

## Patchwork Poems - Personal Notes

Art is by its nature indulgent of the artist whether he or she is good or bad at it. To paint, to write, to sculpt, to sing, to dance and to act, in whatever form, the artist is expressing a view of a subject which satisfies a need in that person and provides an interpretation of the world around him or her. I make no apologies for my attempt to express some views of my own. On the contrary I feel privileged that my life has given me the freedom to have some time to do so and equally important, has given me the wonderful experience of knowing people who have inspired me to write. And it's those who I thank.

Poetry is the neglected and poorest of the artistic media. A poem is designed to allow the reader to engage in an interpretation of his or her own within a certain frame set by the poet. That frame ranges from simple text where the poet's meaning is easy to ascertain to the more complicated prose where meaning is obtuse or possibly no meaning is intended but just the flow and sound of the words. In between there are all sorts of rules and regulations (alliteration, internal rhyme, sprung rhythm) most of which I break.

By way of setting I have written a few words before each poem to give some background as to how each one came to be written. I hope you enjoy them.

## Benches

Have you ever taken time to study the inscriptions carved into wooden benches in a local park? On Richmond Hill, falling gently to the river Thames is a beautiful public terrace garden. On its upper level is a row of thirty or more benches. Further down into the gardens there are pairs of benches placed together and then the solitary bench hidden in a more quiet corner.

This poem was inspired by the heartfelt messages written on those benches – most of course are very short and simple, but they all tell a story – and this is another.

## Benches

Some stand in a row, transfixed in time and space  
Wood arms touching wood as they secure their place  
In prime position perfect to grip the past  
Fondly remembering lives that went too fast.

Others live alone beneath a tree unseen  
Quietly contemplating what might have been  
Shielded and safe from the worst of sun and rain  
Yet sadly unfulfilled, hiding their life's pain.

"Jane loved to sit here enjoying every day"  
And when she died her children needed to say  
"That she had owned this spot", that is how they felt  
Shame they did not know the cards that life had dealt.

Tom Smith walked his dog "Together resting here"  
His friends knew him live his life without a care

Full of laughter handshakes easy charming rhymes  
Making them smile, cry, having the best of times.

They often meandered through the garden ways  
"Bearing sunny smiles on the wettest of days"  
Long hours together "In this place their love grew"  
How much they meant to each other, no-one knew.

Two benches along, Jane's husband sat "In peace"  
Not quite besides her but yet in easy reach  
He lived longer so they lost a seat to share  
Their children did not think he would mind this chair.

Part hidden under branches of an oak tree  
Tom told his perplexed friends what his words should be  
"Had I courage I would have taken your hand,  
Jane, and sat with you forever on this land".

Some stand in a row transfixed in time and space  
Others sit alone within a quiet place  
Those with a secret love have nowhere to rest  
But the benches witness they gave life their best.

## Song of the Orphan Elephant

In Kenya there is a wonderful lady, who has spent more than half a century rescuing and looking after orphaned elephants and other animals. Her name is Dame Daphne Sheldrick and in February 2012 she published her life story in a book called "An African Love Story". There was some fanfare in the London Sunday newspapers at the time and I happened to read a well written piece in the Sunday Telegraph about her and her work with orphaned elephants.

It sometimes takes an exceptional human being to make one realise how savage we are as a species and frankly how unworthy we are as the dominant inhabitants of this planet. So often we ignore the obvious, that there is intelligence in animals, kindness, love and order in the societies they try hard to create for themselves despite the cruel intrusions we make into their lives and habitat.

The story of an elephant, left orphaned and found by the dead body of its mother, ravaged for her ivory tusks, moved me to tears.

And I thought if he could express himself like us, what would he say?

## Song of the Orphan Elephant

I have less right to live than you

Beneath wide Heaven's floor and Earth's blue sky

No shame in that, you know it's true

So many reasons why we have to die

But curse the shot that broke her frame

Acceptance of our lot brings little joy

With anger, sadness, searing pain

In closing eyes she left an orphaned boy

I have less right to walk than you

In yellow fields of shrub midst trees of green  
It's just a fact you know it too  
Please no tears for me and what might have been

But curse white horn that means so much  
To those that kill and tear it from her face  
Not even is a mother's touch  
Worth the brightest day alone in this place

I have less right to grieve than you  
Yet grieving seems to be a part of me  
So many once but now so few  
Long memories of how it used to be.

But curse the help that comes so late  
When she is gone and I am left alone  
This orphan's care is now my fate  
Not the open savannah of my home

I have less right to dream than you  
Though dreaming is for me the only way  
To brace myself and make it through  
The loneliness of yet another day

But curse the dreams that man has brought  
So cruelly to a world of gentlest love  
Scream; scream against the sadness they have wrought

Which we could not have dreamed of

I have less right to love than you  
Our species cannot show how deep we feel  
Though loving less is hard to do  
Understanding of love's loss is just as real

But curse the love you show to me  
Kindness does not mitigate your race  
Strength and wisdom should make you see  
It's your duty to help us share this space

I have less right to cry than you  
So crying here I lay my head to die  
And now I see small specks of blue  
Between heaven's wide floor and Earth's grey sky

And

From that place elephants tears fall  
Rain crossing rainbows colours all along  
While thunder roars the mother's call  
In answer to her dying orphan's song.

AJ.Young – March 2012

## WW2 Letters

I was talking to a friend one day about how the world has changed so fast and so many of us probably do not understand what it would have been like without instant messaging. I referred to the telexes I used to know when I first started work, and how the ticker tape worked overnight to send short messages around the world especially useful for the shipping business. He told me how, as an executor, he had found a box of letters in the loft of his Aunt's house - they were all written during the Second World War. The funny thing he had noticed was how they were all numbered so that the reader and the writer could connect the letters to each other - so often at that time the war time post was such that letters never arrived or, if they did, they would not follow any chronological order.

This obvious circumstance gave me the idea of for the next poem – it's a bit more of short love story really between two ordinary people struggling with separation at a time when world events seemed more important than any individual lives.

### WW2 Letters

My Dear May

Here is the first of many letters yet to come  
For sake of good order let's call it number one  
I'm fine on ship but missing you so much my dear  
Can't tell you where I am but glad that you're not here  
It's freezing cold on watch and spend my time all day  
Looking at the grey sea and whiling time away  
With thoughts of you and the hot summer we just had  
This sodding war's enough to make you really mad  
My mates are great and we're innit all together  
But God please I hope it doesn't last forever  
Must go now back to watch, wish I was hunting whales  
These sneaky U boat killers don't have any sails  
So love you dearest May, keep those home fires burning  
And in this wet grey place nothing quells my yearning

For you May

Dearest Ray

So pleased to get your letter number one, here's mine

We're all ok, hope this finds you more than fine

No point in telling you how much we miss you Ray

There's Joe to feed and I just get on with the day

Especially now as I've got some good news for you

That summer was hot; one's now going to be two

I hope it'll be a girl, curly hair and brown eyes

Just like you, dreaming, always looking at the skies

But you hold your dreamy eyes searching that grey sea

That's your only job now that you are away from me

Keep yourself, your mates, your ship safe and heading home

I would not forgive you if we are left alone

So take care Ray

Dearest Ray

Letter number two, sorry Ray bad news you see

Lost our baby girl, just wasn't meant to be

Can't write more just now but I'll be fine, you know me

Hope you're watching carefully for me that grey sea

I love you Ray

My Dear May

Just got your second letter, this is number three,

Can't tell you how upset May, I am so sorry

Had no idea that you were in the family way

Until the Captain gave me your letter today  
Like you she would have been a beauty to behold  
More precious in my arms than all of the King's gold  
Than everything that we are told we're fighting for  
She would have given meaning to this bloody war  
But most important now dear May is how you feel  
Brave girl I know you'll pull through, though the pain is real  
Won't be easy, for you there was the joy of dreams  
For me, not knowing, life's not ever what it seems  
Things ain't been too bad here though we hate the clear night  
They come in packs then like wolves searching for a fight  
I hope the food and clothes are somehow getting through  
It'll be worthwhile if it's finding its way to you

My dear May.

Dearest Ray,

Hope you got all my letters this is number four  
Spend lots of time in the hall waiting by the door  
For letters that don't come or coming all too late  
Are mixed up like our jumbled lives and twisted fate  
The bombs are falling now like rain that doesn't dry  
Drenching the town and children too afraid to cry  
But Joe's safe thank God on a farm somewhere in Wales  
Just hoping you can hide in those Atlantic gales  
Keep well now, wrap yourself in deepest darkest black  
Stay wide awake, won't be long now before you're back

God bless you Ray

Dear Mrs Davies

We regret to inform you that your husband, Ray  
Missing, presumed dead, on another bloody day  
Feared lost in action somewhere on the high seas  
He did his best, you have our deepest sympathies  
Yours, on behalf of the War Office

My Dear May

Number five, today I had the finest of days  
Clear blue sky, white horses racing over the waves  
Honestly May, I feel a calmness with the sea  
Touching sky, never thought my mind would fly so free  
And I'm going to fly one day May, Oh what the heck  
Despite boots so salty their crusted to this deck  
Jumping off this ship I'll reach for the silvery moon  
Shut out it's light, save my ship and be with you soon  
Promise you like a bird surfing clouds in the sky  
Now stop worrying May I'm not going to die  
So if you see a pigeon flying high above  
Don't duck dear it's only me bringing all my love  
To you May

Dearest Ray

This letter has no number now, it's just for me  
One I never wanted to come, just has you see  
And then your lovely number five arrived today

I had to write these unread words, so much to say  
It made me cry and laugh through tears and cry again  
You were my husband my lover and my best friend  
I'll be feeding the pigeons in Trafalgar Square  
Little Joe and me have plenty of time to share/spare  
Thinking of you Ray

AJ.Young – 25<sup>th</sup> March 2012

## White Wolf of the Matterhorn

The ballad of the White Wolf was written on Christmas Eve from a chalet in Switzerland at the foot of the Matterhorn. Friends were coming for dinner and there were gifts under the Christmas tree, but I wanted to give them something a little more personal – so I woke early that morning and wrote about a shepherd boy, a dog and a wolf.

The Matterhorn brings both beauty and sadness. Many brave people have died on its slopes and ridges. The hero in this though is the wolf, its strength and beauty matching that of the mountain

### White Wolf of the Matterhorn

Each Christmas Eve, the furry mice that live in Old Zum See

Gather around the fireplace to talk about the day

When long ago, a shepherd boy quite lost in winter snow

Lay dying in the cold night air beneath a moonlight's glow.

He had struggled up the valley, in search of one lost goat

But as the night grew colder still he shivered in his coat

Climbing slowly ever higher he feared his father's scorn

If he went home without it alone on the Matterhorn.

Yet he could go no further, falling deeper in the snow

With his faithful dog beside him and urging him to go

Back to the warm village fires, to his mother and his home

Waiting in the kitchen with a hot supper and a bone.

The bitter cold and tiredness dragged him closer into hell

Until he sent his dog away towards the old church bell

To find the help he knew he must to save his sorry soul

And off she ran down to the church intent to make her goal.

They say that from the Matterhorn, a grey wolf found him there

Sleeping in a snow drift, barely breathing the freezing air

She walked up to him quietly and nudged him in the arm

And seeing him slowly dying, lay down to keep him warm.

It was many hours later when the moon was laying low

Rescuers came up the mountain to see a horrid show

Above the boy a mighty wolf with fangs close to his throat

Lay over him, her thick grey fur covering like a coat.

They shouted "No", as the boy's father raised his gun and cried

"Leave him beast, I'll hunt you forever if my son has died"

And with a roar like cracking snow, the bullet left his gun

A fatal blow which struck the wolf, too frightened now to run.

The father rushed towards his son the gun above his head

Ready to strike the wolf to make sure she was really dead

But then she turned and ran away, licking the boy once more

Her only crime to keep him alive on the snowy floor.

And when she ran across the snow, she seemed to disappear

The greyness of her bloodied fur then turning white with fear

In shock men stared in disbelief hiding tears in their eyes

The grey wolf morphing into white with tortured howling cries.

As they circled the shepherd boy, his father crouched above

Taking his father's hand whilst his dog wagged her tail with love  
The boy told how the wolf had come and kept him warm all night  
And thanks and peace were needed now with no more need to fight.

Each Christmas Eve, the furry mice that live in Old Zum See  
Sit listening to the noises that bring the Christmas Day  
If you listen carefully you will hear the Matterhorn  
It's the howl of a white wolf, mighty, lonely and forlorn.

AJ.Young