

# White House Poetry Circle

## 'Coronavirus Times'

Issue 9  
February 2021



### Keep Calm and Carry On

In a way, these times are teaching  
Us to be patient and calm,  
We can learn a lot from old values  
A slower life has its charm.

We all miss the company of friends  
It will come, when this thing ends,  
We will laugh and have special times  
When we meet again and share our rhymes.

In the meantime  
We have enough time -  
To hear the sweet birdsong  
And to linger longer, all day long  
Evelyn Hazard

*"Even the darkest night  
will end and the sun  
will rise."*

*Victor Hugo (1802 -1885)*

### 'The Jab'

Well it didn't make the papers  
And I wasn't on the news  
But I've had a Covid Jab, the first of two  
And I have to say, no queues.

It was just like any other job  
Except a mask I had to wear  
Social distancing, yes there was  
Side effects are something rare.

I had to smile when I arrived  
As I watched the people there  
Who'd come along to get the jab  
Some of course in care.

Many showed confusion  
As they lined up for their turn  
Not knowing what they were there for  
But they were very soon to learn.

Some thought perhaps a hamper  
Or a day out with their mates  
But no it's just a Covid jab  
Yet some did celebrate.

January the thirteenth  
My second one is due  
Then they tell me I'll be covered  
For the Covid, not the flu.

But that jab I had some time ago  
So for me that is okay  
And when you are at this certain age  
You no longer have to pay.  
Terry Bickell

*Hope is the thing  
with feathers  
That perches in the  
soul,  
And sings the  
tune-without the  
words,  
And never stops  
at all...  
Emily Dickinson  
(1830 - 1886)*

### Food for Thought

I meet him at the bottom of my garden  
At sunup and again just after four,  
There are times when he gets a bit impatient  
And I find him kicking his heels at my backdoor!

We don't have time to have a conversation  
He's got just one objective on his mind,  
He knows that I'll be ready and quite willing,  
So that satisfaction soon with me, he'll find!

He's well aware I'll never be too busy  
To attend to his needs twice a day  
But once he's had all that he's comes for,  
Without a backward glance, he's on his way.

He likes it best of all beneath the lilac;  
I guess it gives him what he needs for cover  
It's there he finds what I give to his liking,  
My twice a day, come what may, young lover.

Somehow I don't think he really loves me  
So why do I keep giving him his way?  
'Tis said you get to a man's heart through his  
stomach -  
So I'll go on supplying Robin, worms every day!  
Violet Charlton



I watched a blackbird on a budding  
sycamore  
One Easter Day, when sap was stirring  
twigs to the core;  
I saw his tongue, and crocus-coloured bill,  
Parting and closing as he turned his trill;  
Then he flew down, seized on a stem of  
hay,  
And upped to where his building scheme  
was under way,  
As if so sure a nest was never shaped on  
spray.

*Thomas Hardy (1840 - 1928)*

## 'Getting Fit with Fat Tim'



Come on now get off your butts  
And follow Tim along  
As he tries to get the weight off  
With a mind so sure and strong.

There are many out there just like Tim,  
Where the mirror is not their friend  
Where they find it hard to touch their  
toes  
So the message that he sends.

We're all overweight and lazy  
Not the way we want to be,  
Come on folks, get a grip on this  
Can we do it? Wait and see.

You do not need a rope to skip  
Just use your feet and hands.  
You do not need to own a treadmill  
We all can understand.

You can walk or jog an hour a day  
In easy stages too.  
Watch that diet, put the sweets away  
There's just so much you all can do

Get fit not fat, feel well each day  
As the mirror becomes a friend  
You look forward to looking in it,  
As good vibes now the mirror sends.

Good luck to Tim and all his followers  
May success be the end result.  
Keep it up forever -  
Become a poor man's Usain Bolt!  
Terry Bickell

Wise words for dieters - 'My doctor told  
me to stop having intimate dinners for  
four. Unless there are three other people'.  
Orson Welles (1915 - 1985)

## The Elder and the Wren

Elder once grew in my garden  
Unchecked it grew and grew,  
Reached up to the sky, got to twenty  
feet high,  
It's top branches way out of my  
view.

Elder blossom in the springtime  
Was extremely evident,  
But the odour it exuded  
Was not exactly heaven sent!  
Elder has a nickname,  
Because of its smell you see,  
It's called by those who are in the  
know  
By the derogatory name of 'cat's  
wee'!

My elder was not very healthy,  
The aphid attacked it each spring  
Their arrival would attract birds of all  
kinds,  
Their fledglings too, they would  
bring.

Dozens of blue tits and great tits  
would fly in,  
Long-tailed tits too and then  
Before those tits could devour all the  
insects,  
On the scene would appear Jenny  
Wren.

I loved her visits and it seemed  
She was a single soul,  
I never saw her with a suitor;  
A 'loner' was her role.

I'd watch the way she flitted around,  
Her style was quick and jerky -  
She fared very well on her aphid diet  
And she always appeared to be  
perky.

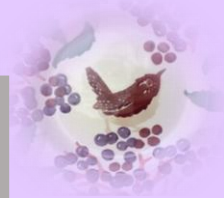
I usually feed my bird visitors  
With suet pellets, fat balls, even  
cheese,  
Cake crumbs, especially for robins  
And stale biscuits they too would  
please.

The 'Starvelings', well they would eat  
anything  
Brown bread and fats of any type,  
And the wood pigeons weren't fussy  
either-  
They'd scoff the elder berries when  
they were ripe!

But last year I made a decision  
That the Elder had to go,  
It was dwarfing all the shrubs in my  
garden,  
So big I'd allowed it to grow.  
I didn't want to arrange its demise,  
But every year my neighbour  
complained -  
'That elder's much too near my house  
And it would interfere with the  
drains!'  
So down it came last summer  
That massive elder berry.

And now no more the blue tits will  
come  
To feast, or to make merry.  
No more berries for the 'starvelings',  
The wood pigeons too will miss it,  
And now I fret, 'cos I regret  
Jenny Wren will no more visit.  
I wonder where she'll go now  
To get her insect meal,  
Or will she find some other food  
Which will to her appeal?

I'll miss those birds who used to come  
The Elder larder to plunder,  
Where will they go to get their fill -  
And where's that Wren, I wonder?  
I really hope she's doing fine  
And has found another venue,  
Where aphids are in abundance  
And always on the menu!  
Violet Charlton



## The White House - Poetry Anthology Project

In the last couple of weeks, Griffi took the opportunity of telephoning several members of our Circle and all were pleased to have the chance to 'meet' her, even 'at a distance'.

As a result it has been decided to widen the 'brief' for poems requested and we now ask that you submit a maximum of 10 of your poems, recent or not (but as yet unpublished) - on any subject from your life experiences (try to limit the length to a maximum of 2 pages for each poem). If you have any poems especially relating to the Becontree Estate, Dagenham and the White House - be sure to include them.

Selection for publication will be by a White House panel - as yet a cut-off date has not been decided but don't delay - please send your work in soon!



'Roland' by - Terry Bickell

I'm on my own, so to find a friend  
That was prepared to share my life,  
I thought was rather special  
As I've not now got a wife.

I'm not that way, but he is a male  
And people might begin to wonder  
When we are out together socialising  
And I say he is from a place down under.

Not Australia no, I didn't mean that  
He's from under the bleeding sink -  
He's a big 'un too, a kinda' brown  
I caught him having a drink.

I'm sure he winked and raised a paw  
As our eyes met across the room,  
But jump I did, right out of my skin  
As I reached for the back yard broom

What really was amazing  
Was that he spoke as well that day,  
'I'm Roland', he said quietly to me,  
'What's your name? Is it Tom, Harry or Ray?'

I told him my name was Steve  
But you can call me Brooksie, if you like -  
'I know you can talk which is amazing  
Can you by any chance ride a bike?'

I thought perhaps we could go out  
together  
Looking for some toot,  
I'm sure we can help each other out  
As we go out on our bikes or by foot.

Have you got any brothers or sisters?  
Residing here with you  
Or are you just a bachelor rat  
That has turned up out of the blue?

Roland told me straight, he's on his own  
And he'd heard I like a quiz.  
I thought that's good, that's really good  
Between us we could be quite a whiz!

Once this bleeding lockdowns gone  
And we are getting back to normal,  
We can practice hard to win 'em all  
From Dagenham to Cornwall.

Roland has become my friend,  
A special friend at that -  
Not many out there now, could claim  
They have a friend that's a talking rat!



*The only English patients I have ever known refuse tea, have been typhus cases; and the first sign of their getting better was their craving again for tea.*

*Florence  
Nightingale  
(1820 - 1910)*



'A Forgotten Museum'

The Florence Nightingale Museum has closed  
And I'm told by some for good,  
How can this be right at a time like this?  
I for one don't believe it should.

Her name will always be synonymous  
With modern nursing as it is today.  
We have all admired her through the years I know  
For her truly special ways.

Even now as we fight through a pandemic  
Her name is there again  
As the Nightingale hospitals are put to use  
To help with all the pain.

People like Florence Nightingale  
Should be remembered for all time  
And to close this wonderful museum now,  
Can only be a crime!

The inspiration for our N.H.S.  
I know for sure she gives,  
And I feel within my heart of hearts  
Her presence here still lives.

Still fighting for the good of all  
A very special person,  
Let's keep the memory of her alive for ever  
And know, without her things will worsen.

I ask, in fact I beg of you  
That the government help to fund  
This memory for many future years  
With a museum - it can be done!  
Terry Bickell

A Peaceful Time

I wish I had walked in the English countryside in 1903  
Across green fields, stretching out  
Peaceful, quiet and bright  
Before the war to end all wars.

I would trace the footsteps of a young composer  
Through the Surrey fields, where  
Vaughan Williams walked,  
Contemplating English Folk  
Songs he could set to music.

I would walk, and take in the beauty  
Around me and before me -  
I would listen to his 'Lark Ascending'  
And my spirit would soar with each note.  
Evelyn Hazard

*"It's spring fever. That is what the name of it is. And when you've got it, you want—oh, you don't quite know what it is you do want, but it just fairly makes your heart ache, you want it so!"*  
Mark Twain (1835 - 1910)

### W. B Yeats 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

### W H Auden 'Look Stranger'

Look, stranger, on this island now  
The leaping light for your delight discovers,  
Stand stable here  
And silent be,  
That through the channels of the ear  
May wander like a river  
The swaying sound of the sea.

Poetry Challenge for February!  
These two beautiful poems are - both poets know how to evoke imagery through their clever use of alliteration and phrases that when spoken mimic the actions they describe - 'lake water lapping with low sounds', 'leaping light' and the sublime 'swaying sound of the sea'.  
So - our challenge for this month is to write a short poem using these techniques - it won't be easy but it will be interesting to see what we can do - (please submit your effort to be included in the next CT)... Good Luck!

### 'Sleeping Sickness'

I'm on so many lovely tablets now  
To keep me going I suppose,  
But all they do is make me sleepy  
And I forever seem to doze.

Telly on, well Terry gone -  
I'm nodding in no time  
No matter what the programme is  
Comedy or crime.

I just can't understand it,  
It really is a pain  
I could be sitting down just talking  
And there, I've gone again!

Sleeping sickness I've been told  
I could be suffering from,  
But I'm sure it's just those tablets  
'Cos some are really strong.

I'm writing this as my eyelids close  
So I'm writing now in Braille  
I'll get there in the end of course,  
I never seem to fail.

It could of course be Covid,  
I don't mean I've got it, just the fact  
That everything is blamed on this  
So odds against me are now stacked.

My head fell in my dinner  
As once more I felt the urge  
To sleep again, oh what a mess  
As Spaghetti did now merge.

There was Parmesan and  
Bolognese  
Sliding down my chin,  
I woke up quickly, opened wide  
And shoved the whole lot in

What's for afters, I then asked  
Is it custard or ice-cream?  
In a way this all reminded me  
Of a very vivid dream.

I fell asleep, so very deep  
And I really was away,  
Not away with the fairies though  
I was on a Safari day.

To Africa I'd been transported to  
In this vivid dream -  
Now on an Elephant I was perched  
So natural it did seem.

There were Wilder beasts and Rhinos  
Giraffes and Zebras there,  
But alas, alack I didn't see  
A seven foot Grizzly bear!

A Rattle Snake went across our path  
As we slowly trekked along;  
Our Mahout in charge of the  
Elephant  
Was singing an African song.

Suddenly I heard a shout  
That sounded like 'er indoors  
Your dinner is on the table  
What are you doing on all fours?

I've found a baby chimpanzee  
That's got an injured foot,  
I think he has fallen from this tree  
So back he needs to be put.

Those tablets will be the death of you  
Have you fallen asleep again?  
Your Spag Bol is getting cold right  
now  
You really are a pain!

You are in our garden, by the pond  
On your hands and knees  
With next doors cat looking quite  
bemused  
Who with a net you are trying to  
seize!  
Terry Bickell

### A Lone Journey

In the middle of nowhere  
Two epic rail lines crossed  
Without connections -  
I remained overnight.

With a room ten minutes away,  
Finding no cab  
I walked -  
Somewhere out to the right.

Deserted streets as in a film,  
Distant locals bobbed into town,  
Jumped down  
Quickly moving out of sight.

I stopped at a Burger King  
Then walking on, soon with unease  
Through silent downtown  
Passing doors with dim lights.

A youthful lone cyclist  
Circled around,  
Crossing the street -  
Did he mean to give me fright?

Breathless, I scurried,  
Who knew I was there?  
No one to miss me  
Until the homeward flight.

A lone journey -  
Curiosity and interest lastingly  
sated,  
With memories long after  
Among my highlights!  
Deirdre Marculescu

