and his lips landed in her hair, then she neatly side-stepped. His hands fell loosely to his side, his blue eyes mirroring his disbelief.

"What about chemistry Stacy?" he murmured.

"So see a chemist, because you sure, Sure, aren't diffusing your wandering atoms on me. Go find another catalyst."

"Huh?"

"Well, you sure wasn't picked by the agency for your brain power."

He moved away from her, his masculine pride ripped apart and yet trying, manfully, not to show it.

"You're sure some dumb lady, first you refuse my body then insult my brains, all in a matter of minutes. That's no way to make friends."

"Not refuse Sam, I'll take a rain check." She smiled gently and caressed his forehead. "It's time that we were on business. Once we've found Professor Neverready there'll be time for us to get to know each other." She stretched up and kissed him gently. He began to respond as she left his arms.

"Later.." she promised as she gathered her blanket about her, "You'd best get changed yourself, you're soaked."

"Well, turn around, and no peeping."

"You're a strange man," Stacy said laughing, "One



moment you're making a pass, the next you are a shy little thing."

"O.K. I'm shy," his tone was light, "But turn around anyway."

Stacy did so with amusement. He looked cute in his blanket.

It was dawn when Stacy awoke, cramp in her every limb. Lay across the room on a fibre mat was Sam, curled in a cat like ball, his arms about his face. He looked lost and childlike. The need to protect the poor little guy grew.

Stacy toyed with the idea of waking him, yet she was unwilling to rouse him when there was nothing to do but wait. Let him sleep, at least he wasn't scared when asleep.

It was a few hours later when the door opened to reveal two of the original males who had captured them. They strode in. The blond one came to a halt by Sam's side, threw a look of distaste at the sleeping man, then kicked him in the ribs. "You follow us. It's time." He peered closely at the inert form of Sam. "Is he alive?" he asked, giving Sam yet another well placed kick. Sam shot up with a yell.

"What the hell is going on here?" he complained. "It's alright Sam, we just have guests," Stacy said in a dead-pan voice.

"You two, follow us." The blond male ordered. Sam tried to rise but fell back wearily. Stacy rose and in one fluid movement was by his side offering a hand to help him up. He took it with a grateful smile.

"I feel quite weak," he confided in a low whisper. "I hate men like you." They both turned to face the blonde one with puzzlement on their faces. "I mean you, Mighty Warrior, you are a snare to our sex. Our position should be to keep women in place. You, like little boy, woman protect you." Sam smiled wearily, "Well, I've not been well of late

I've had some hard missions."

The blonde one strode off with a tut of disgust. They were both blinded by the daylight for a few seconds, but slowly they became aware of many pairs of eyes watching their slow progress to a platform where many figures stood. Sam's grip on Stacy tightened.

"This could be it. They could be maneaters."

"I always did say that being a woman could have it's advantages," Stacy said with a grin. Sam didn't rise to the joke. In fact he looked quite put out and stayed closely by her side saying nothing. As they walked closer, they began to make out the figures on the platform, and Sam grew less tense- his eyes grew wide. Stood on the platform, Stacy noted with vague amusement, were twelve young girls dressed in very small wraps with a flower at each side of their long hair. At least they were taking Sam's mind off his ordeal. The girls were stood around a silver gilt chair in which Professor Neveready sat, Professor Neveready? What was she doing here? Stacy cursed the slow pace of her captors and tried to hurry along, only to receive a kick in the ankle for her troubles. "All have respect for the chief," the male ordered. She said nothing in reply and kept her curses to herself.

It was some long moment's later when they reached the platform. Sam had a leering grin on his face which reached his eyes. Stacy felt an urge to kick him in the knee. Men were all the same.

The woman in the chair looked ill, her face was sallow and Stacy's thoughts left Sam for important matters.

"Professor Neveready." She called. A strong hand punched her onto the platform and she landed in a heap at the Professor's feet. The yell beside her belonged to Sam as he landed among the girls, and his yell turned into one of delight. Stacy threw him a brief smile as he settled into his man-made heaven, then turned her thoughts to the matter in hand. Jumping upright she took the hand of the Professor.



"It is Professor Neverready isn't it? I'm Stacy Warning and that mass of delight is Sam Sure. We're here to rescue you. It appears that we've arrived just in time".

Stacy hoped she sounded more or less in control, she hoped to inspire hope into the poor lady.

"But, my dear Stacy.. you don't mind if I call you Stacy do you?"

Stacy nodded her agreement.

"You see, you appear to have mistaken my flight from Earth. I wasn't in any danger, I was merely leaving. I'm fed up of the way man-kind treat females, I wanted to start again. I knew of this small group and so I came here."

"But, nothing has changed, the men think they rule, the girls stay at home, the men are dressed in gowns and the girls in fantasy outfits."

"You are mistaken. We dress the men in gowns to prevent our man being stared at by other women. We females dress in our revealing manner as we are all girls together. The view of the man does not matter, they would not dare touch a woman unless she made the first move. You are invited to stay or leave, it is your choice."

#### Epilogue:

"I think I'm going to ask the agency for a change, if all your missions are going to be so useless."

Stacy smiled and sat back in the co-pilots seat, glad for once that he was doing something for his fee.

"But Sam, you're leaving me so soon?" She teased.

"Business is over until we reach Ram, I was planning to cash in the rain cheque, but if you're leaving, it seems a waste of time."

"Sex is never a waste of time, no matter what you say Stacy, it's because of our man's attitude to sex that makes us your masters."

Stacy considered using her Laser on him, but had second thoughts. Firstly she couldn't fly, second he had a cute body. She sighed and sat upright.

"But Sam, it's the female who calls the shots, and

it's my hope that we will always do so. Are you staying?"

"Why not, I'll prove you wrong Stacy."

"No Sam, but maybe you'll learn a little something on the way."

"Does that mean I get you in my bed?" he asked with a leering grin.

She met his eyes with amusement. "No Sam, it means I get you in my bed...."

SUSAN KEIGHLEY



Mum's the Word!

## Freda Carter's Day

The sun came shining through the bedroom window as Freda Carter lay sleeping. It swept over the covers of her bed, and on to her face. It took her a few moments to collect her thoughts. There was something about today that was going to be different. What was it? She pondered for a while. Then it all came flooding back. Today was special. She felt a tingle of excitement all over her body. Today was to be her day of days.

At last, she had achieved something that would make the family sit up and take notice. She had waited a long time for something like this to happen - an occasion to talk about and remember - and it had taken quite a lot of doing too. Determination and willpower had been the secret. It would be the topic of conversation with her neighbours for weeks. Her picture would be in the papers. She knew that, because that nice reporter had been to see her yesterday; and she'd brought with her a young man to take some photographs.

People would be in and out of the house all day. She would be the centre of attraction, and she was certainly going to make the most of it. Freda sighed. If only this could have happened when she was younger. Funny how it had been her lifelong ambition to achieve fame. When she was a schoolgirl, she'd dreamed of being a great actress. But nobody in the family had ever been on the stage, and she didn't know how to go about it. Besides, her mother said: "People like us don't go on the stage." So that was that. Poor

Freda became a machinist instead.

However, seeing all the coats and dresses set new plans spinning in her head, and she dreamed of owning her own fashion house, where all the film stars would come to buy her exotic creations. It was a fine dream while it lasted. But then Harry came along, and Freda fell in love and got married. She left her job and didn't take another one.

When the children were small, she decided she would like to be a writer. She was sure she could write stories. Goodness knows, she made up enough of a nighttime to lull the children off to sleep. They seemed to enjoy them, and always clamoured for more.

But what with the cleaning and the washing and the endless shopping and more babies arriving she never seemed to get the time to put anything down on paper.

Fame, it seemed, was not to be for Freda Carter. The years went racing by. Life seemed to be set in a pattern which could never change. It looked as if she would spend her days as the woman in the end house.

But after today, it was going to be different.

Everyone would know who she was. The people would read their papers and they would see her name in it. All the neighbours would know, all the town - the country even. She was going to put on her best dress of course. It was laid out all ready.

But she was so nervous she couldn't fasten up the back. It was a good job that her daughter came up then to help. Or she would never have managed. Then she had to find her glasses; that was most important.

There was a lot of mail for her, she was told. But it was the newspapers that Freda wanted to see. Even that first cup of tea could wait.



Her hands were trembling as she unfolded the paper. She didn't have to look far. Her picture was there. On the front page. It wasn't a very good photograph, but anyone could tell who it was. And if there was anyone with any doubts, underneath the picture her name was printed for all the world to see. She began to read the caption:

"There will be big celebrations at the home of Freda Carter today, to celebrate her one hundredth birthday."

### EMMA PETERS

MUM'S THE WORD! was set up for women who prefer a daytime group - pensioners, unemployed women, women at home with small children, and anyone else who wants to come along. Some of the women who've come along are trying to write for the first time; others are just taking advantage of criticism from some one who'll take their ambitions seriously.

## Wythenshawe Writers

### Rejection

The man with the cigar,  
As he got in his car,  
Turned and said:  
"Obscenities, lewdness, thuggery  
And - be profane.  
That is the way to  
Instant fame.

I clutched my script,  
Whilst my heart took  
A trip,  
As I said to the man  
In the car:  
"What happened to elegance,  
Charm and wit?"  
Growled he behind his cigar:  
"I can't fill my coffers  
With your offers.  
These nouns are no  
Longer a hit.

On stage there's no room  
For charm or wit.  
As for elegance -  
Well! It's had it.  
Bare backsides, broads and bawds,  
That keeps my bankbook warm,"  
Said the man in the car,  
Lighting another cigar.

HANNAH CHETHAM



## October Afternoon Train

Tremendous relief to leave behind  
The city's staleness,  
To reach the plains and woodlands.  
We kiss the banks of a canal,  
And pause for breath.....

We pass a crop of utterly used cars;  
A long tunnel darkens our windows.

Steelworks sprawl around us;  
Mud-flats appear. Russet reeds  
Gleam in dyked fields: deserted stations  
Drop disconsolately away.

Rain-splashes create arteries on the swift windows;  
A caravan site smiles at us.

The sky has tossed away the sun;  
So little of the world is left.  
The sea, darker even than the night,  
Nudges towards us.

**STAN PRESTON**

Stan Preston died last September. His work was marked by an eye for beauty in unexpected places, as in this poem. A selection of his poetry is published in *IN ALL INNOCENCE*, available from Commonword at 50p.

## Autumn Equinox

This planet that we dwell on  
Glides through space  
With no apparent haste  
And despite it's size  
With quite amazing grace.  
And at this time and on this day,  
Heralded by blustering winds that play  
With summer's dying leaves  
And bring the spray  
From large white cumuli,  
Our planet gently tilts one way  
And hands our hemisphere over  
To winter's icy grip..

**BRENDA LEATHER**

A turn of the head, eyes glimpsed behind glasses  
Triggering open some door to my past.  
Suddenly, stranger, you tilt my world,  
I'm eighteen again and hating it.

Certain my years of hard-growing  
Would make it easy to reach you as a friend,  
And your face aches also from the strain?

**PATRICIA DUFFIN**



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## Home Truths

### Turn of the Tide

I stand and the sand stretches round,  
In mound and ripple and calm.  
The sea in the distance seems still,  
Stillness seems all around.  
I walk to the brink of the sea,  
And there as I wait, at last,  
I'm aware of a murmur of movement.  
Satisfied I turn and stride,  
Back along the sand.  
Yet as I turn to look again,  
The sea is as dark glass  
And round about is silent sand.

ELIZABETH THOMAS

STAN PRESTON

Stan Preston died last September. His work was marked by an eye for beauty in unexpected places, as in this poem. A selection of his poetry is published in IN ALL INNOCENCE, available from Commonwealth at \$10.

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## Home Truths

### Summer of Ghosts

Belfast,  
My ghosts haunt your streets,  
Overcast sky broods  
Above grey houses  
Full of emptiness.

Childhood memories trapped in each other  
I struggle to share, be close.  
Then wonder why the burst bubble stings.

### Trapped behind Glass

A turn of the head, eyes glimpsed behind glasses  
Triggering open some door to my past.  
Suddenly, stranger, you tilt my world,  
I'm eighteen again and hating it.

Certain my years of hard-growing  
Would make it easy to reach you as a friend,  
Did your face ache also from the strain?

PATRICIA DUFFIN



## Home Truths

### Experience

Folks said to Jack and me, "You're too young to be wed  
How're you gonna manage with no roof over yer 'eads?"  
Our answer was, "Get stuffed, it's our bed  
and we'll lie on it." So young and silly,  
We fell for our Billy,  
in a flat -  
and that's that.  
Well, the devil came  
born from such pain  
as I never knew - or will again.  
Those stitches were bitches,  
I couldn't bear put on me britches,  
and Billy, well, 'e got colic of an evening,  
and morning, noon and night were screaming.  
Me 'usband 'e got wild, and the neighbours were  
complaining.  
Oh, be quiet love, it's not you I'm blaming,  
it's that devil over there, Oh when will 'e stop  
moaning?  
He drives me so crazy, for sure one day I'll maim 'im,  
that flaming child, 'e never lets me sleep,  
I'm that tired and exhausted, God knows the hours  
I keep.  
I've cuddled 'im and nursed 'im, till in the end  
I weep  
and throws 'im in 'is cot and leaves 'im, 'e knows  
I can't stand it, but on and on 'e goes.  
'Ey Jack, is that them 'ammering on the wall?  
That bloody baby, soon we'll have no roof at all -  
it's five o'clock in t'morning,  
she says she'll have the law on us  
if we don't stop 'im bawling.

Cum 'ere yer sod and shut yer mouth  
and quit that rotten squalling.  
And then - I didn't stop to think  
I just flung 'im in the sink.  
'E stopped 'is crying then, an 'eld 'is breath,  
then went all pale and quiet - like death -  
God Jack - come quick, 'es 'it 'is 'ead.  
Get 'im to the 'ospital girl, 'e said,  
look at 'im bleeding. Full of dread  
we ran, we didn't mean no 'arm  
to come to 'im.  
Them doctors looked at us, suspicious like,  
looked all over Billy - poor little tyke.  
They took 'im from me, they said 'e was neglected,  
'es a battered baby, 'e needs to be protected.  
I'm on my own now 'es in care -  
no use counting on Jack  
'e went off and left me 'ere  
when the tongues began to clack.  
It's as much as I can bear  
when neighbo-rs stand and stare  
then turn their backs.  
I'll never 'urt a child again, I swear,  
if only our Billy 'ld mend,  
'e'd still love me, 'e'd be my friend.

**LIZ BRADSHAW**



## Newborn

Pain.

Blood red pain. So much pain,  
everywhere.

Drowning out the voices, soothing,  
sympathetic,  
until I am all alone.  
Blinded by the glare of the theatre lights,  
deafened by my own silent screaming.  
Somewhere, out of the pain filled void, I hear  
your voice, encouraging,  
loving.

Are you afraid too?

Peace.

A moments calm, a brief release.

A time to think, to gather strength.

A cool cloth passed across a burning brow,  
a moist sponge held,

all too quickly, to parched lips.

A small smile to tell you  
of my love and gratitude.

Pain.

Searing white pain.

Oh God the pain.

PUSH!

Voices, urging,  
commanding now.

A sudden wave of resentment.

What have we done

you and I?

We were a unit, you who lead and I,  
who followed.

There was no room for someone new,  
this someone who is tearing me apart  
in his fight for life.

PUSH!

Alone.

Through dimmed lights they have all gone away,  
these moments too precious to share.

Your arms around me,  
mine around him.

Wordlessly, we can only stare  
at him,

so tiny, so perfect,

his head still wet with the fluids of creation.

Pain? What pain?

There is only the ache

of loving, of needing to protect.

This breast, which you so often touched;  
that brought desire,

now aches with the need to fulfill.

Offered, it is accepted, innocently,  
trustingly.

We are a unit, we three.

We who made -

and he, who so newly is.

CHRIS CARSON



## Home Truths

### Choice

"How did you feel about the result? Did you want it to be positive?" asked Elizabeth.

She looked at the young woman sitting at the opposite end of the table. Small and plump (not fat), she had the sort of face one would describe as bonny - rosy cheeks, a small, snub nose, round hazel eyes with rather delicately shaped brows which appeared to be quite natural, as she wore no make-up, and a mass of tight brown curls. Elizabeth was tall, fair, slim and aged, as the young woman guessed correctly, about forty-five. She was dressed in a straight grey skirt and dark blue shirt blouse.

"I'm not really bothered. It would be nice to have a little girl, but my husband will say we can't afford a baby."

"Well, there seems no doubt you are pregnant. Look, the sample isn't changing in any way. It's completely opaque and milky."

It was Jennifer who spoke now. Quite young, she had bright red hair and wore jeans. The young woman looked. Jennifer was tilting the drop of urine and the drops of the two other liquids she had mixed with it on the black disc. She had been rocking it to and fro for the last two minutes. "How long is it, did you say? Nine weeks?"

"Yes."

"Usually, people know whether they want to be pregnant or not."

Jennifer looked at her curiously, but the young woman didn't answer. She seemed quite composed. She was thinking that the two women doing the pregnancy testing didn't appear to live in the house. Jennifer wore an anorak, and Elizabeth's coat hung round the

back of the chair on which she was seated at the table. They were in the front room of quite a large, old-fashioned house. Children evidently lived there. Papers with brightly covered scribbles on them adorned one wall, a toy car lay overturned on the rug before the fireplace, and a doll's pram piled high with dolls and stuffed animals stood in the corner.

"Come back and see us if you change your mind," said Elizabeth. "Can I have your first name please? It's just for our records, so that we know how many people have been, what the result was and how they felt about it. We don't want to keep any tabs on you personally. Oh, and could you tell us how you came to know about this service."

"I saw the notice in Graham's corner shop. My name's Mary."

Elizabeth wrote down the information in a notebook.

"Do I owe you anything?" asked the young woman.

"There's no charge, but a small donation would be welcome if you feel able to give it."

"Oh of course." She fumbled in her purse and handed 50p to Elizabeth, who got up and accompanied her to the front door.

"I hope you get your little girl," she said.

"Remember you can come back if you need any help."

She closed the door, and went into the kitchen where Jennifer was putting the pregnancy testing kit back into the fridge. It was twelve o'clock, and time to go. This was Marie's house. She was, like Jennifer and Elizabeth, a member of the local women's liberation group, and lent her front room for pregnancy testing every Saturday morning. Today, it had been Elizabeth and Jennifer's turn on the rota.

Now Jennifer said, "Did you believe her? It seemed a bit fishy to me."

"That's why I said she should come back if she needed help," said Elizabeth. "I didn't like to talk



about abortion, when she seemed to be accepting the situation."

All the same, as she made her way home, Elizabeth found herself thinking about the young woman. What did she really think about her pregnancy? Surely the situation was different now from the time when she had been a young married woman? Surely women didn't feel bound to pretend they wanted a child, just because they were married and relatively prosperous or did they? Perhaps they should have encouraged Mary to talk a little more. Before the test, she had told them that she had stopped taking the pill three months ago and had taken no precautions since then. That would seem to suggest that she did want a child. She, Elizabeth, must stop worrying about it. If she had any problems, hopefully Mary would come back to see them.

Laura made her way home through several streets in this suburb of a Northern industrial town. She was thinking, "How silly of me to give a false name. They couldn't find out who I was from my first name, could they?" She found these days that deception was becoming part of her life. She hid her confused thoughts and feelings from everyone, even from herself.

When she reached home, she made herself a cup of tea. Now, she sat at the table in the living room of her small semi-detached house, sipping it slowly. That had been her mother's answer to most problems.

"I'll make a cup of tea and then we'll see what we can do," she used to say. Laura missed her homely common sense. There seemed no one else she could turn to, but she couldn't have told her mother about this - about being pregnant, yes, but not all the other things connected with it. Her mother would have been quite rightly horrified. Then she, "Somehow or other, she would have helped, but she's dead and there's no one else to turn to. I can hardly talk it over with Veronica!"

She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. It had been a wedding present, and kept excellent time. It was now twelve thirty. John would soon be back

with Michael and David. Eleven years old Michael was playing football for his school team, and John had taken David, who was only six, to cheer him on. They would be back in half an hour, ravenously hungry. Michael ate as much as John these days. He was shooting up fast. He was going to be tall like his father. She had prepared the meat and vegetables before she went out. Now she went into the tiny kitchen to light the gas under the pans. There was stewed apple and custard for the sweet. She had intended to make an apple pie, but she felt too harassed and pre-occupied by her problem to make the effort. They'd be disappointed, but she couldn't help it. She went back into the living room and busied herself setting the table. The actions of her hands were methodical, but her thoughts were in turmoil.

Those women doing the pregnancy testing had been quite nice, but she hadn't really trusted them. She'd seen the notice advertising the service in a local shop. It was very convenient to be able to go on Saturday morning, because she worked during the week and after work it was such a rush getting home to prepare meals, finding time to do a minimal amount of absolutely essential housework. There wasn't much time to go to the doctor's. She was always anxious to get home quickly because Michael had to pick David up from primary school and the two boys were on their own for a time. There was no surgery on Saturday and she hadn't wanted to take time off work. Mr. Jackson the manager always looked askance, as though he didn't believe his employees had a real excuse to be absent. The test had been very quick - only two minutes. How could they be sure that it was correct? They weren't doctors. In her heart of hearts, she was sure herself, but she clung desperately to the hope that she might be wrong. She would go to see the doctor. Mr. Jackson would just have to lump it. Yes, she would get a proper test - and then? Then, if she was pregnant, she would think about what to do, but she needn't think about that just yet....no, not just yet.



She went into the hall and looked at her face in the mirror hanging there. Funny how normal she looked, in spite of the fear and anxiety in her mind. She mustn't let John know about her worries. She had been a little short tempered lately. John had said so the other day, but he hadn't seemed to notice that anything was seriously wrong. When she went back into the kitchen, she saw her husband and sons coming up the little garden path at the back of the house which led up to the kitchen door. She braced herself. They burst in.

"We won, Mum!" shouted Michael.

"Michael won, Michael won!" shouted David.

"Calm down now, calm down," said John, but he smiled at the boys. "Dinner ready?" he asked. "We're all starving."

"It won't be long," she said. She had always been a good wife and mother until..... If you had children, you owed them a good home with a mother inside it. She would have liked to have been just that, she thought - a woman at home with a lovely house, like the ones you saw on the adverts on television, always happy and smiling, amid gleaming floors and pans and the whitest of white washing. For that you needed a husband who earned a lot more than John. He was a draughtsman with the threat of redundancy hanging over his head. They managed to keep up the mortgage repayments on the house, to keep it in a reasonable state of repair, to pay the gas and electricity bills, to have a colour T.V. ( but they'd had the telephone taken out ) because she worked for a nearby firm which made electrical goods. She worked in the packaging department and had been working there for three years now. David had been lucky to get a place in nursery school, but she'd felt bad about that. She'd felt he should be with her until he was five and went to proper school, but the additional money had certainly been a help. She hated her job and yet she wanted desperately to keep it, particularly now when, even if he were not made redundant, John would probably be put on short time

working. She would, as she had told Elizabeth and Jennifer, have liked a little girl, and another boy

would be welcome (she liked babies) but it was only John who said it; she too knew they couldn't afford another child - even if it were John's, but they hadn't slept together for nearly six months.

She sat in her usual place at the table as they ate their meal. Through the window, she could see Jim and Veronica's almost identical house, immediately opposite. It seemed an age since her senses had quickened at the mere mention of Jim's name, let alone his appearance. She sometimes went over to see Veronica who was often alone with two small children in the evenings, but not as much now as she used to do. John usually sat watching television except when he went out twice a week for a drink with his workmates.

Jim and Veronica were relatively new to the district. They had moved in with a baby and toddler from another part of the country when Jim got a better paid teaching post at a College of Further Education the area. Veronica had been a teacher before the children arrived, and while she was working they had saved up quite a lot. They could afford to run a small car. Their house differed only from John and Laura's in having a garage built on the side. Veronica, tall, dark with strong, determined features, grumbled about being tied to the house, but Laura envied her and thought her a bit of a hypocrite. Nevertheless she liked her well enough. She found Veronica's company more agreeable than that of her other neighbours, many of whom had no children and seemed to resent her boys playing in the street.

She liked Jim too. He was kind and thoughtful. He helped about the house more than John and there was an easy going confidence in his manner which she associated with 'educated' people. Fair and of average height, he dressed casually, much more casually than John did for the office. Very often he didn't wear a tie- but he seemed to Laura always quite smart in some



indefinable way.

For the last six months, John hadn't wanted to make love to her. He was often tired and irritable these days. She didn't like his irritability, but she hadn't minded him not wanting sex. After twelve years, lovemaking was becoming like a routine. It wasn't exciting any more and she was often very tired herself. Still, she did miss it a little, but John refused to discuss it when she had tried once or twice. She didn't suspect him of being unfaithful. She knew he loved her. No, it was probably because he was worrying about his job and was over tired. She had read in a magazine that this kind of thing can happen. She didn't like to discuss it with Veronica. It wasn't something that was easy to talk about. Besides it would be disloyal, wouldn't it? Still, she found herself going across the road to see her new friend more and more frequently, mostly when Jim was out (he worked a lot in the evening) but sometimes he was there. He noticed her as a man notices a woman he finds attractive. He paid her compliments and she began to take a little more care with her appearance. She imagined him as a lover, but brushed such thoughts away almost immediately. She was not that kind of woman, was she?

It was the week before Christmas and she had gone over to babysit for Veronica who, living in the area as a school girl, had gone to a reunion at her old school. Jim had gone out to attend a meeting, and even if he called for a drink, he would be able to take over before his wife returned.

Laura sat, knitting a sweater for Michael and watching television. She was wondering whether to go back on the pill. Perhaps John didn't trust her to use the cap properly. She knew he didn't want any more children. Perhaps if she started taking the pill, he would make love to her again. She had stopped taking it and wasn't keen to start again. She felt she was tampering with the natural functions of her body and she had read about possible risks of cancer, or it thrombosis? But perhaps that was the price she

must pay.

When the door opened, she roused herself with a start, realising that she'd been paying no attention to the programme. Jim was back early. He came into the room.

"Hello Laura. The meeting finished early and I didn't feel inclined to go for a drink. How are you?"

How attractive he looked! He was about her age - nearly thirty - but he seemed a little younger.

"Fine," she said. She could hardly tell him her thoughts. "I'll be getting back."

"Oh do stay, if you want to watch the programme. I'm sorry I interrupted," he said.

"I wasn't watching properly," she said and rose to switch off the set, but she sat down again on the settee and he sat next to her.

"Well, how about a drink?" He looked in the side-board cupboard. "Vodka, Whisky, Brandy, Gin?"

"A gin and orange would be nice," she said.

He handed her a drink and poured himself a whisky. She was trembling a little. He must notice it. He must realise how she felt about him. She was making a fool of herself. When he kissed her - she responded passionately. All the pent-up emotion of six months seemed to be released. She thought, "I must stop this."

She was not only thinking of Veronica as she stayed in his arms, acting with an abandonment which she had not thought she was capable of, but also of the fact that she was quite unprotected, that her cap was at home in her bedside drawer. He was becoming more insistent, and suddenly she didn't care. She wanted him.

They had met once or twice since then, but there had never been another opportunity to make love, and when she missed her period the ensuing panic drove all erotic thoughts from her mind.

She remembered going home hurriedly that night just before eleven o'clock. Veronica was due back at midnight. She went up the stairs in her stockinged



feet (they had taken up the carpet to decorate) so as not to disturb John, who was already in bed and probably asleep. She should feel ashamed, ashamed at deceiving her husband and her friend, but all she felt was a sense of exhilaration. It had been so exciting-like when she was first married, but more so.

She thought as she got into bed beside her husband's sleeping form: "I must try to get John to make love to me. Then if I'm pregnant (please God, no!) he will think the baby is his." But that hadn't worked, and she'd just hoped against hope that she wasn't. After all, it wasn't inevitable.

The house across the road was empty. Jim and Veronica had gone with the children to Veronica's parents for the weekend. She wished she had never met them. She had been quite happy with her humdrum life. How could she have been so stupid?

"Stop this," she told herself. She would go to the doctor's on Monday and get a proper test. It was no use getting desperate until she knew for sure. She would put all thoughts of pregnancy out of her mind this weekend. Didn't people say that sometimes your period didn't come just because you were worrying?

It was time to clear away. All the time, she had been thinking about that evening before Christmas and its consequences, she'd been making non-committal remarks to the children and John as she served up the meal. This was quite usual on her part. The only difference was that usually she was worrying about mere trifles, such as the organisation of meals for the following week, or when she was going to turn out the bedrooms. Today, she intended to get on with the washing. There was Michael's muddy football kit to attend to. She pulled out the machine in the kitchen. John went out to mend the back garden gate, and the boys went out to play. She resolutely set about her task, and so engrossed herself in it that she actually did stop worrying and started to hum her favourite tune. She tried to behave normally over the weekend in the hope that when she saw the

doctor all this worry might be at an end. Apparently she succeeded, for no one seemed to notice anything was wrong.

She was astounded, when she did see the doctor on the following Monday, to find she was going to have to wait a whole week for the result. The other test had taken two minutes! It was a shock at first; but then she thought, "Now it's no use worrying for another week."

It was a week's respite, as it were, and she got through the next five days well enough. One or two people at work, noticing that she was rather more than usually preoccupied with her thoughts, would say in a bantering way, "a penny for them". She always managed a smile and a flippant reply, but panic threatened to take over with the approach of another weekend.

She decided to paint the bathroom, though it really didn't need it.

"I think you're mad!" said John. "Tiring yourself out." But he didn't offer to help.

That was what she wanted - to be so exhausted that she would have no energy left to worry - but as the moment of truth loomed nearer and nearer, the dread hanging over her like a dead weight seemed to grow heavier and heavier until she wished it would crush and annihilate her completely.

Even before the doctor spoke, she knew what he was going to say. "It's positive, Mrs. Ashton. I congratulate you. You'll be hoping for a girl this time, I suppose."

She forced a wan smile and nodded.

"Come and see me in another month, and we'll arrange for you to go to the ante-natal clinic." He wrote out a prescription. "And I think you need some iron tablets - one a day for the next few months." He handed it to her.

She got out of the surgery in a kind of daze. What was she going to do? It was the middle of the morning, and she should go back to work, but she



must have time to think. She turned her steps in the direction of home. The thoughts which had been going round and round in her head all the previous week in a confused muddle when she had hoped against hope that she would not have to face them now must be put in order. As far as she could see, there were three courses of action open to her, but they were all dreadful.

She could go back to the pregnancy testing women. Hadn't they said she should? But how could they help? Would they suggest an abortion? How would she be able to get one? The doctor seemed to take it for granted that she was overjoyed. Apart from the fact that her mind revolted at the idea, how could she get one without John's knowledge?

She could go ahead and have the baby. John would probably leave her, but even if he didn't he would never forgive her. Why should he? She couldn't forgive herself. If he hadn't neglected her, this might never have happened. But she knew, if she was honest, that she would have let Jim make love to her anyway. She was an immoral woman. She must never let him know whose child it was. She didn't want to ruin Veronica's life as well, but wouldn't Jim be suspected? After all, whom else did she know?

She could ask the doctor for some sleeping pills and take an overdose or if she couldn't get sleeping pills, aspirin would do. Then the nightmare would be over - for her anyway, but what about the children?

If she was going to try to get an abortion, she would have to act quickly, but how could she face it? Wasn't abortion murder? She had always thought it was wrong.

She had almost come to a decision as she turned the key in the kitchen door.

RUTH ALLINSON

## Home Truths

### Coupling

Like a piston  
Your body enters mine.  
And in my mind  
We're lying  
On the forecourt  
Of Victoria Station.  
Where I'm training  
My climax  
To arrive,  
Punctually,  
Before yours,  
So I won't miss it.

GAIL AINSWORTH

HOME TRUTHS, a women-only group, has been meeting for over two years now. We often write about personal feelings, but our work also reflects the world around us, whether it expresses pleasure in nature or rebellion at misery and oppression. We write both about ordinary life and the way life ought to be. You can find more of our work in the collection, HOME TRUTHS, published by Commonword at 50p.



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## Monday Night Group

### Mortuary Visit

'No-one comes before their time'  
he smiles paradoxically.  
I clench by corpses filed  
in cabinets like distant relatives,  
And spy trestled ghouls beyond -  
pensioners caught in a yawn  
Airing their brainboxes.

He smokes to mask the stench of innards.  
No secrets here, drained of humour  
Yellow fat shines through. Squeezing  
for oedema in a lung,  
I lean to see it oozing.  
Slicing a brain for tumours -  
Cortex, pons and cerebellum.  
Yes I nod ( too late for some ).

'Another cardiac failure, like flies  
this week. No need to wash knives'  
The belated surgeon winks,  
scraping a calcified aorta. See  
The coronaries restricted bore  
and that grey patch, an infarct  
Where no blood reached. Yes,  
the cause of death he gloats.

A youth is trolleyed in, blotchy blue,  
'Only capillary bleeding,' he assures,  
A likely drink and distalgesic'.  
and seems distressed by a body  
Almost as good as new, or enthusiastic  
to pry, I couldn't tell.  
He grumbles, 'The home office chap  
will have to do this one.'

Weighing floppy livers, he chalks  
results for each competitor.  
A helper slips hearts into a bag  
like one who owns a dog. As I  
Shed rubberwear, the mate sews scalps  
back, rough-mending with a bodkin.  
Five pms, a days work done by dinner,  
alright for some, I nod.

BOB WOOD

*The Monday night group is the longest established group at Commonword. New writers share experiences with members who've been writing for some time. As you can see from the work here, there is a range of interests and styles. Some writers are setting the record straight on their own experiences. Others are experimenting with styles of writing, often describing situations they haven't directly experienced.*

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## Monday Night Group

# Our Being One Another

"Come around anytime," she had said, her face looking into mine. "I'm always glad of a bit of company."

And suddenly this morning, between the sugar bowl and the cup, I had thought, 'Yes, why not?' and later, between the empty cup and the horoscope - 'Today feels like a good day. A good day for meeting people and making new friends'.

And so I left the big house with the dimly lit rooms and the dark landings and the smell of too many people living too close together, and walked down the street to the park. And did not look back.

It was late summer and already cold. A few scattered leaves, looking somehow strangely alive, still scurried along beside me where I walked and were caught and held struggling in fingers of thick grass that edged the paths.

"There's something about you," she had said. "Something innocent. I think it must be your eyes."

I had wondered about that for a long time, looking into mirrors and old photographs until I began to think that she must have been seeing someone else. The way you sometimes do when you look too closely into another person's face. The way you sometimes see yourself reflected there and are taken by surprise.

The park was green and empty and sad. It always seems to be such a lonely place when there

are no people there. As if the great, silent trees need our busy little comings and goings to reassure them. To free them and bring them to life again -

"How old are you?" she had asked, "Sixteen? Seventeen?" And I had answered, "Yes, in the autumn. The beginning of October."

The wind blew the tall grass that grew along the railings and around the bottoms of the trees where the blades of the mower didn't dare to go.

We had met in the doctors waiting room. And had both reached for the same magazine at exactly the same time. We had both laughed awkwardly. Embarrassed. And had begun to talk.

It was as simple as that - our first seeing one another.

I walked through the big iron gates on the opposite side of the park and took the piece of paper, on which she had written her name and address in large unsteady print, from my pocket. Standing on the pavement and resting the weight of the child growing inside me.

"It's these tablets," she had said. "I told him they wouldn't work. Told him I wanted the usual ones. Well, he'd better give them to me this time." And her eyes had flashed brightly for a moment. But then a small frightened look had crept in behind the defiance and I had turned back to the magazine and pretended to be reading it.

"It's the worry about money." She had said simply. "I'm nearly at my wits end."

But later, when she had been in to see the doctor, she had waved her prescription like a flag and smiled at me as I rose to enter the surgery.

"Don't forget and come and see me." She called as she went. And I had thought, 'Yes, yes I will some day.'

The house was boxlike and pretty and new. Like all of the other houses on the council estate. I knocked a little louder and waited again. And felt



as if I was back in the empty park with nothing but the silent trees surrounding me.

She seemed surprised when she answered the door - standing there with one hand on the latch and the other holding a bathrobe closed about her body. But her hair was dry and she looked much younger than I had remembered.

Two months can be a long time in the lives of strangers. So I said my name.

She hesitated as if she was uncertain, but I could see that she did not want me to leave. And then she made up her mind. "Come in," she said, "Come in."

I followed her down a short hallway carpeted in green with a large rubber plant on a stand, and went into the living room.

"Sit down. I wasn't expecting anyone to call. Should I make you tea or coffee?"

"Yes," I said, and sat in the armchair that faced the window looking onto the back garden."

"I'll put the kettle on then and change," she said, "I won't be a minute."

And then she was gone and I was left alone in the little living room with its bright colours and its central heating and a picture of a small boy with a tear stained face looking back over his shoulder into the room.

For some reason I couldn't look at his face.

She was gone for a long time and then I heard voices coming from the kitchen and then the back door opening and closing very quietly.

I sat in the armchair and looked through the lace at the window and saw a man walking up the garden path away from the house. He wore a long, grey overcoat and a hat. And he held his hat to his head with one hand - not cupped over the crown as some men do, but lightly with one finger and thumb tugging the brim down.

At the gate he paused for a moment and half turned around before walking away, and I saw that

the side of his face, which was partly obscured by the raised arm, was discoloured by a large purple birthmark and I remembered that I had seen him before on some other cold and windy afternoons walking alone in the quiet streets and looking at the girls who climbed in and out of car doors. Looking at their legs and at their faces. As if he were looking for somebody he knew. Or somebody he remembered. Somebody from so long ago that it might even have been in another life.

And I turned from the window and lighted a cigarette and waited for her to come back into the room.

She came in a little while later with tea in flowered cups and biscuits on a matching plate. But she hadn't changed, only tied a belt around her robe.

She saw me looking and smiled. "Well, at least I'm not on the tablets now. And I'm not worrying so much about money either." As if I were a grown up woman and we had been friends for a very long time.

I took a biscuit and placed it on the saucer with my cup, but did not eat it.

"How will you manage?" She asked me later. "After the baby is born."

"I don't know." I said, "I never really think about it."

"Well, you're going to have to think about it sooner or later." She told me, and she bent to pour herself another cup of tea.

And I thought, "Yes. I suppose I will."

Then we each smoked a cigarette and talked about other things until she leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes and I thought that she had fallen asleep.

I rose from my chair and went to open the window to let the smoke out of the room, but when I sat back down again, I saw that she was looking at me strangely.



"Take this," she said, taking some money from the pocket of her robe and handing it across to me. "Buy the baby something."

But when I hesitated she said, "Go on, it's alright." And then unexpectedly, "You're a pretty girl. You shouldn't have any trouble managing. Who knows, maybe you'll be helping me out one day?"

And I thought about that for a while. And while I thought she smiled at me, and I smiled back at her and then took the money and put it away. And it felt as if we had done a deal. In a way I suppose we had.

It was really just as simple as that - our first being one another.

KEVIN OTOO

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Monday Night Group

## Our Being Here

From this low hill overlooking the sea I stood and watched you walking on the beach below. Your coat unbuttoned and a scarf slung loosely about your neck - like an afterthought. And yet it had almost been winter, the sky bleak and grey and a cold wind ruffling the water.

"You'll catch your death," I had said earlier foolishly not thinking. Standing there on the boarding house steps with the cold light striking your face. And you had smiled a sad smile and asked, "Of what, a chill?" Then you had walked away alone. Leaving me to climb this small hill where I had been able to stand and keep you in sight.

Later, while you were walking, a gull had cried (or laughed - a desolate, haunting sound that echoes through me still-) and you had looked up startled as it wheeled away out over the water and then had stood facing the sea, your hands thrust deep into your coat pockets, your shoulders hunched slightly forward - surprising me yet again with their increasing frailty. And I remembered how once your long, dark hair had fallen onto shoulders that were firmer than these. But at that moment the years and your illness had hung upon you as heavily as a man's coat hangs upon a child and I had turned from you. And from your pain.

"Just remember me the way I was," you would say. "When I was at my best. Not at the end. Please not at the very end." And I would put on a brave face - knowing how difficult it was for you.

When I turned back to the sea again I saw



that you were almost directly below where I was standing. But you did not look towards me or give any sign that you were aware of my presence - and when I saw how close to the waters edge you were walking - and how it was splashing over your shoes and onto your legs - I had wanted to call out to you, but had checked myself instead. And you had continued to walk there, your head down as if studying something in the sand.

The day before, I had watched you walking in the same place, and the day before that (when we had first arrived and it had been raining - the sea running restlessly up on to the dark sand ) and in your every movement, your every stillness, I had sensed an impatience that you had never shown before, and standing on this hill I had come to be afraid for you - and had wondered at our being here.

"It's what I want," you had explained. "Just to be alone for a while. To be alone but to know that you are close by. Having you with me is all that is important now," and you had hugged me and I had kissed you on the forehead, the way that you would sometimes kiss me, unexpectedly, while I was reading a book or simply sitting pre-occupied with my thoughts. And it was then that I realised how our roles were changing and how more and more you looked to me for re-assurance and comfort. And I had hoped that I would be strong enough when the time came.

Below me on the beach the wind was blowing across the tops of the dunes and I began to notice how it continually tugged and pulled at the coarse grass growing there. Wilfully bending the grass beneath it and cruelly exposing the naked white roots - almost as if it hated the grass. And I realised that we too, continually expose one another's weaknesses... expose them with our strengths, and I was ashamed. Ashamed for all the

times that I had caused you pain. Caused you unhappiness.

And later, in the evening, sitting before the fire in the guest room, I had told you about the wind and the grass. How the one seemed bent on destroying the other. But you had just smiled across at me and asked, "Which of us is the wind then, and which of us the grass?"

And I wondered about that the whole night - listening to the sounds of your sickness, and your attempts to disguise them. And what troubled us most of all was why some of us can never secure themselves firmly enough in this life but always seem to have our grasp shaken loose. And I wondered if it was all just a matter of luck or if it is a gift that some of us are given and some of us are not.

But, seeing you there that third and final day, stooping to pick a pebble- or shell- from the sand at your feet and throw it out across the water with such a hopeless resignation, I knew that it would not matter for very much longer. And that sooner or later we all of us must come home to rest anyway.

And yet that night, returning in the train, we had the compartment to ourselves and you had been bright and cheerful - lifting your legs onto the seat and resting your head on my shoulder - and you had told me of your dreams. Your dreams for myself and for our child. And we had sat that way for a great many miles, contented and at peace with one another.

But that was a long time ago, and, thankfully your illness had taken you quickly, quietly - sparing us both the ultimate indignities and allowing me to remember you as you really were.

And now our child is a woman herself. And now as I stand here on this same low hill looking out across the beach, I can see her walking - walking at the very water's edge, just as you did -



and the memories come rushing back like the tide across the sand, and suddenly it is very cold in this place and I am afraid again and I have begun to wonder what it is that we are doing here.

KEVIN OTOO

Kevin Otoo describes these two stories as a beginning and an end, with a middle as yet unwritten. It may never be written.

## VOICES

VOICES is the national magazine of the worker writer movement.

It aims to bring together the best of working class writing.

In VOICES 25:

Women's writing  
Work from Tottenham writers  
Part Two of MICHAEL'S STORY,  
by Mick Weaver.

Available from 61, Bloom St., Manchester 1.  
Price 60p.

## Monday Night Group

### Childhood Memories

When I was young I used to thrill  
To the exploits of Tarzan and Buffalo Bill.  
As one swung from tree to tree,  
The other shot it out with bad men three.

Then came that softie Big Dangerous Dan.  
No wonder what he did, it never worked to plan.  
And oh that appetite, with a whole cow pie.  
If it was today, of starvation he would die.

Get Dennis the Menace, oh what a lad!  
The naughtiest boy a mum ever had.  
What a difference from Little Plum, the Indian boy.  
To become a great Brave, he tried every ploy.

But my favourite one was Roger the Dodger.  
I used to laugh because he was a right plodder.  
I have a friend who could be him, so it seems,  
The way he dodges work with his plans and his schemes

ANDY WILSON

Pure in voice and true in lyric  
'Love' was all she ever sang  
On a warm summer night, on the Love-Soft Radio  
On the Bal Boys Band.





## Monday Night Group

# On the Sugar Sweet Radio

I'd wished I was drinking,  
 When I heard her singing  
 But she got me stoned on a song  
 And I was reclining  
 The while I was listening  
 The music just took me along  
 And she could sing so sweet and pure  
 You couldn't fail to understand  
 All night long on the smokey Blue Radio  
 On the Bad Boys Band.

And I was in prison  
 When she gave me freedom  
 I gave her my mind, and she took me away  
 But she gave me more  
 In a room, softly sleeping  
 She beckoned to me, and I couldn't stay  
 She smashed all the shackles  
 With one wave of her hand  
 The nightjar on the Midnight Radio  
 On the Bad Boys Band.

And she was beside me  
 When she sang a love song  
 She touched my body with breathing  
 When she sang the blues  
 I shared a heartache  
 I knew the pain she was feeling  
 Pure in voice and true in lyric  
 'Love' was all she ever sang  
 On a warm summer night, on the Love-Soft Radio  
 On the Bad Boys Band.



I was crestfallen  
When the concert was over  
I hadn't thought it would end  
She said 'Goodnight'  
As the last chord was fading  
I thought I was losing a friend  
But even so, I was elated  
And I came to understand,  
That I'd shared a moment on the  
Sugar-Sweet Radio  
On the Bad Boys Band.

**SAMMY TIERNEY**

## Commonword Books

### NOTHING BAD SAID

Fifteen stories by North West writers, including Ruth Allinson, Kevin Otoo, Rick Gwilt and Sammy Tierney. Growing up and growing older, making friends and struggling for existence are among the themes of this powerful new book.

96 pages. £1.20 + 30p postage.

### HOME TRUTHS

Selections from the women's writing group of the same name. Includes work by Brenda Leather, Ruth Allinson and Patricia Duffin.

72 pages. 50p + 25p postage.

## Monday Night Group

### Night of the Werepig

Locking yourself in the cupboard,  
It's that old mother Hubbard syndrome,  
You're alone  
And there's no need to fetch the dog a bone.

Grimy glass in peeling frames,  
Turns the night bright with dead fly stains,  
The rattle of the door chains  
You're locking yourself in the cupboard again.  
To the budgies chirrup you take syrup of figs,  
Tonights the night you just don't dig,  
The night of the Werepig.

Later, by the refrigerator,  
Clutching that broken calculator  
And staring out at a rooftop scene,  
It's the split spleen scene of a surgeons dream,  
It's the biting breath of a stifled scream,  
It's all your nightmares grown too big,  
It's the night of the Werepig.

Silent footfalls in the hall  
And all the suspense of a kick in the balls,  
A gradual pain closes your eyes-  
On lullabies and babies' cries,  
Outside a policeman dies  
And no one tries to help him.



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All the vastness of the past,  
Never seemed to be this bad,  
They stab and steal, rape and run,  
Smack, crack, attack at the point of a gun.  
'Calling all cars, now hear this..'  
This is the night of the Werepig.

Emerging to the surging of blood in your ears,  
All your tears, all your worst fears,  
All those years spent in arrears,  
It now appears are over.

They've flattened your flat,  
They've rhinoed on your lino,  
Littered up your litter bin  
And polished off your wino,  
You can't even have a smoke  
Because they've pissed on all your cigs,  
The dirty rotten bastards,  
The night of the Werepig.

**CARL HOLT**

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## Monday Night Group

### Out of work Navvy

I've had dreams that were best  
Kept a secret,  
I've had dreams written big  
In the sky,  
I've had dreams that were  
Set to make history,  
Once enough people stopped  
To ask why.  
I've had dreams that belonged  
To my grandmother's brother  
And James Keir Hardie and me,  
And they are nearer the dreams  
Of an out-of-work navvy  
Than the dreams of a right-wing M.P.

I've worked on the buildings  
Like Tressell,  
Seen the future with a little  
More hope,  
Been pieced up by  
Taylor Woodrow  
Who like all their reds  
On a rope.  
So although there's been times  
When I've been unemployed,  
It's hardly by choice  
As you see,  
But I'd sooner be an out-of-work navvy  
Than a right-wing labour M.P.

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I've stood my ground in  
Red Lion Square,  
While policemen were  
Drawing their clubs,  
And I've always gone to  
My union branch  
And not just for paying my subs.  
I've distinguished bandits from bosses,  
Though the difference is one of degree,  
And I'd sooner look like an out-of-work navvy  
Than act like a right-wing M.P.

We've elected the cream  
Of our number,  
Who call themselves  
Labour men,  
They've worn their best suits  
To the best bar in London  
And never been  
Sober again.  
On employment and housing they've failed us,  
Now they add to the injury,  
And insult the poor out-of-work navvy  
By comparing him with an M.P.

RICK GWILT

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## Monday Night Group

### The Move

1962. The year of the Big Move, when all over Manchester thousands of families migrated to the outskirts of the city in an exodus that hadn't quite been seen since the second world war. For us children, uprooted from Hulme, Ancoats, Ardwick and many other districts, it was what the promise of the Promised Land was for the Jews.

I can remember so vividly the excitement that flowed like an electric current in the children of Hulme, and also the packing of meagre possessions in cardboard boxes.

A typical conversation that would flow when your mother took you out shopping went something like this:

"I see Mrs. Flanagan has moved to Wythenshawe, got a four bedroom house and a garden as big as Piccadilly Gardens. And to top it all she's got an inside toilet and a bath...."

The 'oohs' and 'ahs' when all these were mentioned, and the look of pure delight of these young working class mothers created in their children a strong excitement we had never felt in our lives.

It was as if the whole district had won the pools and whoever got the key to their new home, it was as if the man from Littlewood's pools had suddenly been; and once somebody had got the key, there was a mad scramble to sell blankets, suits, old tables, to buy a three piece suite "that would look so nice in our new home". Even my own father was not unaffected by this and would sit my brother and two sisters on his knees and lean back on our ancient couch, and his tired blue eyes would momentarily look young as he explained about having a garden where you could, of all things, even grow your own food; and I, John, aged nine, the



oldest, would not have to wash my sisters and brother in the tin bath by the fire any more, and we would all have a bed to ourselves to sleep in.

I remember so well the same night, sandwiched between my sisters and brother, dreaming about the move: "Ay-ye, Ay-ye, my own bed." Truly we were rich.

As the sun rises, the day of the move also came.

I am sure not one of us in the house slept all night long. When the huge removal van came, I was given the job of carrying the crockery to the van, and my nine year old chest swelled with pride that I was given such a major part in the exodus.

Once everything was firmly in place on the van, and I was in the back of the van, with the rest of the children, and Mum and Dad were sat in the front, the driver retorted to my father: "You've left the front door open." My father looked, and quickly jumped from the cab, and said to my mother, "Just think, Mary, it's the last time I'll shut this door."

"Don't be daft, Jimmy, come on. The driver's waiting."

It was just like a scene from an advert for Hamlet; he calmly lit a cigarette, and with a crash that nearly took the rotting wood from its hinges, he gave it a volcano of a kick that lodged it in place at a crazy angle. Of course, we all thought it highly hilarious, and the girls started singing 'Sitting in the back seat with Fred' as we moved slowly out of the street. My brother spotted Richardson, the street bully, and started screaming all sorts of obscenities at him. I think he only plucked up the courage because he knew he would never see him again. "You bastards," he managed to get out, running alongside the van. "Get stuffed!" we happily replied in unison, and merrily carried on our way to the promised land.

**JOHN WARD**

## The Write Crowd

### The Chair

The chair stands there,  
With its scratched legs,  
Its worn out seat  
And its solemn stare.

Somebody sits down,  
It collapses and breaks.  
The end of a chair?  
The end of another tree.

**ALEC WILLIAMSON**



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## The Write Crowd

### The AshTray

The ash tray  
Sits on the table,  
Crumpled fag ends  
Precariously balanced.  
I want to throw them away.  
But all I can do is stare.

ALEC WILLIAMSON

THE WRITE CROWD, based in Firwood, has stopped meeting recently, due to a shortage of members. But Commonword is still interested in doing work with children and young people, in youth clubs, amongst community associations, etc. THE WRITE CROWD had its own magazine; we would like young people to be able to use our facilities to talk about the things that matter to them, and that the rest of us ought to hear.

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## Rochdale Writers

### Monday Monday

Overslept and so much to do  
I don't know how I'll ever get through.  
Better laugh, no time to cry.  
The days are quickly slipping by.  
In between washing and sewing I don't know whether  
I'm coming or going!  
A broken lace, a lost shoe,  
Dear, I have so much to do,  
There's a list of telephone calls to make  
And I must return that borrowed plate.  
The ironing's piling up very high,  
There's whites to wash, woollies to dry,  
The rabbit's running around in the shed,  
Wondering why he hasn't been fed.  
The Gerbil gave in - he just dropped dead,  
I found him with the fluff under the bed.  
I need to get on with the vaccing and yet  
I haven't finished the packing.  
The library books are overdue,  
I won't worry about a day or two,  
I'll just unwind and sit and think  
Oh no! that's all I need.. spilt ink.  
Now the carpet needs shampooing,  
There's a broken vase needs re-glueing,  
The elastic's gone in Kathy's gym pants.  
I know I haven't watered the plants.  
The fishes haven't yet been fed.  
I really think that's enough said.

PATRICIA HOWARD



## Going Solo

I arrived, invitation in hand,  
My host just opened the door,  
Said "Hi-Ya", turned and left me  
Feeling very uncertain, unsure  
Whether he knew who I was.  
Because as I entered the lounge,  
With my coat hanging over my arm,  
No one noticed that I was around.  
Had I read the invitation wrong?  
My mind became full of doubt,  
I couldn't manage to catch an eye,  
Nor was it manners to shout.  
So after waiting and wondering,  
I decided to call it a day,  
Left without even saying "Hello",  
Put my coat on, turned round  
Came away feeling sad.

The next invitation I got,  
What a different reception I had,  
The host's approach, with a beaming smile,  
The warmth of his hand as he enclosed mine,  
His courteous greeting, seemed to emphasise  
His way of receiving, "How very nice,"  
"What a pleasure it was to welcome me."  
My uncertainty vanished and became security  
Through his sincerity.  
So I stayed, feeling happy.

ELLA TAYLOR

## Winter of '82

Snow swirling twisting twirling,  
Drifts piling high,  
Wind keening, trees leaning  
'Neath a leaden sky.

Lots of woollies, cold wind bullies  
Those who venture out.  
Shoes not gripping, feet slipping  
Gracelessly about.

Cheeks glowing, snowball throwing,  
Children love the snow.  
Old folk grumble, fear they'll stumble;  
Wearily on they go.

Cars buried, drivers worried.  
Warnings they ignore.  
Commerce halted till roads are salted,  
Fresh food prices soar.

People shocked as roads are blocked.  
There's chaos, pain and loss.  
This land so proud can soon be cowed,  
When Nature shows who's boss.

PEGGY DUNN

Rochdale Writers brought out their own book this year. Much of their work is affected by a strong local pride, and some of it is in dialect. Recently, they have branched off into two groups, one of which is still looking for somewhere to meet.



# Commonword Books

## DOBROYED

*Dobroyed* is the story of one year in an approved school. It is the result of years of struggle by the author to put down as honestly and accurately as possible his experience there, and overcome his lack of conventional spelling and grammar.

£1.20 + 35p postage.

## CLOUT!

'The story behind the bruises'. Battered women in Manchester refuges talk about their lives. Plus practical advice about leaving a violent man.

50p + 25p postage.

## LIFETIMES

A series of seven booklets written by people in Partington, an overspill town outside Manchester. They pool their experiences from widely scattered childhoods to the present day, talking first to each other but ultimately to us all.

£2.50 the set + £1.00 postage.  
35p per booklet + 25p postage.

All books available from:

COMMONWORD, 61 BLOOM ST., MANCHESTER 1.  
GRASSROOTS BOOKSHOP, 1, NEWTON ST., MANCHESTER 1.

Grassroots are starting a worker writer section, containing a range of books by working class people

## MEETINGS

Mondays, 7.30 p.m.: COMMONWORD WORKSHOP, 61, Bloom St., M1. Everyone welcome.

Tuesdays, 7.30 p.m.: HOME TRUTHS, women's group, at Stretford library every other week. Ring Ailsa or Joan at Commonword for details.

Wednesdays, 7.30 p.m.: ROCHDALE WRITERS at Balderstone Community School, Queen Victoria St., Rochdale.

Thursdays, 11.00 a.m.: MUM'S THE WORD! women's group at the Slade Lane Neighbourhood Centre, Longsight. Creche available.

Fridays, 11.00 a.m.: WYTHENSHAW WRITERS, at Brownley Rd. Social Centre, Wythenshawe.

Any other groups who would like to join in Commonword activities are welcome to get in touch with us.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover	Helen Whitworth
p. 50	Al Binx

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Thanks to the North West Arts Association,  
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 assistance.

Cover  
 50 p. 70  
 Alison Watworth  
 At Risk

ILLUSTRATIONS

Any other group who would like to join in  
 Commonword activities are welcome to get in touch  
 with us.

Friday, 7.00 pm: WYTHENSHAW WRITERS, at  
 Wymsey Rd. Social Centre, Wymshaw.

Thursday, 11.00 am: WOMEN'S THE WORDS WOMEN'S  
 meet at the Linda Lane Neighbourhood Centre,  
 Mansfield, Creche available.

Wednesday, 7.30 pm: ROCHDALE WRITERS at Balder-  
 stone Community School, Queen Victoria St.,  
 Rochdale.

at Rochdale Library every other week. Rana Alisa  
 or Joan at Commonword for details.

Monday, 7.30 pm: COMMONWORD WORKSHOP, at  
 Bloom St., M1. Everyone welcome.



WRITE ON is a regular magazine published by Commonword, a working class writing and community publishing project. The stories and poems contained in it are written by working people in the Manchester area. Commonword is not a commercial publisher: we make no profit and the writers are unpaid. Our aim is to encourage writing by people who have been traditionally taught to think of literature as something left to their 'betters'.

We hold regular workshop meetings, at which writers and would-be writers get together to read and discuss their own work. We publish books and booklets of this work and we organise public readings. At present we help to run or are in contact with six writers' groups all of which welcome new members. For details see inside the magazine or phone our office for information.

COMMONWORD is a member of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, c/o Bristol BroadSides, 110 Cheltenham Road, Bristol 6.