

I SING
THEREFORE
I AM



VOLUME
ONE

I Sing, Therefore I Am

First published as an e-book in 2022 by Oxford Brookes Poetry Centre
Oxford Brookes University OX3 0BP

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Design by davidknightdesign.com

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THE **POEMS**



listen to the poets reading their work at
carerspoetry.org

Anonymous

Why?

Why don't I paint?
Or read?
Or write?
What makes me persevere?

The immediate is easier
The washing
The cooking
The ironing
Even the shopping

The days pass in the immediate
Emails are answered – sometimes
Dad is well fed and cared for
Is he always comforted?
Is that also crowded out by other immediates?

It's easier to be doing
Than being
But it's in being that we are fulfilled.

Anonymous

The Bedroom

Walking in
I see how often he may have been
 Up in the night
Looking
Are the curtains drawn back yet?
I carry the cups of tea
Say "Hello Dad!"
Put the cups on the table
Open the curtains
Report on the weather
Put out the tablets
"How are you Dad?"
"Did you have a good night?"
"Here's a cup of tea for you"

Listen to a song
 Or two songs
Reminder - "Here's your tea"
We drink our tea together
Looking at the photos on the wall
Remembering

Anonymous

Glasses Cases

Glasses cases

Pick up – open – examine – close – put down

Do you keep money in them?

Try the glasses

Reading or “walking about” glasses?

How to tell?

Where is the money?

Open again and have another look

Close – put away

But

Where is the money?

Anonymous

My Owner

I sit on the table
I'm black
I have a friend on the table
He is blue
We both contain glasses –
 Or spectacles, to be clearer

My owner forgets
He thinks at times
That I keep money
Not glasses

Picked up
Put down
Open
Closed
Puzzled

Anonymous

Colours

What is pink?

Mum's cardi is pink. Reminder of the last Christmas

What is red?

The primula, planted now in the garden, taken from the grave

What is blue?

Forget me nots – everywhere. Memories. Everywhere

What is white?

The bath is white, clean and bright

What is yellow?

The houseplant. Brought by a friend. Growing

What is green?

The plant in the basket, on the table. Growing and growing

 Soon dad won't be seen

What is violet?

Lilac is violet. The miniature tree, present for mum, once upon a time

What is orange?

The bowl of tangerines on the sideboard – bright burst of colour

 Now, on the sideboard

Anonymous

Singing In The Morning, Or In The Night

The singing starts the day
Lying in bed, alone
Singing is the way
Of connecting.
I sing, therefore I am

Another day, a new day
Alone, but alive
Remembering the day
Singing for her
Maybe she hears, still alive?

Anonymous

Loss and Gains

He has forgotten
So I say it again
He has forgotten again
So I say it
Again

I laugh, make it fun
On a good day
But not always
It's not fun
Always

It's shower day today
"I don't need a shower"
He says, everytime
Persuading, encouraging,
Showered!

He loves the photos
Looks every morning
Forgets he's seen them before
We remember
Together

The loss becomes gain
Time to remember
I will never forget
Trains, family, gardens
Life gone by
Gains from the loss

Dust

The morning stops me
With its list of chores.
The merry-go-round of washing, clothing, feeding.

The afternoon stops me
With its speckled tasks,
Dots of domesticity and responsibility
Cover me like dust.

The evening stops me
With its hushed quiet.
Opens a space for the worries and cares
I've spent the whole day brushing away.

The threat of truth stops me
With both her darkness,
And her promise of light.

Listless

1. Take the washing out
 2. Put more washing in
 3. Decide where. To wear. My clean clothes
 4. Decide who cares.
-
1. Make my lunch
 2. Make kids' lunch
 3. Decide tuna, cheese, or ham
 4. Decide why I'm so empty.
-
1. Fill the new vase
 2. Unload the dishwasher
 3. Decide whether I like that vase
 4. Decide whether I know what I like, any more.
-
1. Take paintings to be framed
 2. Take a trip to visit a friend
 3. Decide which frames look best
 4. Decide to frame my life differently.
-
1. Live as a writer, confidently
 2. Let go of anger, rationally
 3. Decide which view of life to take
 4. Decide to care, less. List, less.

Centred

Acid in my throat,
A reflux; my world in flux
As it stings and pricks.
The breeze, as it whispers past,
Reminds me of an opening.
A vast expanse of blues and greens
To counter the bitter coffee,
A morning ritual bent out of shape.
The comfort of cooking; cosy blankets
Now all in shadow.
The family calendar helps give structure
To a life both adrift and fixed in place.
Flowers once bloomed, now dried out,
Surprise me with their death –
A beauty of its own.
Red kites cry my tears away,
Hands smooth the surface at the heart of it all.
This sturdy table,
Balm in my hands.

Grip

I am a godsend to her.
Like a magician, I grip the lid
and ta-daa, the jar is open.

Strawberry jam, pickled onions,
salmon paste if you please,
all accessible to her now. See how

happy I make her. I don't mean
to taunt, I'm sure she loves you too
but when did you last make her happy,

see her impish smile? Be honest now,
part of you regrets ordering from
that catalogue; knickers, shoe horns,

vests and all manner of gadgets like me.
Don't cry, don't let her see. Go on, find
something to polish, something to clean.

Pantomime

If I were brave, I'd peel them off, but she loves them, self-adhesive stickers with pink rose patterns she pressed onto the tiles two years ago. She likes to fix the curled up corners as she sits on the shower stool. She's my Mam when she asks if I'm ok as shampoo splashes my eye. I could cry and get away with it, pretend it was just the silly shampoo. Clouds of baby talc fill the cubicle; my fault, I forgot to keep it out of reach. White dust settles on our hair and eyelashes as another sticker breaks free of the tiles. Mam emerges from the haze like The Snow Queen in our every morning pantomime. I take the liberty of laughing.

Catherine Graham

Things To Do

after Brian Bilston

I never cried in front of my mother, I cleaned the bathroom instead. CG

Clean the bathroom

Replace bin bags

Search for her missing earring

Suggest a different pair

Clean the bathroom

The Claddagh ones

The pair that Nancy gave her

Hoover under the sofa

Search for the missing earring

Order repeat prescriptions

Clean the bathroom

Put a new battery

In the kitchen clock

Take two steps forward

And a lifetime back

Apply to be on a game show.

Brave

The nurse at the vaccination centre tells me,
“Well done, all doing our bit to beat the virus.”
Once more, in misted half-light, I’m in a queue,

none of us taller than the waiting room chairs.
My mother, in her best coat and headscarf,
the ones she keeps for doctors’ appointments,

sits in the back row and waves her gloved hand,
a little wave meant for no-one else but me.
The nurse in blue with black stockings calls out

my name. One by one, other children emerge
and run tearfully back to their mothers as if
traumatised by Santa Claus or an episode of

Doctor Who. “I remembered to say thank you.”
I tell Mam. My mother removes her glove
to grip my hand. “Well done, you were very brave.”

My bravery is rewarded with a walk to Grainger
Market where Mam buys a bag of peanuts. We sit
on a bench in Eldon Square and feed the pigeons.

Questionnaire

When did I become a Carer?
Do I consider myself to be full-time?
Is my role rewarding financially?
Have I been offered support?

What, if any, are my plans?
Where do I see myself next year?
Am I overwhelmed by the responsibility?
Do I consider being a Carer a career?

Am I lonely?
Am I still in touch with friends?
When did I last go to the cinema?
When did I last see a play?

I kneel to bathe her feet.
She bends to stroke my hair.

Izumi Nagai

A Quiet Spoon

Translated by Dr Jason Danely

In a corner of my kitchen drawer
there is a small wooden spoon.
Too small for the hand or the mouth of anyone in the family,
its gently curved handle, makes a graceful shape.

When she was baby, I would bring the spoon
to my daughter's mouth, every day.
Porridge, soup, or mashed vegetables on it.
The warm coloured spoon, like an autumn leaf.

In the spring, when my daughter turned one,
there was a big earthquake in Kumamoto
Houses destroyed, no electricity nor water could reach them.

In the emergency shelter, crowded with people,
Food and everyday items gradually began to arrive
Many people came from far away to help

I would bring this spoon, every day,
to my daughter's mouth
Rice, fish , soft pieces of meat.
I was only just here. A quiet spoon in my hand.

しずかなスプーン

キッチンの引き出しの片隅に
小さな小さな、木のスプーンが一本ある。
家族の誰の手にも、誰の口にも小さすぎる、
持ち手が少し曲がった、やさしい形のスプーン。

赤ちゃんだった娘の口に、
毎日毎日、このスプーンを近づけた。
おかゆや、スープや、つぶした野菜を乗せて。
秋の木の葉のような、あたたかな色のスプーン

娘が1歳になった春、
熊本で大きな大きな地震があった。
家々は倒れ、電気も水も届かなくなった。

人がいっぱい避難所に、
だんだんと、食べ物や日用品が届けられ、
遠くからもたくさんの方が、手助けに行った。

私は娘の口に、
毎日毎日、このスプーンで運んだ。
ご飯や、魚や、やわらかな肉を。
ただここにいただけだった。しずかなスプーンを手にして。

Wind

Translated by Dr Jason Danely

“Today, I made the wind!”
The child’s hand searched inside the navy blue bag
Pulling out a ribbon of light blue paper tape.

Going to meet my child at Kindergarten
We went straight to the park
Playing until the sun went down

“School is so boring”
The child’s hand searched inside the red backpack,
Pulling out today’s homework papers

I take my child to the park
After she returned from school.
The child, who hasn’t done their homework
Me, who haven’t finished my work
Playing, blown by the wind

風

「今日は、風をつくったよ。」

子どもの手は紺色のバッグのなかを探り、水色の紙テープの束を出した。

幼稚園に子どもを迎えに行くと、

そのまま公園に行った。

日が暮れるまで、遊んでいた。

「学校、つまらないよ。」

子ども手は赤色のランドセルのなかを探り、今日の宿題の紙を取り出す。

小学校から帰ってきた子どもを、

公園に連れて行く。

宿題をしていない子どもと、

仕事を終えていない私が、

風に吹かれて遊んでいる。

Aime Wren

Untitled ('You invited me')

You invited me
to New York City
The Barclay Intercontinental
Its lobby tall evergreen
boughs laden with ornaments
Scarlet apricot amber arranged
masses of amaryllis blooms
Holiday music floating
above our excited heads
Your navy felt lapel on my cheek
As I grasped you in greeting
Daddy!

Lavender Cream

Your hands now thin
Frail fingers
I hold in mine
I'll trim your fingernails

I set out the clean white towel
Basin of warm soapy water
Your nail clipper
My hand cream

I hold each finger
Leaning closely
I trim and file
Shaping slowly shaping

Instrumental music
Playing softly
We chat a little about the day
You close your eyes

Your head drops to one side
I prop a small pillow
Behind your neck
More comfortable? Yes dear

I wrap your hands
In the hot towel
Your body relaxes
As I begin

To rub lavender cream
On your hands
your wrists
your forearms
The way the lady did
At my manicure

Firmly gently
Your lean fingers
Entwined in mine
Together
we unspoken know

This is
Most likely
Your last
Nail trimming

Aime Wren

In the ICU of this world

Let us look at the unspoken intimate, my father

Even if you don't live until tomorrow
You opened your mouth to received the spoon
That I lifted to your lips this morning, my father

Even if you can't talk
I will always hear your voice
Recounting International news, my father

Even if I must walk ahead without you
I will feel your presence
Follow your wisdom, my father

Even if the nurse limits our visit to one hour
I inscribe these sixty minutes in my soul
And refuse to look at the hands
on the large clock

Aime Wren

I Hold Ground

Soft pink triangle
At the tip of a white paper stick
I've never held one
Before needing to feed you
Gingerale thickened
Banana smoothie
Baby rice cereal
Thinned
To ensure nutrients
We agree on a routine
Together you and I
Three sips and then a rest
Three sips and then a rest
Three sips
And then
A rest

I wait as you suck the triangle
Soaked sponge
Concentrate on swallowing
Your eyes closed
The paper straw softens
I worry that the sponge
Will break off in your mouth
Causing you to choke
Complicating
the whole reason
That we are doing this
Three sips
And then a rest
three sips
and then a rest
three sips
and then
a rest

You ask for your
Gingerale
She says No
Nothing other than water
Down the carpeted hallway
I march to ask
the director of care
Hydration is hydration
Your wishes
I hold ground
It will be Gingerale
On a pink sponge
For you to live, hours longer

Aime Wren

Bedside

Blue eyes, alert mind,
Intelligent gentleman
Gentle
Man

Frail, thin,
Exhausted, choking
Unable to stand
Weakened unto death
Shallow breath
In the fetal position
Pillows propped
Between bone legs

Blue eyes, alert mind
Intelligent gentleman
Gentle
Man

Go gently
Daddy,
Go gently

Aime Wren

January Grave

Navy blue suit jacket over white starched shirt
Crested tie perfectly knotted
My gift to you from Oxford
You approve
Canadian Flag I ask they drape
Instead of flowers
Frozen tears on my eyelashes
My boots snow deep
In silence

They set your grey scarf
Leather gloves in honor
At eighty two
The Prime Minister's office
Your vocation on Parliament Hill
Your pass into the House of Commons
Teenage I, to witness bills motioned into law
Good leadership dear
Sanctity of democracy

Intelligent compassionate
He at twenty -two
Stands beside me
He a younger you
Who bears your name
Your patience your posture
Frozen tears on my eyelashes

My younger you
Blue eyes alert mind
Through grief with me
Our boots snow deep
In silence
At your January Grave

Nautical Jacket

Waterproof
Red, navy, a hood of sport yellow
You wore it in Cape Cod
On windy Fridays sailing
When the two boys took lessons

Waterproof
Red, navy, a hood of sport yellow
You wore it in New Port
On ocean drive Saturdays
When we ate Oysters

Waterproof
Red, navy, a hood of sport yellow
I wear it now in Muskoka
On sad spring Sundays
When I need your presence

Three Sidewalk Blocks

Fastening your yellow coat, I button up her red one
I place your hat suggesting she wear hers
Fleece blanket draped across her knees
Your legs take toddler steps along side
Obedient little hand holding the arm of her chair
I wheel her towards the park, only three sidewalk blocks
Beyond the nursing home

Mama cardiac weak now blind, your giggles inquiring mind
The floating scent of lilacs dance with daffodils
Your beginning her ending along three sidewalk blocks
Climbing running, we swing you slide down again
She holds a cracker cranberry juice dribbles from your chin
Her life of shunning you will never know
With my life I guard yours, along three sidewalk blocks

Each ready to return the way we came
I push her wheelchair you walk beside
She a nap now needed you the same
Energy expended you begin to cry
Toddler weight her weakness cannot bare
I perch you on my shoulders your arms wrap my head
I fear I will succumb on these, three sidewalk blocks

Mama in wheel chair child on my shoulders
Fainting without strength to push to carry on
Suddenly each cement ridge shares a secret
Slight momentum from imprinted marks
Power that propels her wheelchair forward
I push my dying mamma with my toddler on my shoulders
Together we surmount, three sidewalk blocks

Acknowledgements

These workshops were made possible by the support of the Oxford Brookes School of English and the British Academy. We are very grateful to Carers Oxfordshire for their essential advice in the planning stages, and their continuing help during and beyond the poetry workshops. Thanks also to Dr Niall Munro, the Director of the Oxford Brookes Poetry Centre, for his expert advice and guidance, and to Tom Cosgrove for the seamless IT support. Warm thanks to Dr Jason Danely, Reader in Anthropology at Oxford Brookes University, for his beautiful translations of Izumi Nagai's work. Thank you to Professor Tina Miller, Professor of Sociology at Oxford Brookes University, for helping me think differently about research, and to the Research Lead in the Oxford Brookes School of English, Professor Katharine Craik, for her invaluable advice and patience. The idea for these poetry workshops emerged from conversations with the brilliant and generous poet, Professor Sandeep Parmar, and this project remains forever in her debt. Heartfelt thanks especially to the carer-poets who brought these workshops to life.

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