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**National Poetry Day Project October 2010**

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what my daughter saw

she said there was a moon
shaped in the wax that had
dripped from the candle
into the saucer below
and even had a face
with a nose and a mouth
in profile
  it was exquisite
she said and said she would
keep it for its
capriciousness
though didn't quite say it
that way
neither did she say she
believed there was a man
in the moon who
was made out of green cheese
though still
spontaneously
saw value in scented wax
from a burnt out candle
that
to the eye
became something else
entirely
I watched my father doing this
lifting every leaf
spraying them
he used insecticide
I use bio degradable
natural anti bug treatment
but some things don’t change

I still use his secateurs
to cut away the dead parts
the wasted leaves
deadhead the flowers
and check the pots weed
all the same way

even the hands slightly soiled
the etched skin
the size and spread of fingers
are just as I remember them
generations

my mother left me with a neighbour
and a name to remember her
when she went to rejoin her life
without me somewhere else

my first name is James
although names are often taken
from someone in a family
this is mine alone

my adopted parents looking for a child
ended up with “baby James”
without a doubt I got the better deal
and a name to call myself

so there I was at two
a graft on someone else’s tree
a foundling found
to share a home and family name

my wife and children have it now
for them it is a signature
just like every other name
generations in the making
My Father’s Spade

My father would put on a cardigan, darned at the elbows, dig till the soles of his wellingtons were clogged with dirt;

stretch twine between sticks so that rows were straight and parallel; lean knobbly beanpoles together as a long arch, like folk-dancers’ arms;

would lean on his spade, puff a flimsy roll-up, then sprinkle lime, so the garden looked as though it had woken to frost.

Scarlet runners, potatoes, marrows, grew in neat abundance; poaching jays put a stop to peas, and blackfly to broad beans.

His old spade rests its rusty blade and bleached wooden handle in my shed. I use it now and again; share its familiarity with his hands and feet.
The Way The Cookie Crumbles

She fights the idea that she could lose her independence.
The table where she always feeds us begins to creak,
just like her knees do every time she bends them.
Her family circle grows closer.
The circles that surround it spread like rubber bands
stretched too many times.
They become too wide to hold their shape. Still the pain restricts her movements.
Mother feels exercise might keep her in the loop. She stretches past the bounds we place.
She doesn't rest.
She twists her neck and points her chin.
I mean, she tosses her head defiantly

She dumps that cup of sympathy and makes us cookies and tea.
The Prodigal Weight Of Apricots

Go bind thou up yon dangling Apricocks
Which, like unruly children, make their sire
Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight.

RICHARD II      SHAKESPEARE

1.

Heloise In Brittany

Naked, pregnant;
feasting on apricots;
Abelard holding a stone
between finger and thumb.
On the table, Lenten lilies;
a half-empty bowl;
pollen; more stones.
While lovers, Peter and Heloise had a son, Astrolabe. In their future correspondences no mention is made of him although Abelard writes, in his HISTORIA CALAMITATUM, that he was brought up by his sister, Denise, in Brittany. It is not known if his son knew of any poems written for him; or, indeed, if Abelard wrote those that survive. After Abelard’s death, Heloise mentions Astrolabe in a letter, tries to get help for his future, but only in passing. However ...

2.

Abelard’s Last Days At St. Marcel

Many revisions. I am writing poems, a sequence for my son. I was his age, now, when he was born. As then, no one must see, must know.

The wood basket’s brought in.
The fire laid then lit. I thank them.
A letter’s handed over with a smirk. I wait,

watch the fame’s yellowness, fascinated by the sound, lichen, fungi, lathed by flame; releasing devils, preachers, hidden in smoke.

Such fire can roar like a heretic or drift like incense; we can hold neither yet its smell hangs on clothes.

They leave. I break the seal; outside the Infirmary window, Mars, Venus, visible beyond hills; from Troyes, faint hammering, a smithy’s forge;

each page loses its chill as light dances through parchment, two logs dissolve and I read it again, again.

They return, recite Compline, carry then put me to bed. Though old and ill I am warm, watching ashes’ brittleness like bones’ future fall in a coffin.
Heloise And The Novice

As rain curtains in
we shelter under eaves,
watch two doves raise wings,
stretch necks, bow in turn.
she hands me an apricot, sobs,
says she’s never known love,
just discipline. I bite,
want to expound FRUCTUS AUTEM
SPIRITUS EST: CARITAS ... LONGANIMITAS ... CONTINENTIA –¹
that an apricot is sweet
only when ripe.
Instead I remember
and eat.

Later we emerge,
faces moist,
hurry for Nones.
Astrolabe Visits The Paraclete

I was working as a gardener, Paris, when I heard the song:

*Though his parents live, an orphan;*
*the Church’s bastard, he.*
*Wandering lambs are now his only kin*
in the fields of Brittany.
A Breton accent, like mine.
“And what was the child’s name?”
“Astrolabe.”
I froze,

went to Notre Dame,
talked with a Priest.
He told of a secret marriage;
my father’s castration,
my mother taking the veil.

Then showed me a prayer:
*And Thou, Jesus, sweet Lord,*
*art Thou not also a mother?*
*Truly, Thou art a mother,*
*the mother of all mothers,*
*who tasted death*
in Thy desire
to give life to Thy children.
My father’s prayer.

*PATER NOSTER,*
*MATER JESUS.*
Which way to go?

I arrived at the Paraclete,
my father’s house
my mother’s home,
explained I sought work.
“Pruning,” the sister said.
I began.
Each bush thinned,
each stem beyond the bud.
the Abbess walks by
reading a letter,
fingering a cross,
looks up, greets me.
“What’s your name.
Where are you from?”

“Mother …”
“Reverend Mother,”
she corrects,
clear eyed.
I cut, I cut;
branches fall.

I say I’m only passing through.
she blesses me,
promises to pray.
I do not recognize her smile.

1. *The quotation is from Galatians 5:22. A modern translation would read ‘The fruits of The Spirit are; love ... longsuffering ... patience.*

2. *The Paraclete was a Monastery founded by Peter Abelard. Paraclete is Greek for one who pleads. Later it became a Nunnery with Heloise appointed as the Abbess.*

The poem was a prizewinner in the 1997 PHRAZ competition for Long Poems and it has also appeared in All We Know Is All We See, Arrowhead, 2002. See: [http://www.arrowheadpress.co.uk/books/allwe.html](http://www.arrowheadpress.co.uk/books/allwe.html) for details.
FAMILY PORTRAIT

Lurking in the shadows of history
the knight who built warehouses in Leith
whose descendants fled to Ireland
after lending money to a king;
the younger son who migrated
from Clandeboye to Kiwiland
and married a parson’s daughter;
his two sisters became barmaids
on the West Coast goldfields;
the Australian engineer, reputed
to be an earl’s son on remittance,
who married and deserted
the Irish lacemaker;
the printer, the nurse,
my red headed sisters
and me standing beside
the Welsh sailor who brings
his own retinue of shadows;
the musician who played
at a king’s wedding,
the poets, the miners and
around us our sons.
strong handsome and clever
with beautiful wives and
their children who hold
the future in eager hands.
My brother (1963)

I enter, none talks, but I listen, mother's feeble weeping from the corner where light is prohibited from entering, the doorway and the window are covered by people outside and except for mother's weeping, silence fills the room, fear fills my little mind. Father comes near, hugs me, closer to his chest and murmurs into my right ear: 'He's gone.....' A few seconds of dumbness collects strength to burst out - now the room is filled with sounds - of mother, father, brothers and sisters - an entire family's outburst on a life's departure. Only he does not cry; he lies, his eyes closed, awaiting his last journey.
Parents

I really don’t know who they were those people who bequeathed my genes their memories are just a blur returning only in my dreams two faces in a photograph two strangers I have never known lie deep beneath their epitaph two names etched into silent stone as long suppressed emotions stir my thoughts are driven to extremes I offer up for him and her these wayward words and rhyming schemes on their behalf through many drafts these two imperfect paragraphs
Father, with hindsight

He spent his early years
driving plants down into the ground
by tacking on to them whole heaps
of fruit and veg.

Beans he glued on shrinking vines;
carrots hammered into the soil;
currant bushes and raspberry canes
he sprinkled with beads of black and red.
They duly dropped their leaves
as summer turned to spring.

Carefully he extracted seeds
and sealed them up in labelled bags,
then excavated dung from every furrow,
setting it free on its quest to find
the only right particular beast.

Any bare land he covered
assiduously with weeds. This
was his part in evolution’s
long march on to nothingness.
My father-in-law’s leg

… stood in the corner by the wardrobe from where he had to hop. Even when he wore it, it lurked in corners of our minds, as though his trouser leg was never camouflage enough. At first, just a casualty of war, it grew and colonised the man, until he was all leg, stamping through the house and all our loves and arguments, reminding us that he himself was left on that Italian beach, had sent out this replacement to goose-step through what life remained.
Mothers I Have Known

women in my life were people to be paid attention to when I was too young to wear lipstick or know how to comb my hair so it did not look like a hay stack. Their voices spoke commands and certainty and right words appropriate to all situations demanding responses. They knew what to say when one of them was sick or happy or had given birth or lost someone or fell into sorrows so black, speech could not bring back light or free the tongue.

they greeted each other with hugs, kisses, gifts, or baked offerings covered with tea towels freshly laundered, pressed and folded so they somehow did not slip away on the walk over to the house of the one being comforted or reassured or just visited because it was time for talk at kitchen tables over cups of tea or coffee served in ceremonies requiring china cups gilded and flowered, ripe for special moments while they met children played just far enough away not to disturb but close enough to appear when summoned when suspicions about about noise called for interventions.

they met on afternoons or even mornings when men were away at work and if the men were home they were included in conversations with notes missing as if the conductor's pages had blown off into a wind along with memories of keys in which the music was to be played so melodies became impressions like masses of gold throated narcissi among birches in soils wet and leaf heavy beneath dense cloud dressed skies on such occasions the women smiled and laughed for men who leaned back into their chairs, like cats fed on warm milk while the women became voluptuously exotic flowers as they moved around their kitchens tending kettles and filling cups to the brim and I understood they were keeping wounds hidden deep beneath starched aprons for times when only women with children came together to be mothers sculptors and guardians of all our worlds.
Barbara Philips

**Telepathogram**

I look for truth in photographs
they are faded, cracked, yellow
there is no black or white
in spaces near neat borders

I want to push those borders
into panoramas set in times
when you stood as you stand
in my hand in this field

I cannot decipher the look
in your eyes as you gaze into
the camera held by someone unknown
to me as I was then unknown to you

the lens drew in your story
let the imprint find this fragment
my fingers trace your face
but the space you fill escapes me

we exchange looks
you speak to me across the years
your voice is an apparition
but I cannot make out the words

love is all I feel
the words need not be heard
I turn myself into a telepathogram
and send myself to you
It's my son's birthday. He should have been
22 today, but his braces fixed smile
will forever be 15, embarrassed, a cynical
twist at the corner of his mouth.
My friend in school is telling me about her 25 year old son
who is going to move in with his girlfriend and I want to scream.

My youngest daughter goes to the graveyard twice this year: first with her dad
(they've planted cyclamen bulbs, smell the soft, wet earth),
then with me. We light a candle (comforting small light in the fast falling dusk)
sing to him, wish him
everlasting happiness
wherever he is. I cry.
Deep, guttural sobs.
We pin the organ donor medal to his tombstone,
the only medal he's ever got
in his short life, his long death.
He must be proud.

Later, at night, my mother
calls. She's in a hurry, going out to the Bridge club, doesn't have time to
talk to me. Don't you know
what day it is? Sure, ask your dad how sad
I was today, it's very hard for me, you know.
So why won't you talk to me?
What for? You're hurt, I'm hurt, what's more
to be said? Nothing, mom,
you're right, not a thing
is left to be said.
mom and dad

Mom nags dad not to wear 'that ridiculous hat'. 60 years together and her self esteem is still welded to his appearance in the eyes of their friends.
Missing

On my family tree
are two names I have not heard before,
they were never mentioned, or whispered,
no breath for them, no life at all.
My mother's brothers Sam and Davey,
their existence hidden, excised,
instead of honoured and remembered.

Sam, a tailor, sewing ladies garments,
thin and bent from crouching low,
a wife and children, maybe three?
My first cousins I'd have liked to know,
to have met them when I was young,
what fun we might have had, playing games
or climbing trees, a gang of feral boys.

Davey, perhaps a bold adventurer,
he wasn't one to stay at home
he'd have sailed around the world,
then told me stories from far-off lands,
of ships and natives wearing beads,
of animals with stripes and tails,
and all the dangers he had faced.

The truth, when told, is not so colourful:
for deep amongst the census records
I found the entry for little Davey,
but of Sam there was no trace -
in Plashet cemetery lies the family grave,
un-named, unkempt long forgotten,
their final resting place.
CONTRIBUTORS

James Bell

James Bell - has published two collections to date. "the just vanished place" (2008) and "fishing for beginners" (2010) both from tall-lighthouse in London. Scottish by birth he has lived for may years in Devon.

Jim Bennett

Jim Bennett lives near Liverpool in the UK and is the author of 63 books, including books for children, books of poetry and many technical titles on transport and examinations.

His poetry collections include;
Drums at New Brighton  (Lifestyle 1999)
Down in Liverpool (CD)  (Long Neck  2001)
The Man Who Tried to Hug Clouds  (Bluechrome  2004 reprinted 2006)
Larkhill   (Searle Publishing 2009)

He has won many awards for his writing and performance including 3 DADAFest awards. He is also managing editor of www.poetrykit.org one of the worlds most successful internet sites for poets.

Jim taught Creative Writing at the University of Liverpool and now tours throughout the year giving readings and performances of his work.

Lesley Burt

I am from Christchurch, Dorset and, with the exception of a few years in Germany and Hampshire between 1966 and 1974, have lived here ever since. I have two children that, to my astonishment and theirs, are now approaching middle age.

I wrote poetry as a child, and at grammar school was one of the rare kids who loved poetry, all things Shakespearean, Jane Austen and Dickens.

My qualifications are in teaching and social work. During the last ten or so years of work, I did a couple of Open College of the Arts courses, began to write again and had some poems published in various magazines. Since then, I developed my skills further through a couple of Jim Bennett’s online courses.

My poems have appeared in various magazines such as Tears in the Fence, Poetry Nottingham, The Interpreter’s House, Roundyhouse etc. and online through Poetry Kit. I have also edited Poetry Kit’s Transparent Words and The Helen Lowson Paintings Project.

I retired in January 2009 from a post at Southampton Solent University where I was a lecturer in social work. I have missed my brilliant colleagues and the students; however, this gave me time to compile my first collection, Framed and Juxtaposed,
I am currently working towards another collection, and enjoying another year of organising sessions with my group of Christchurch poets.

**Lynn Ciesielski**

Lynn Ciesielski resides in Buffalo, New York USA with her new husband. Her family is very important to her. Her mother lives alone about three miles away. She speaks to her most days even if only to inquire about her health. Lynn taught Special Education in the city schools for eighteen years and retired a little under two years ago. Now she devotes most of her time to her husband and other family members and to her poetry.

**Bob Cooper**

Bob Cooper lives in Birmingham, UK. He is currently working on his 7th. Collection.

**Waiata Dawn Davies**

Waiata Dawn Davies, a retired teacher, lives at the mouth of the Waitaki River in the South Island of New Zealand. Her last public appearance was at Wordstorm Literary Festival, Darwin Australia in May 2010.

**S K Iyer**

Is from India, presently put up in Pune. A commerce graduate, presently leading a retired but a busy life and poetry for him is a hobby.

**Mick Moss**

Mick Moss is a 57 year old art school drop out and music industry graduate. Originally from London, he has lived in Liverpool for 25 years.

**Stuart Nunn**

Stuart Nunn is a retired English teacher living in South Gloucestershire. He is an examiner/moderator for A Level English Language and is currently re-planting his garden.
Barbara Phillips

Barbara Phillips has written the following poetry collections: Tympanic Mysteries: Love Is a Tympanic Mystery; Shadows In the Echoes; Blue Sails Haiku and Not; Confessions of a Sybaritic Puritan; Goldfish Sings Cherry Blossom Songs; By Flim Flam Fandango I Dance Love With You. Her poems have appeared in various anthologies such as Oval Victory: The Best of Canadian Poetry, and No Love Lost EOA and West London Poems Part Two, and others, as well as literary journals such as Ygdrasil A Journal of the Poetic Arts, Bywords Quarterly Journal, Quills Canadian Poetry Magazine, Ottawa Arts Review, Transparent Words, and Poetry Super Highway.

Tammara Or Slilat

Tammara Or Slilat, poet and painter, born 1960, lives in Arbel, Israel. Published two books of poems in Hebrew, many poems in magazines and e-zines, currently in the last stage of her MA in English Literature and Creative Writing in Bar Ilan University, Tel Aviv.

David Supper

David Supper was born in Surrey and apart from brief sojourns abroad, he lived and worked in Reading until 2007 when he moved to Nottingham. David taught art in a large comprehensive school in Berkshire and started writing poetry in 1999. He directs plays and designs sets in his local theatre and still paints when he finds the time. David founded Serpent's Tooth, a poetry writers group, in West Bridgford, where he now lives."