



# The Saint Of Travellers

David Webb

*A doctor's journey through depression, addiction and into enlightenment*



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addiction and into enlightenment**

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**To**

**Dianne, Joshua and Ashleigh**

who were still there when I came home



*....and to abandon the shoes that brought you here  
right at the water's edge, not because you had given up  
but because now, you would find a different way to tread*

*David Whyte  
Finisterre*



*I drank a bottle. And another half.  
Drank memory and composure.  
Strange how such soothing water should cut like shattered  
pieces of anticipation unrealised.*

*Wiping a hand through viscous demoralisation  
I try to connect the places where I walked away from myself.*

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## **Prologue**

A troubled early life preceded a career in clinical medicine, multinational corporate and writing. And recovery from almost two decades of ruinous alcoholism.

In gratitude of the compassionate wisdom of others afforded to me, I share my own journey. And the wonderful hidden secrets of common humanity, which are available to everybody. If we choose to seek them and release them.



## Poetry

With astonishment,  
my mind  
being present to itself  
overflows  
spilling words onto the page  
into the corners  
chattering and collecting about themselves  
amicably bickering about  
who will go where  
in what order  
which will come first  
who will follow  
because  
that is important  
and in little time  
each proudly seated  
separate, but no longer individual  
in the only place they were ever meant to be  
so that when this moment is gone  
it will remain forever.

## Dancing

My mother danced in the kitchen.  
Her and I, tiny.

Toes tripping over uneven tiles,  
air around us thick with fervent fragrance, affection,  
banana bread baking and  
wisteria blown in through an open window.

It's terrible to have rhythm, she said.

Quickstep and spinning and  
her apron at right angles to the floor.

Sometimes the radio was on.

Anyway, her own ruminations so mellifluous,  
music emanated from her mind.

And she sang.

At four when she swapped wisteria for juniper  
it soaked her soul and sapped her spirit, sinking into  
shadows  
sulking silently in the settling sun

and she swayed for secret reasons.  
Dismantled movements,  
dancing partners separate.

Grace gone  
and she lost her voice  
and the sweet lyrics became laments  
and tears  
and now  
she didn't know me.

## Enlightenment

Enlightenment  
is a child growing inside of you.  
At first, minute. Almost lifeless.

You  
unperceptive parturient.  
Barely aware of the evolving awakening  
hiding deep in this hallow.  
But this seed  
enclosed in fertile reason,  
once there, assumes  
the wisdom seeping through your eyes  
and is nourished by the company of pilgrims  
to the altar of its own heart.

Suddenly  
quickening. Hardly perceptible.  
But more and more and more  
it begins to grumble  
twist and turn  
until  
it is delivered.

Revelation  
irradiating brilliantly from your consciousness.

Tomorrow  
as you step carefully among the desires and longings  
of others,

be merciful.

*My first exposure to being a real doctor was during my student years. I knew little and met my very first patient in a forbidding obstetric ward at an outlying hospital.*

*When I recently recounted this story to two psychiatrists with whom I was having dinner, they suggested it might have been an augury.*

*In fact, perhaps the most important lesson I have learned on this journey to sobriety is that each moment and each meeting is an augury, profoundly affecting the lives of those who live it.*

*That is why each moment demands exceptional reverence and compassion.*

## A delivery

The tiny traveller  
flops onto the bed between  
his mother's legs  
limp and lies in blood  
like a sticky fish  
deboned and loose.

How shocking hearing silence  
where there should be screams  
of new life and excitement  
at his arrival.

Instead she stares at her  
stillborn soundless still  
herself and bewildered  
barely breathing lest we miss  
the tiniest of goodbyes  
before he rises to return  
to he who sent him here.

I ask myself where making  
sense of this makes sense,  
where a mortal soul is dead  
before it breathed;

if it learned all it came to learn  
in its little life  
wrapped inside a womb,

while his mother sang  
and felt his kick  
and smiled at her good fortune.

How important it must have seemed  
to make that effort  
but leave so soon  
amidst sadness and despair

awful emptiness where once  
was expectation of a son.

How mysterious,  
this small person with  
no life of his own  
made such a difference  
to the future lives of  
those who lived  
profoundly more by meeting.



*The symptoms of addiction I don't talk about. Maybe I don't even identify them. Yet they lock me into a heart breaking cycle of despair and drinking. Hopelessness. If all is hopeless, then what hope is there? Anhedonia. Discovering no joy in life, unable to look forward to the future. A horrific sense of isolation. It is these thoughts that isolate me. I can apologise for my behaviour. But, I am the only one in the world having these thoughts. These thoughts of which I am so ashamed; which are intolerable; which are indescribable.*

*It seems addiction amplifies the experience of being human. Sometimes weighed down just by living.*

*There is, however, an escape. No matter how hopeless it seems. And that healing is here. In this moment. In others. When we talk.*

## Haunting

I feel like a ghost.  
No body to call my own.

Distant from the loved and the unloved.  
And in my mind a space has grown so now my thoughts are transparent.  
My personality neither here nor there  
my melancholy nature hopeless with despair.  
My legs look far too short with my feet dangling in mid-air  
while I float in unawareness. I don't walk.

Anxious in the company of others.  
Paranoid.  
Afraid.  
Though I suppose most purposefully avoid me,  
because the only attention I am paid is when people look right through me.  
I have made myself that unimportant.

Deceitful.  
Consumed by rampant dissimulation,  
I've shattered everybody's trust.  
Now as distance grows between me and them  
my motives gradually adjust and I suit myself.  
Nakedly unashamed of that.

Except I am ashamed. Very ashamed.  
Shame burns into the place where my real soul used to be.  
It's stuck. Now it's part of me.  
It's on my skin for everyone to see  
and even if I don't feel it any more.  
Any more than usual, anyway.

I'm suffocating in lonely isolation.

When I think I think there's no-one else who would ever have that thought  
ruminating in my hollow head – what's left of it;  
that's what my drugs and drink has brought.

When they said no man is an island  
they never considered an apparition of my sort.  
Not really appropriate in polite society.

Seems this purgatory entrapment bears  
no inkling of escape.

So I lie here in this dirty spot curled  
in a semi-foetal shape and try a little mindful meditation.  
Perhaps I might receive some compassion from myself  
I've lost all expectation it will come from anybody else.

Or maybe not.

This present moment isn't actually the place right now I want to be  
to have to face the face of demons that billow and ridicule inside of me  
and the demoralising consequences of perpetual deep despondency.  
I resent the loss of both my integrity and dignity  
and the slowly disappearing last vestiges of sanity  
and the exclusion of myself from the entire concept of humanity.  
What I really need is to turn my mind off altogether.

Whisky, close my eyes.  
I resign all sense of pride.

Unconscious, I might still appear to be alive.  
But empty and abandoned  
And long since dead  
inside.

## Unwrapped

My single  
malt makes  
my mind  
muddled  
for much  
of most mornings  
Thirstily thinking through  
thoughts thoroughly threatening  
I sit seeking solace in self-centered  
sadness 'Till finally, feeling faint and  
facing failing faculties, Unaware, I  
unravel into unconscious unrapture.

*I don't think this is a poem. But it remains as an insight into the desperate sense of isolation of drinking.  
Some drunk despair, perhaps.  
I must not forget.*

misty panes  
i can hardly see through  
in a world i wish i could join

i love you.  
i wish i could join you.

i don't know they are there.

suddenly i am looking through  
and i wish they weren't there.

they close when my eyes are open  
and i don't know for how long.

i love you, locked outside  
but still touching me within.

if i could smash them  
i could climb outside

into your world.  
sometimes i think i have, but

i'm always disappointed because  
i have not. they close again.

and i'm looking out. you are looking in.  
one day we will meet around the window

it will be inconsequential  
although now it blocks life

it blocks my love  
yours flows backward through

and you don't know mine is stopped  
from reaching you.

but one day, you will know.  
one day i will walk around the glass

and you will walk around the glass  
and we will meet in the middle.

i love you  
and you will know.

## **Double vision or something**

double vision  
circling ceiling  
vestibular uncertainty  
did the grass move  
chardonnay  
chateau something  
i'm not feeling well  
perhaps i'm coming down with something  
but i can't be  
i'm a doctor  
but  
i'm not feeling well

i have felt  
like this before

i swore  
i wouldn't  
anymore

i was wrong  
or something

## Black and White

Tonight. Watched a last friend turn their back and go  
Dying inside, but can't let it show  
If you don't remember, then how do you know?  
It reminds you inside you are different

You can't recall the things that you said  
My behaviour's a mystery, my emotion is dead  
I can't make sense of this disarray in my head  
On the outside they say you're different

Intolerable pain when dogs bark in my soul  
There is no compassion when you're out of control  
The panic and fear swallows you whole  
And reminds me I want to be different

When I slip into darkness you're not even aware  
Incomprehensible torment coming back up for air  
The escape that you long for, you couldn't find there  
What would life have been like to be different?

Regimental assembly is the best I can do  
Sell my desperate story to help the others get through  
Hand me another *To thine own self be true*  
Understand you can't know that I'm different



*In my self-centered ruminations I settle on all of the things that have made me who I am. And I blame. And I burn in resentment.*

*If I am attentive, amidst the ashes that remain, I realise I have become that very contemptable person of whom I was most afraid.*

*Here, in this exquisite vacuum of self-discovery, I am presented with a choice: To walk on, or to rest. Resting is the most difficult decision, but, now, the only one with reward. To submerge myself in the terrifying stillness of self-awareness. Only in this moment can I diverge from the path I am on and choose an alternative direction. And, if I am to expect forgiveness and compassion from others, the minimum expected from me is to genuinely offer the same to those who came before.*

*In this learning to live life differently, I liberate myself and those close to me from the cycle that I had, in unawareness, committed myself to repeat.*

## Becoming new

are you ready for this?  
will you sit if you know  
there is wisdom here?  
cloaked in heavy silence  
notice how it trickles  
through heartwood  
taking the shape  
of your solitude  
into your roots  
inside, changing to colours  
of meadows and forests  
how contentment gently falls  
like lustrous leaves  
from the boughs of stillness  
so the path ahead is gentle to your feet  
and the quiet ebb and flow of understanding  
quenches that deep, deep thirst you have carried  
all your life  
will you rise, still warm  
with presence  
to those around you?

sit  
then there will be wisdom  
here.

## What you wish for

When I was a young doctor, I could spot an alcoholic a mile away.

You don't need X rays and expensive tests.

You can see the man with his hairless shins and his pendulous breasts  
and his shrunken nads and his protruding belly  
and his slurry speech and his breath is smelly  
and he lies when you ask him please to say: How many drinks have you had  
today?

Oh, no, I don't drink much, doctor, it was only a few  
with my buttered toast for breakfast – perhaps one or two.

Bottles? I ask.

Now I sense agitation

No, doctor, no!

He tries to avoid confrontation at being found out in this habitual lie,  
but he can't hide his ruddy face with its shrunken eyes  
and tiny mosaic of spider veins  
and when I palpate his liver how he winces in pain  
and the shaking hands when he holds arms stretched out  
and the swollen toe from the bout of gout  
and when I ask general knowledge how long we must wait for him to think  
for a while,  
because he cannot think straight  
and now he gives the wrong answer to the day and the date  
and he can't understand this poor cognitive state.

Where did the years go?

I can't remember how I got into this state.

Was it my despondent incompetence or a family trait?

Now I'm hopeless and miserable and I just cannot wait for my next drink  
to take the edge off.

So I think of those men with the bottle of cane  
and how I used to wonder how they became the shell they became  
and yet carried on drinking despite the despair and the shame.

Now I know.

And when I look in the mirror  
I see one and the same.

## Ashleigh

I cried today, Dad. As you lay dying  
I slipped my fingers into your palm.  
I could not feel you.

Ashleigh.

When I squeeze my daughter's hand  
our humours hold one another 'round the waist  
and dance the spaces between our finger tips.

Affection passes, as if a floating bird,  
gliding  
between the cells of each other's sensation.

Between cells glial and neuronal,  
from tenderness is born a magnificent magma  
which infuses our very souls.

It bubbles and boils and burns its being into the other  
at last inseparable so when it returns refreshed, reformed,  
reborn. It is new.  
Nourishing.

Until the next time we touch.



*I learned a lot from my patients about myself. Some of it only made sense years later when I learned to pay attention to what was really going on in the unfiltered moment.*

*Admitted to the trauma ward, she had tried to poison herself with ergotamine, cutting off the blood supply to body, hands and feet. As much as we tried, over the ensuing days, it seemed we could not save her. Until, in resignation, it was decided to withdraw all life-sustaining care and allow her to die in peace. After that, she recovered.*

*The guilt I felt that, despite my training I was not able to save people, became matched with that for this life saved. For those who died; for those who lived.*

*Years later, I understood.*

*It was not guilt.*

*It was arrogance.*

## Resurrection

That gasp should have been her last;  
the condition is severe.

I've started intravenous fluids,  
ensured the airway's clear,

pumped adrenalin into a vein,  
four hundred joules into the chest  
to bring this imminent corpse to life,  
annul her cardiac arrest.

This overdose is not the first.  
I wonder if she really wants to die?  
Depressed, suicidal, alcoholic,  
this is at least her seventh try.

Four different times Samaritans  
like me kept death at bay,  
without much self-congratulation we  
impelled serenity away.

I cannot think now about her anoxic mind,  
her hands palsied by gangrene or  
the rehabilitation she will go through  
before she tries it all again;

but I who practise modern medicine  
must clear my mind if to contrive  
to ignore the anguished helpless breast and  
keep the tormented soul alive.

I won't experience her gratitude  
her hugs with amputated hands, or  
gaze on her disabled smile.  
I can't care if she understands.

I consider not life's quality.  
Oh my dearest Frankenstein,  
your Honourable Experiment  
holds not a candle close to mine.

A heartbeat! A slightest movement!  
Out, Death! Be gone! You've been frustrated one more time!  
But I'm relieved to call the social worker.  
Let someone else explain my crime.

There will be no record made of miracles,  
neither solace of a quiet death,  
but rather electric shocks and chemicals  
returned this unhappy Lazarus to breath.

## The Golden Swollen Lady

The Golden Swollen Lady  
has crusted lips,  
oedematous limbs.  
Resentment directed at me.

Though it was the surgeon  
with honourable intentions  
who tried to set her caustic juices free.

A few days ago she was yellow, dry,  
her reptilian integument too pruritic to bear  
as the putrid waste from her dying blood  
seeped and crept and left its venom there.

Now excoriations have left their telling mark  
on the hand on the bible,  
though she can no longer pray.  
Mumbling in anguished bewildered semiconscious detachment,  
while we holy healers helpless watch her soul steal away.

She doesn't understand who has done this to her.  
Her devastated mind tells her I am the one.  
Through morbid eyes, ghoulish breath croaks her last benefaction:  
*"God will get you for what you have done".*

Oh, the irony of your dying Kussmaul breath!  
As your empty drooping eyelids fall.  
Your begrudging farewell, unwelcome endowment  
invokes the name of the One who could have mended it all.

*The patient in each of us. In fact, there is often a multiplicity of patients within.*

*And the wisdom lies, when the time comes, in knowing how much care or how much palliation is appropriate.*

*Sometimes and inevitably, no matter how traumatic it might seem, I have to free parts of me to die so that my real self can live.*

## The Medicine Man

Ancestral rites.  
No drums, no headdress, no smoke.  
No villagers. No elders to witness  
the oath he broke.

Tinctures silent, drop by drop.  
Heaven sustains her disease and pain  
and taunts her frustrated impatient soul.  
The mundane seems now so inhumane.

Wordlessly he chants and sings  
prayers: Gods sanctify this linen fleece.  
No flames. No reverent hooting owl.  
Her breathing labours, her heartbeats cease.

He did for her the best he could,  
but it seems this anointed livelihood  
is to wrestle in vain some empyrean plan.  
So who will forgive the medicine man?

Forefathers, what now do you have to say?  
By his own hand  
his patient slips  
away.

*Wanting to end it all.*

*Sometimes it all feels overwhelming. My thoughts turn to places I should not want to go. At times they seem so intrusive, they are almost unbearable. Wishing them away does not work. When I fight them, they fight back.*

*And yet, quite on the contrary, there is enormous comfort in turning towards these thoughts. What is it that I can learn from them? What is my mind telling me? What exactly is it that wants to die?*

*Sometimes it's just about letting go of who I think I am and finding that the person who is left after that is actually not so bad.*

## Falling

For a short time  
between his toes  
granite  
from the top  
it's all trees and distance  
and troposphere  
arms outstretched  
as if to embrace  
the whole planet  
and all it took  
was to lean  
and fall  
now  
body bathed in air  
falling faster than his mind  
into the atmosphere  
like he left that behind  
freedom feeling  
fear  
falling from him  
as he fell  
and his dull and desolate  
life did not flash  
before him  
rather limbs limp slack  
quietude and stillness  
for the first time  
he had purpose  
bringing him to ground  
as his life  
swept back  
on the wind.

*A poem about my mum, absence, opportunities lost and the benevolent, unrequited forgiveness extended by those who remain, despite everything, to share our journey.*

## The musician is gone

The world has changed irrevocably.

Dorothy doesn't dance anymore  
and Don no longer plays  
Never Die Young.

I once made breath  
from skin dripped from bones  
and sent a laugh home  
from closed eyes.

I chose the crystal droplet  
with privilege unequalled.  
A front row seat  
at the hand of God.

Is that where I learned to cloud your eyes,  
keeping cool as the trees rush by?

Your selfless sight.  
Gift to me.

Why I remain  
artistic debris?

*Moments of coming up for air. And of observation.*

## **Song of a Forensic Pathologist**

Sliced bits of brain and a dirty old bone,  
A hole in a skull that's been smashed by a stone.

An artery bleed from a cut by a blade,  
A tiny impression a small bullet has made.

Buckshot in muscles, a finger that's blue,  
Tram track contusions, the intention to sue.

Pulmonary oedema and pericarditis,  
A lumpy stiff phalanx that's beset with arthritis.

A small pale infarct, an old CVA,  
A conviction in court at the end of the day.

A skeleton hid in a box underground,  
That fine scrap of hair a policeman has found.

A small broken tooth, anchovy paste pus,  
A little old lady who's been squashed by a bus.

Rotational injury, petechial spots,  
The gasses that form when a dead person rots.

Respiratory failure of an uncertain cause,  
A fatal pneumonia and genital sores.

A large hepatoma and maggots in limbs,  
These are a few of my favourite things.

## The Ballad of the Body Beautiful

She thought she'd finished having babies  
So the gynae tied her tubes  
And she went to see the surgeon  
Who put implants in her boobs.  
A dermatologist's appointment  
To excise her ugly mole;  
Lying naked on the sunbed  
Tanned her body, head to sole.

Her friendly plastic surgeon  
Removed the bags under her eyes  
And did a tummy tuck and suction  
To take the fat out of her thighs.  
The orthodontist put her teeth straight  
And her facelift was complete.  
The manicurist shaped her nails  
Both on her hands and on her feet.

A dietician consultation  
And a contract with a gym  
Was the last part of her plan  
To make her beautiful for him.

Then a new wardrobe from Armani  
A Gucci bag and Blahnik shoes,  
Topped off this brand new package  
She felt for sure he'd not refuse.

But when finally the job was done  
And home she rushed, her love to greet,  
She found that he had run away  
With the young blonde girl from down the street.

So the moral of this morbid tale  
Is the observation that  
If your body is synthetic  
You might as well be fat.

*After leaving clinical medicine, I thought there might be some respite in a corporate life. Money, car, hotels.*

*It gave me more time to watch so many of us screw it up.*

*But here's the truth of it. If the ennui and angst is on the inside, you can't make it go away by changing the outside.*

## **Bad company**

You think I like to eat at fine hotels?  
Prostrate in silken sheets?  
Where satisfaction palliates your resting mind  
nightmares chase my sleep.

The money doesn't touch me.  
I cannot trace the things I need.  
Never physically cut me.  
Yet deep inside I bleed.

Sometimes, I had friends  
pursuing disconnected lives.  
New names, new friends,  
new children, new wives.  
Homogeneous plays that seem  
predictable.  
Reconciled by absence,  
disparate lives and separated days.

I had an opportunity.  
We joked – a healer – that was me  
but I gave it all away.  
Now what am I supposed to be?

I always take a walk along the promenade  
consume the frigid nightfall ocean air.  
Charged by draughty god in through the face  
try to get my soul back there.

So you think I like to eat at fine hotels  
all drugged up so my core is numb  
engulfed in sticky silken sheets?

We all went wrong.

*Learning about what is on the inside.*

*Mindful meditation has become a daily practise. There is liberation in learning to stand distant from my thoughts and to know that there is something deeper within.*

*That the present moment is just this.*

*That it's OK to be who I am right now. Thoughts and all.*

*It is exciting to discover that there is a lot more to be discovered. And that I will grow into that. Into the person who I can become.*

## Observing

Sometimes I am certain. My mind is made up.

I am a pilgrim passing through the passages  
of my own imagination

an observer

of thoughts draped with canvas jackets to protect them  
from the wilting hours

of sentiment trapped by inescapable condemnation  
of insecurity

of memories long since left undusted.

*Mindfulness is gently bringing an intentional acceptance and non-judgemental awareness to the present, just as it is. It is a freedom from rumination about the past and the future. From regret, resentment, anxiety and fear. It is the healing that comes from recognising that each moment is true unto itself. That there is an inherent meaning in each moment. It is the beginning step towards both recovery and enlightenment.*

## The first step

Between the night and first light,  
the deafening darkness of silence  
can arrest your breath  
and leave your mind to wander unsupervised.  
Revisiting regions long sentimentally renounced,  
and intruding into fearsome territories imagined.

In disquiet,  
in the immediacy of illusory intuition,  
it is easy to abandon yourself.  
But you should not.

Let the present moment be your refuge.  
This is the space in which you need not be afraid.  
For here will you find providence.

Here, where the clouds of the morning are forged,  
lovingly at the anvil of your mind,  
moulded with the beating of your heart.

And you, farrier,  
architect of your own invulnerableness,  
with new shoes  
will walk into the dawn.

## Meraki\*

*for Bernice*

You are the First One.

Now aware of each second;  
while sticky minutes thickly drip  
from the future  
and surly moments loiter  
before reluctantly slipping, without goodbyes,  
into the weight of passed time.

Inattentive to the unhurried hours,  
Uncertainty would seem unwelcome,  
but lovingly takes your hand  
to warm and encourage you  
as you travel.

In the absence of a lamp,  
Generous Aspiration  
gathers about her the fortitude of the disappearing light.  
Radiating what is distinctively her own.

And, in time, you arrive.  
Only you can claim this Wonderful Gift  
intended only for you.  
Trembling with excitement, to Sit Still.

And from your quiet unfolding fingers  
release into  
this New World  
that New Life  
for which you risked everything.

\*Meraki: to do something with all your heart, with love, with your soul, with complete devotion

## Mind wandering during supper at a mindfulness retreat

As Brian carries hot soup  
over my head,  
I think of the fall of Rome  
and Pompeii buried  
beneath molten lava,  
and I remember how he told me  
he sometimes shakes.  
Vesuvius smoking  
black clouds blocking  
the rising moon.  
I close my eyes  
with a burning desire  
to scream.  
Awake the sleeping lithosphere!  
Seismic waves  
cause him to trip;  
his fingers slip  
and scalding pumpkin drips  
across my eyebrows,  
cheeks and lips.  
And through anticipated searing pain  
I find my thinking change again.  
I only brought one pair of pants.

## Contemplations from a treadmill

If I stop running, I will be flung and dash my head where squeaky, sweaty  
soles have tread.

My mind exposed upon the floor.  
My most secret secrets not so secret anymore.

Vaporous thoughts escaping slowly through cranial cracks, intent, direct,  
might infect, perhaps, another's wit and poison private intellect.

Convictions better undivulged  
liberated, immense, metastasize  
to conceal themselves in as yet pure psyche  
and construct an imminent surprise.

Melancholy, dark demeanour, infusing once quite guiltless air,  
fouling laughing innocence, which, defiled, remains quite unaware.

Mean, dreadful introverted motives  
now emerged, pervasive, spread  
seep inside unsuspecting judgement  
to leisurely fester in another's head.

And yet amongst this rumination,  
this prospect tensely overwrought,  
I concentrate on breathing, pacing,  
and turn to less forbidding thought.

## New arrival

It is becoming clear  
this work essential to my livelihood  
is to be postponed.

A pregnant pause pierces my  
train of thought  
derailing it

demanding my attention acquiesce to  
this urgent emergence  
whose occiput crowns in my consciousness.

Expectations of all other deliveries  
disappear in the scramble  
of this unexpected arrival.

The imminent infant  
disrespectfully delivers a fatal blow  
to my deadline

reminding me  
poetry is not written.  
It is born.

*Becoming aware of myself is not always comfortable.*

## Prejudice

This is the thought  
that nobody wants to touch them.  
A greasy thought.  
A thought that stains;  
that lingers after the wash.  
This is the thought in the drawer,  
a thought I don't notice  
when, after sleep, eyes half closed,  
I dress myself for the day.  
That, too late,  
I discover only in the mirror  
when I catch myself  
turning  
visible to others all this time  
worn about myself  
in the fabric of my humanness.  
This is the thought that reminds me  
that I don't know  
that I don't know  
that I don't know.

*Who am I?*

*Who is asking?*

*I wonder why it takes so long to discover that to find yourself, you only need look inside. There you are. Perhaps, for many of us, that's too painful. In addiction, our real self remains trapped inside, prevented from expressing itself. Just as dark is an absence of light, the absence of my expression of myself presents as something I am not. My absence of patience presents as impatience, absence of kindness as unkindness, absence of consideration and compassion as self-centeredness and cruelty. In reality these dysfunctional characteristics don't exist. They are merely the expression of the absence of expression of virtue.*

*In a sense, I am two people – how I feel on the inside; kind, loving, caring; and how others perceive me through my behaviour – the expression of my unexpressed self; unaware, self-centered, dishonest, unreliable. This is one of the reasons why I feel such a deep sense of disconnection not only with others, but also with myself. Once I find the courage to really look into the eyes of my own soul, I realise that I have been there all along. A constant companion, waiting to be released, waiting to come to a relationship with myself and with others.*

*We all have an aptitude for virtue, it is just a matter of identifying it and learning to behave more like that by practicing and spending time around those who are already doing it. With this comes the realisation that I am already myself. And I need to let myself free.*

## Writing

Your courageous attempt to show the outside world  
inside  
on a written page.

A frightened history creeping  
to show her face  
like a child at the bottom of the stair.

Seeking honesty-lowered eyes and grasping  
gasps of gratitude for  
imagined secret familiarity.

Yet the dark stays dark.  
Emptiness continues to bleed  
from the concealed unreachable places.

You must know,  
in this masterly inactivity,  
you are mistaken.

The reluctant physician  
comforts no-one  
but himself.

Seeking reassurance from all  
except the only one  
that matters.

## Meeting

This evening, as the light was glass  
stained by the aging hour,  
I cupped my hand and drank  
water from the stream beside the place where I rested.  
Frosted footsteps heavy across my lips  
and burned as I swallowed  
too quick for them to warm.

Looking down into the water  
I caught your eye.

Arrested in that unexpected moment  
this gaze fixed by gravity of mutual moons manifesting in separate minds  
each too blinded by the other to look away.

I tried to smile,  
tried to warm the distance between us  
but I could not.

Your eyes were dark.  
Black, like the pebbled moss beneath the surface.  
And you did not smile.

I felt you are sad.  
Sensed isolation so deep inside  
that breath is only a glimpse of liberty  
and a beating heart  
is an expression of humility betrayed.

Only the present held us here.  
The gracious nature of Nature.  
Herself mindful of the loneliness that is born between the twilight and the  
darkness,  
between seeing and uncertainty.

Then, startled by the dying breath of sunlight  
I lifted my eyes.

Instantly  
you were gone.

And I,  
companionless  
in the unfolding night,  
rose.

## Returning

Why does it disturb you to be awoken  
by the silence of words passing  
through your dreamless mind?  
When all the time this  
was what you were first called to.

When, in earlier times  
thoughts were viscid and impenetrable  
and memories too drenched in melancholy  
to allow a foot in the door.

It is no wonder that when you found nothing  
that became the very meat  
on which you hung the bones  
of your threadbare soul.

But now, in this different time  
the tender-hearted faces of vulnerability  
have revealed their true love and beauty  
with deep humanity and affectionate attention to detail.

Sometimes it seems  
deep inside of you  
you had been there all along.



*Facing the past is important. Not so I can blame, but because it helps me to understand why I am who I am now and that that is OK. But it does not excuse me continuing that way. Embracing the past, learning from my own mistakes and the mistakes of others is liberating. It enables me to face the future. To move on.*

*Sometimes it might be difficult to look the past squarely in the face. I might not even remember much of it.*

*Surely though, talking about it is a start.*

## Closing

I can't remember the last time  
I remembered  
something  
important  
like  
from my past.  
Experiences don't stick  
as they are supposed to.  
Unpinned  
they tumble through the cleft  
of the happening minute  
and roll like medallions  
pausing to spin briefly  
on their delicate edge  
before collapsing  
onto the dull, flat surface beneath  
forgetting.  
Difficult to reach them there.  
With mind sight  
I can just see them.  
Cowering.  
Maybe nudge them with an enquiring thought  
carefully  
so as not to tip both  
over the edge.

I wish  
when one fell  
like a penny  
I would have made a  
wish.

*Living begins with awareness. Even if that means just becoming aware that I am not aware. That I don't know what I don't know. And that's OK.*

*One of the profound damages of addiction (and life in general if we allow it to be that way) is that it arrests our emotional and intuitive development. Life leaves us behind. This is one of the reasons why we often experience such a profound sense of not fitting in.*

*Recovery is less about change than it is about returning to the journey of becoming who I can be. It's about unlocking and expressing what is already inside.*

*And that is why it's futile to try and find yourself.*

*You know where you are. 'Trying to find myself' is just a euphemism for the emptiness of profound lack of meaning. It's an expression of unawareness.*

*Unawareness that, in reality, every moment in life has meaning. Merely for the fact that it irrevocably changes the very next moment.*

*So what do I need to become aware of? My thoughts, emotions, feelings, sensation, motivations; that little voice in my head; my values, my principles; my place in the world. Although this might sound difficult, it is far easier than it may seem. It all starts with a little hope. The acknowledgement that there is something different. That there is a different path. When we take that first step towards something new, hope turns to faith. I don't need to know how it will turn out; it doesn't matter. I just need to do it – to turn away from the path I have been travelling and, with awareness, take a new path. See where it leads.*

*When that path repeatedly turns out for the better, then I begin to trust that this path of my choosing is the right one for me. Trust is earned – it may take years to develop that trust. No matter. It will come. And later, I will learn, also, to trust myself.*

*Right now, I just need to start with a little bit of hope. That's enough.*

## Becoming

Things cannot go on as they are.

I have made my days too dark, she said.  
A deep, deep dark,  
too dark to clearly see myself inside the night.  
And though in darkness wakefulness evades me,  
I am locked outside the heavy gates of sleep.

But Hope listens from inside her shell  
to the noisy life beyond the walls  
Unseen, not yet known. But imagined.

There must be more she says.  
If I try, I can hear it  
seeping through the cracks and tiny pores of reality  
that surround me.  
But here, inside, it is dark  
and humid with despair.

And with the next beat of her heart  
she conceives a tiny breath of Faith.  
Faith born from Hope.  
A pirouette of expectation,  
skipping between moments  
with the abandon of one who is about to leave.

She learns quickly now.  
Making friends with ground.  
And air surrounds her.  
And she can breathe.  
And on her pale skin  
the light,  
with the excitement of a child in a new place,  
dances.

Now she knows.

Now she can be sure  
that while she unfolds with the happy scent of accomplishment  
tomorrow will wait in compassionate contentment.  
In that she trusts.

Trust born from Faith.

In this place.  
As a gift, she closes her eyes,  
and feels the breath inside of her,  
so,  
for the first time,  
like an infant baptism,  
she can set her soul free.



*So many of us face what seem to be unassailable challenges. Hurdles and impediments we feel no one else would understand. Frequently we are born into them.*

*Our personal journey teaches us these things:  
In the difference between us, there is strength.  
In our stories, there is encouragement.  
In our meeting, there is hope.*

## **courage**

*for Thobi*

i see in you  
Greatness

a harbinger  
born of the flames of shame

crippled  
so you could bear the weight of the  
Others

bent and oppressed  
by the mother sent to protect you

when you cried  
you cried because you felt your soul tearing

you cried to soak the tears  
of the Others  
still to come

when  
smouldering with compassion  
you closed your eyes  
the Others wide-eyed  
stood proudly and took their place

when you remembered  
They made history

but not from freedom  
you have not known you are free  
when you live in that place  
where the Crusted Lands  
have already escaped  
beneath the rain

And when you rested  
you carried  
Them  
on your shoulders  
while

They sang



*Serenity is so much more than just being peaceful. We can't be peaceful all of the time; life will undoubtedly occasionally hold some unspeakable sadness. Nevertheless, even in these times when I am not at peace, I can hold serenity. Learning to trust that my awareness of the present will enable me to respond as best I can teaches me that, whatever happens, I can manage. This is a sense of equanimity – that I can settle into the present, and not have to have things turn out a particular way or be in control – that I can just let things be as they are. With letting go of the need to be in control, I experience something I have never experienced before - patience. And the immediate side effect of patience is serenity. A liberation from the fear and anxiety of not knowing that I don't know what I don't know. Serenity is knowing that I don't know and that's OK. When I know that I don't know what to do, there is a chance of recovery. Now I can talk and ask for help.*

*A poem about going to rehab. Here I discovered that I was already here.*

## Travelling

I remember how we drove on.  
How the heat of the desert sun  
burned the naked crown of our heads  
as we drove with the car top down.

How we drove on.

And at night with the bitter cold  
blowing into our faces  
how I turned to you.  
I am cold, you said.  
And we held each other too chilled to kiss.

And we drove on.

How the sand blistered our faces  
like the myriad of stars in  
the soulless evening

as we drove on.

And when we turned the corner  
we were ready to change  
and although anticipated  
it was unexpected and wonderful.

I remember how a family of blossomed branches welcomed us.

How the flowers with their  
benevolent fanfare of perfume  
declared their delight  
in our arrival.

How the colours burned  
through our eyes and into  
our minds  
just previously occupied to bursting  
with emptiness.

How the snow on proud distant  
mountains maintained the theme of cold  
but this time  
only to add intuitive beauty to remind  
us, this time,  
this time,  
we are alive.

And as we drove on  
the sweet, sweet nourishment of belonging  
tightened between us  
and feeling what it means to  
be a human being in a place where being human  
is both a gift and  
an invitation.

And we drove on.

And as we turned the corner  
And the green turned brown  
and the sun scorched its  
presence into the sacred moon  
we raised the top of the car  
and closed the windows  
to save ourselves from discomfort.

And this time we welcomed the direction of light  
lovingly gifted by god  
and all around us in the  
desolation of silence.

This time  
we experienced  
aliveness, majesty.  
How this time, it seemed  
everything was different.

And when the night came again  
and the heat outside shrank  
to hide beneath the earth  
and frost appeared from the parched sand.  
We, cocooned in our sanctuary.  
Safe.  
Warm.

And this time  
when we embraced  
we felt  
each other.  
Not merely the holiness  
of skin touching skin  
but the humanity of  
breath sharing breath.

It was different now.

Inside of us  
something that had grown  
because we became aware that  
we did not know. And that was OK.

And that destination is inconsequential  
and that you may not arrive  
even when you get there.

Because, for the first time  
realising that perhaps not knowing  
was the answer we had not known  
until now.

And we drove on.

And this time, as we turned the corner  
we did not need to know  
because  
    we  
      could  
       see.



*I wrote this poem at a time when my son left home to study at university. The void left in our home by his leaving was palpable. One of the hardest things in life is to let go. Watching our children grow into who they can be, ultimately something only they can do, and as they choose to, can be particularly difficult. And in this exquisite moment, we realise that contrary to what intuitively may seem to be true, it is never about letting them go. Rather it is about letting go of part of myself. My fear, my need to be in control, my need to know, my self-centeredness. We all deserve the privilege of freedom to grow and to tread our own path. Only when we look back with awareness do we appreciate with gratitude that it is all of our own past journey, in all of its uncertainty, that has afforded us such strength for the future. And as we travel and learn and discard our old leaves that serve us no more, we make way for new growth. The healthy green leaves of evolving wisdom. And through it all, this life, from its humble beginning, through joys and sadness, excitement and frightening, bewilderment and serenity, which create the foundation and fertile soil in which we grow, remains steadfast. Sheltering us under the loving and protective canopy of our own journey. To walk on.*

## The moon of falling leaves

*for Joshua*

When I said goodbye to you  
at the door  
I cried.

When I walked inside  
I walked slowly  
with my head bowed  
in that consecrated moment.

How strange  
that your growth  
should seem to tire me of my very essence  
when it makes me so happy  
that  
you can.

Then I remembered  
how I walked on fallen leaves;

how the soft, faithful ground  
encouraged each forward footstep;

how my mind overjoyed  
in the earth  
as it drew in through my breath;

and all the while  
the branches protected me  
from falling snow.

*A poem about insecurity, self-doubt and despair, and about being alright.*

*I have felt left behind. Stuck, while those who qualified with me went on to become distinguished.*

*At a large international medical meeting, as I listened to presentations about gene therapy, humanitarianism and healing, I sensed intense separation from this world I left behind. I felt like an imposter. Returning to my hotel room, the news was about a terrorist bombing.*

*I wrote this poem the following morning.*

## Revelation

The man with the empty face sits, sips  
his coffee.  
Outside, the rain has stopped.

Clouds, the colour of deep water  
inspect the world of their own creation  
filling every space of the sky  
with volume  
so there's nothing left.  
The embers of their edges still glowing in the dying flames of sun.

Time is waiting for them. In no hurry.  
Smoking whispers still  
in the breathless air  
alone deciding when to move  
and if.

Time does not wait for the man.

It seems that, at birth, he left.  
Not alone. With time,  
always evident companion that talks to him in dance.  
Doing his best to keep up,  
trying not to lose sight of this silent, dearest friend  
who will leave him if he falls too far behind.

It will change, but he does not know when.  
Not now.

Sometimes, it seems he's lagging.  
And then the pace causes his feet to ache  
and he drowns in the air behind his ears and eyes  
thick and dark, like chocolate.  
So he rests.

The others on this journey  
find their own way.  
Guided by a self-made history  
and the consciousness of many  
taking different roads  
that once travelled, fade  
so this exact path exists  
for no more than a moment.  
Leaving nothing, but everything open  
for the newcomers  
to make a path of their own.

The doctors come.

Some seek minutia.  
Slipping inside of cells  
stripping the machinery  
slapping the hand of God  
as He reaches in  
to take away.

Others come demanding.  
God proclaiming.  
Jealous of the living.  
Killing.

The man with the empty face,  
ponders his fractured world.  
His thoughts broken by  
a Presence.  
Silent.  
Unseen.  
Sensed.

The Stranger,  
eyes black, dry, hard, hand extended.

Their fingers interlock  
like those of lovers separated at the moment of first breath.  
Reunited at last.

Without inhaling, the Stranger speaks.  
Cold words falling from lifeless lips onto dusty amber ground  
warming him upwards. Soft.  
Comforting.  
“What would you have done different?”

The man with the empty face looks into the timeless face of darkness.  
Furrowed brow.  
His own eyes so full of space,  
even the brightest light would be untraceable.  
At that moment of aloneness when he knows time is at last gone.

“I would smile more”, he says.

*At some stage all of us will face intolerable loss. If not already, then coming. A loss that leaves us empty. Numb. A loss leaving us to face life, in all of its daunting openness, alone.*

*In alcoholism, living itself means loss. Loss of dignity, of freedom, of all that you have worked for. Of friends and family. And yet in recovery, when you would anticipate that at least some of these things might be redeemable, the ultimate betrayal is the loss of alcohol. Both thief and coping strategy at the same time. A loss that is so unbearable, for many it is impossible to endure.*

*When I was a doctor, one of the greatest challenges to me was dealing with death. And yet there was an intense holiness in these moments.*

*I remember specifically one elderly couple. Both in their eighties. She dying of cancer. He seated in a bedside chair. Fingers interlocked. Preparing for this ultimate separation in her last moments. In the shadows of a life of togetherness, but also of moments that seem so irrelevant now. Of taking so much for granted, of wasting so much time in pettiness and unimportance. The love of those years is palpable in this basilica of departing.*

*Someone once asked me how I could work in a place surrounded by death and still believe in God.*

*How could one not?*

*I am reminded of my walks with my dog, Gemma, my dearest friend, in the cemetery opposite our house. Sometimes late at night, far from being an unhappy place, I could feel the sanctity of love lost dense in the air, as I breathed it in and it overwhelmed me. I have never felt so close to God.*

*So what do we do with this loss? How do we move forward, when our legs are so heavy, the next step seems impossible?*

*We step off.*

*We recognise that this new stride, into the unfamiliar world emerging from the emptiness, is the first on another journey. A new road. One on which all the love that remains and, in wisdom, is open to be shared, is now available to those who we meet on the way. And we, carried by the memory and gifts of all that has been right and all that we have learned, will find the strength to go on, because we can make the road easier for others. And bring meaning to our own.*

## Faith

She  
wears her well-lived life like a garment made of God.  
A favourite chiffon gown.  
Light. Loose. Loved.

His hand holds hers.

He  
always her lover.  
About him a habit made of heavy hours.

Blinking  
eyes glint in the evanescent light of fifty three years  
of shared dreams.  
Now leaving only one.

I  
don't understand.  
How can you believe in God amid this dying?

He  
replies.  
But in doing so he does not turn from her eyes,  
kissing his fingers before gently touching her lips.

*There comes a time, many times, when we become too tired. Here, frequently, we fumble around in the fading light –sometimes for years, knowing the way is lost. However, if we choose to be aware of it, there is a second choice – to embrace the coming darkness – to tread that path through uncertainty. Because no matter how dark it becomes, how long it seems we need to walk, and how weary we become, how exhausted we must feel, trusting only our instincts and the companionship of ourselves, by choosing to enter the muted light, we know that eventually this too will pass and we will emerge into a new and radiant world. This decision, this journey, is one that only I can take.*

*And yet, I am never alone.*

*There are many pilgrims on this road, on their own journey into enlightenment. Our paths cross and diverge. There is always someone to share the road with. And that is the gift of embracing change. As human beings, even though that change is uniquely ours, there is no change that need be experienced alone.*

*Sharing our experience with those who are for the first time entering a darkness of their own is the greatest of gifts. Of experience, of learning and of encouragement. Of emancipation.*

## New moon at Uylenvlei

The space the heart left,  
when it was gone,  
was cold.  
The last memories of warmth scattered into the surrounding.

Momentary helplessness in stolen promise  
at the point of no turning back.

And yet there can be beauty in this moment of intention,  
in this future, hidden, but not choiceless.

With the privilege now of looking back,  
perhaps emerging from this deepest past  
will reveal the true vitality in desperation.

Your greatest strength in coming out of dark  
is that you passed through it.

And the greatest gift of your solitary journey  
was to share that with another.

## **Both Human**

Though I cannot trespass in  
your confidential corner of creation,  
the sanctuary from which your nucleus of being  
shines her light into the world,  
I can wait outside.

And we shall meet in neutral meadows between us  
to share our stories of discoveries in those places,  
enclosed in thoughtful solitude,  
about ourselves.

Perhaps, surprised to discover,  
in these isolated temples  
with individual decoration,  
the walls and weather are the same.

## Robyn

Finally,  
too fragile to bear the weight of  
your desiccated spirit,  
you fell.

As delicate leaves do when seasons change.  
Naturally fractured. Beautifully.

If, while you were falling,  
I had known  
I might have outstretched my nimble fingers and caught you  
thoughtlessly. Impulsively.

But what right have I to deny your fortune  
to courageously embrace the space  
between the path predetermined  
and who you can choose to become?

Though it shook you to feel vulnerable,  
to turn your back on another so you could face yourself,  
break your own heart to mend your soul.

Forgive me. I forget.

In coming back down to earth  
you could rise,  
planting feet on solid ground  
you could grow.

I would not have dared  
had I only noticed  
that through it all, like an autumn leaf,  
you remained  
golden.

## Depression

The mood to which you awoke  
irreconcilable with that which rocked you to sleep  
in folded gentle arms  
affectionate eyes  
faintly on her breath the contented scent of forever.

This morning a lonely sunlight nudges your waking,  
rose tincture filtered by  
confusion pasted across the windows of your consciousness,  
dishevelled thoughts scattered across its floor  
and you too palsied to pick them up,  
tripping attempts to right yourself.

Forever seems implausible in this mind.  
Merely an evolving fearful uncertainty.  
Daunting, dangerous, disheartening.

Falling through this very emptiness  
what ambition remains?

Perhaps it is this:

When all is lost and there is nothing more to lose  
the glorious beauty of hopelessness  
hides, in her silent spacious despondency,  
a new and open path  
that has been waiting for this moment to rise and meet you.  
Inconvenient godsend that leaves no option  
but to walk on.

And walk on you will.  
Not in desperation, but because  
everything from the moment  
you took that first anxious gasp into your uncertain world  
to which you were new  
has brought you to this benevolent instant of perseverance.  
And, if you had known the story of your ripening history before,  
the fortitude to endure may have deserted you.

And so as, like you have done so many times before,  
you take this courageous step  
in all that you have learned  
through the treasures past of unease and hurt,  
you make the decision  
this time will be purposeful.

In faith, with the determined step of the saint,  
reaching out your hand  
to feel in yours  
the hands reaching out for you.

## **Bhodhi Khaya**

I did not expect that when I saw you  
I should find myself.  
Not where I am, but in this home  
I am learning to love.

That in the new lines of your face  
I should see my own journey  
of one who dares to tread into his own soul.

This is not what I was taught -  
to seek my history in the eyes of another;

to find paired footprints at the end of the sand where  
the essence of being melts  
into the waters of humanity.

Here in this gracious spaciousness.

As the mountain bears her fynbos coat close  
against the cold,  
renewed strength in vulnerability guides

our shared return  
to the path of waking.



*As a very young child, there were few places where I felt safer and more loved than sheltered, before bedtime, in my grandfather's arms. Kind and quiet and battered by his own world, he was a man of few words. Silent, sipping whisky and orange, he smelled of age. I on his lap. Always around his neck, a large St Christopher medallion. The Saint of Travellers.*

*Like my grandfather, there was something special about this man. According to the legend, Christopher sought to serve he who was most powerful. In hearing the king was afraid of the devil, and the devil afraid of Christ, he realigned his allegiance and pursued the service of Christ. However, despite searching, was unable to find him. Christopher was advised that if he was to find this saviour of men, he too should make himself of service to others, carrying those who were unable to cross by themselves at a dangerous stretch in the river. A large and muscular man, he set himself to this duty.*

*One day, he was asked to ferry an infant. Setting out on this crossing, with the child on his shoulders, as he took each successive step through the torrent, the infant became heavier and heavier, until the weight was unbearable. Christopher grew afraid in the uncertainty that, lest his legs should fail, he would make it at all, drowning them both. Nevertheless, he persevered and eventually delivered the infant safely on the opposite bank. He never discovered the identity of this celebrated passenger. The child was Christ.*

*After my own dad died, my grandfather's medallion was given to me. It is a treasure. And looking at it now, with the eyes of a child, I am reminded of the tiny baby Jesus riding the shoulders of the saint. He appears happy; listening to music through a set of headphones, waving and calling to those left behind on the shore. Blissfully unaware of the benevolent strength, determination and perseverance of his own saviour who bears him; who has journeyed before him.*

*This is the true Saint of Travellers. He who perseveres when all seems lost; who makes the path easier for those who follow. And who carries those too weak or weary to carry themselves.*

## The Saint of Travellers

A protective mantle  
passed down.  
Choosing silence  
in preference to words.

After so many passing years  
you and I treading together  
this path profoundly chosen.

About your chest the Saint of Travellers.

Welcomed guest at your sacred haven.  
Seated in a worn chair.  
Deeply, I breathed you.

And I remember this:

When everything else made me what I am  
you loved who I have been.

The baby in earphones  
crosses the water, waving.  
Feet dry. Deity.  
Greets the shore on shoulders  
steady, strong.  
Safe at landing. From that point

changes everything.  
Be like that.

Christopher.  
Now slipping across my fingers.  
Thumb sweeps across the face  
of this powerful protector.

This mettle, once who you were  
now  
part of me.  
Commanding,  
unease drowning in his  
clear, distinct voice.

To fear now would be to deny  
all you have learned  
about yourself  
and the countless journeys of uncertain others  
crossing this swollen, tumultuous river  
that afforded you safe harbour  
and this education.

How humbling an honour,  
in awareness of those to come,  
to set out from where you have been.  
Your own voyage at last  
catching the wind.



*Regardless of what our attitude to other people may be, none of us lives, behaves or recovers in isolation. Each of us profoundly affects the lives, happiness and future of each other.*

*You and I will never be the same after meeting as we would have been if we had never met. But likewise, the lives of those we never meet are irrevocably changed by not meeting us.*

*So we have an enormous responsibility to live with compassion.*

*Lindsay was a dear friend who guided me on my journey to sobriety and apprenticeship in learning to live differently. A deeply compassionate man whose ailing health was a constant source of disability and sometimes considerable despair. In his house next to the ocean, we would often stay up much of the night talking about what it means to be a human being and an addict. In the morning we would drive down to the beach, where I would walk and he would sit in the shade of the palm trees in the companionship of his beloved spaniel.*

*After recovering from years of his own addictions, Lindsay assisted many addicts to sobriety. He would say “I will love you until you learn to love yourself”. In his company, I knew I was loved. And, because of his radiance, I also felt a deep connection to those others he loved, most of whom I have never met.*

## Hibiscus Coast

*In memory of Lindsay Gaskarth Marshall*

I see you where I left you.  
Leaning on the table  
among trees on the beach,  
inspiration stolen by cigarettes,  
bones and skin.

Only the weight of your wisdom  
prevents the wind from whisking you away.

I, on the sand, shirtless,  
having made my peace with the sea,  
walk out of the sun.

It seemed our souls had been companions forever.  
Already lovers while  
still strangers  
waiting for that first beautiful moment to meet  
when our minds, like childhood friends  
amid fields and forests  
breathing the hidden secrets life  
reveals only to those who dare  
embrace them together, because  
there is no real learning without  
sharing and no suffering  
is worth the time and the effort  
if it does not come to good  
to realise richer, fuller purpose  
that itself breathes only to bring  
life to others  
who must still meet their own soul  
before it with courage grasps  
the unfamiliar hand of the other  
of whom it is unaware  
it has known  
until now.

So when my tears that released you  
had dried,  
though emptiness overwhelmed me,  
I heard a wiser voice  
that was not me,  
but was indeed my own.

No-one is themselves when they have loved.

A painter's pastels, married on the palette, weave  
unimaginable colour;  
so two souls, now no longer alone,  
conceive texture to the canvas of being.

And none is left unnew when  
they have been loved.



*Experience the moment. Truly, experience the moment.*  
*Eat healthily.*  
*Sleep.*  
*Spend time, face to face, with others.*  
*Share of yourself.*  
*Exercise.*

## Long Distance Swimmer

Emerging of blue  
sunlighted ripples, sentinel.  
Path enveloped by parcels  
of breath.

Claimed by this sublime submergence,  
weightless motion resists,  
and nudges me on my way.

I've taken years to be here.

And in my peaceful, eclectic stride  
I share with myself  
time in my own mind.

*I'm work in progress.*

*Sleep.*

*Escapes me still.*

## **Insomnia**

In front of the mirror  
I reflect on my appearance in the dark  
Only to observe  
While I dream of peaceful rest  
I must sleep with eyes open.

I have watched others in this inside world  
Where to me entry is forbidden.  
How their mind is trusted to the night  
A safe and learned place  
In which I find only terror.

## Why we love

Sometimes, they say  
we should complement each other.  
They say our differences  
which set us apart  
should drive us  
away.

And, sometimes,  
in my uncertainty,  
when I take notice of  
what they say  
I notice.

You are sun.  
Impatient flames of brilliant morning  
burning into my delicate sleepy corners.  
I am night, brittle,  
broken by the faintest moonbeam.

And I notice  
in my discouragement, eyes down,  
through the panels of the pier,  
floating leaves;  
clouds collecting  
in their own reflection  
as if airbrushed by Uriel;  
ocean-gray, heron-blue, bottle-brush-red, charcoal,  
alizarin crimson, auburn, olive.

Colour on colour  
prolific and leaden.

And I notice this: this is it, this is ours,  
this.

We are water, earth.

We are wakefulness.

We are the tenderly sculptured expanse between us,  
sovereign space for someone new.

## Epilogue

Nothing miraculous happened today.

The sun, in the morning,  
wrapped away by clouds  
carefully so as not to break.

That made it darker than it would have been.

I stood in water left over from yesterday aware  
of so much suffering  
it seemed that each of us had hurt at some time  
or another.

In fact, that seemed so common  
it must be normal  
and even so  
it was always over  
almost as if it had been there  
just enough to frighten and enlighten  
both at the same time  
without anyone  
even noticing.  
If it was given a chance.

In that moment my attention turned  
to breath  
that uninvited devoured me  
from the inside -  
inconspicuous traveller,  
riding red cells from cell to cell  
presenting a gift before  
consuming itself,  
leaving visibly in the air  
about my face  
chilled and dense in dim light.

And I wondered if, when she is tired and ceases to call,  
I will notice.

But now,  
while I am here,  
she whispers:  
“Share”.



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