

Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet



**WWII East Lancs Childhoods:  
'Sharing Stories, Making  
Memories'**

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### What is the Sharing Stories Project?

**‘WWII East Lancashire Childhoods: Sharing Stories, Making Memories’** is an inter-generational community arts project which brings together old and young residents of East Lancashire. The project creates opportunities for interaction between children and care home residents where participants focus on childhood experiences during wartime and stories of the Home Front from the perspective of those who were children during WWII. Our aim is to preserve the rich cultural histories from this period and to bring those experiences to life for people to hear stories and ask questions first hand.

The impetus for the project came from the fact that 2020 sees the 75th anniversary of VE day. By asking older residents to share their experiences we hope that children and younger people will develop a deeper awareness and understanding of what war was like for the children who lived through it. Research suggests that interaction between old and young can help to improve intergenerational connections and help older people to have ‘increased dignity and respect, increased compassion, increased mental stimulation, and reduced social isolation’. (Pennington *et al* 2018.)

Intergenerational interaction is also a means of improving self-worth and cognitive health in older people, whereas younger people develop improved attitudes and reduced negative perceptions of older adults (Drury, Abrams and Swift, 2017).

The project captures and preserves the voices of our participants as a legacy for future generations before that generation of people is lost forever. The importance and impact of WWII is unquestionable for those directly affected by it but for post-war generations, there can be a lack of understanding or awareness of how this event changed and

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shaped people's lives (in positive and negative ways). This is true even within families where wartime children who are now adults have not discussed WWII with their families; many would have had parents who fought in the war (or were part of the home front) but did not discuss what happened. There is now a diminishing population who can contribute to capturing these wartime childhood stories, putting this rich heritage at risk.

We hope that you will enjoy reading these stories as much as we have enjoyed listening to them and sharing them with you.

Sandra and Val, Project Leads.



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## JOINT HONOURS 2020 POETRY SLAM

### Q: What is it?

Slam is a form of poetry that can combine elements of performance, writing, competition, and audience participation. It is performed at events called Poetry Slams (or simply slams).



### HOW TO WRITE SLAM POETRY

**Penning slam poetry is not as difficult as it might seem. Follow these quick guidelines and you'll have a first draft in no time!**

1. ***Do Your Homework.*** To see one in action head to YouTube and type in "slam poetry videos": you'll be surprised by the quantity, quality, and variety. Take notes on which you like and why they made an impression.
2. ***Put Your Words on Paper.*** Use your five senses to create a first draft. Write down what you see, hear, taste, touch, and smell when you think about "Childhood".

Details are key when it comes to painting a vivid picture so always ask yourself: "Could I be more specific or detailed?" Craft your words into short stanzas that lend themselves to a natural rhythm and feel free to use rhyme if you feel like it.

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*"Childhood is measured out by sounds and smells  
and sights, before the dark hour of reason grows."*

John Betjeman

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- 3. *Edit.*** When editing, read your poem out loud. If you stumble over certain lines that are clunky or too long, then you know that section probably needs to be cut, changed, or moved.
- 4. *Add some Drama.*** Remember you may not just be reading your poem — you may also choose to ‘perform’ it. If so, look for ways to increase the drama. Are there moments where you can whisper or shout? Or places where you can speed up or slow down? Can you throw in facial expressions or bodily movements to illustrate your main messages?
- 5. *Practice reading your poem.*** Ask a friend to listen too and offer feedback.

The poems, extracts and texts that follow in this booklet were gathered for the Poetry Slam event which was sadly cancelled due to the Covid pandemic.

Some were written by staff and students in response to the project

Others were chosen to be read out at the event because they express feelings and ideas about the experience of War or about Childhood.

Finally, there is a selection of poems written by pupils from local schools on the theme of Childhood.

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### **Child of War by Janey Colbourne (2020)**

Sorry to be a bore, taking your attention from more  
entertaining sights than the plight of this child,  
trapped in a war zone, trying to survive, alone and afraid,  
both his parents slaughtered in a bombing raid.  
Brutalised, growing cold and numb to the mutilated  
bodies piled up, perhaps recruited as a child soldier,  
he might make it through to adulthood,  
but he'll never be the same, never see the world as safe and good again.

Forgive my lack of insight if I can't comprehend  
why it's right to sell arms but wrong to flee from harm,  
to be a refugee, hoping to take your child to safety,  
but the only route you can see to freedom is the raging sea.  
When the night freezes, you keep her warm or she dies.  
And all you have to give is your own half-starved flesh.  
Those deep loving eyes will make you weep,  
as you wonder if they'll see another sunrise.

Is it crazy to leap if your home is ablaze?  
When the only world you've ever known is razed to the ground.  
When your friends and your neighbourhood are blown to bits.  
And your wife sits with your last remaining child to her breast and  
prays  
that your lives will not be next. There is no rest in this place. No respite.  
No calm.  
When that small trusting face turns her gaze upon you, there is no  
peace.  
In the momentary ceasefire just before the dawn, you must decide.  
Would you stay? Or would you bundle her in blankets and run away?

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### **If only by Murwa Ghouri**

If only I could breathe oxygen,  
Not the poisonous fumes of acrid smoke.  
If only I could feel the warmth of the sun,  
Not the ferocious flames of your fire.

If only I could cry tears of joy,  
Not the salty ones that were forced upon my cheeks.  
If only I could hear the loving voice of my mother,  
Not the desperate screaming of others.

If only I could taste the bliss of happiness,  
Not the bitterness of my tears.  
If only I could fly like the birds  
far away from your playground  
That filled slides with rockets and swings with stones,  
That filled the ground with thorns  
killing innocence before it was born.

If only I could run in the luscious green fields  
filled with vibrant Jasmine flowers  
and beautiful red roses,  
That were not dyed with human blood

If only I could swim in an ocean that was cerulean blue,  
Not one that was tinted with a dark red hue.  
If I could only drink pure water,  
And not your toxic concoction.

If only I could rid myself of the metallic blood  
tattooed upon my lips.  
If only I could smell fresh bread  
and not the stale bodies of the dead.  
If only I could have a bubble bath  
and not the showering of your bullets.

If only I had a crayon to draw with,  
and not the sharp stones that you left me with.  
If only I had a rubber,  
That could erase the pain from my tormented soul.

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If only I could have relief in a companion that wasn't death,  
And a heart that wasn't fragmented,  
Smashed into a thousand smithereens,  
There is nothing,  
Nothing but agony

If only I could see through my blurring tears,  
A world full of love and peace  
If only I could be free and live a life of normality,  
If only I could fly like the birds in the sky with their wings poised high  
Alas , if only !



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### **Newborn Eyes by Janey Colbourne**

As I meander blissfully between them, the trees rustle and lean into each other. It seems almost as if they lean and rustle at me. I become aware that under the ground, the vast fungal network connecting roots and rhizomes, carries messages and nourishment from soil to tree, and from tree to tree. The forest is a community, in the truest sense. In the air, unseen chemical messengers are released from leaves, flowers and fruit. The trees are talking.

I wonder how the world would be if humans could see and hear this cacophony, if we could perceive these myriad, dazzling, rainbow layers of reality, if we could directly apprehend the intelligence, the awareness of nature.

It is only when we turn from the insular world of humanity that we can really experience this depth. We are not alone, although our culture has, for a while, forgotten it. Life is all around us, far more than empty scenery. It doesn't have to be a mere backdrop to our lives. Look at the spontaneous joy and wonder of young children in the snow, seeing a rainbow, or blowing on a dandelion 'clock'. Isn't that one of the joys of parenthood? To see through our child's eyes and reawaken that sense of looking at the world with fresh wide-eyed wonder. When do we stop nurturing that wonder in our children? What the hell happens?

Perhaps children begin to lose their immersion when they see how crazy adults are; tightly focused, in pain and exhaustion, encased in cages of our own creation, from home to work, we are divorced from wild nature.

As I walk in the woods, I feel so alive, alert and connected with all my senses. I drink in the visual feast: the dappled sunlight through many shades of green, tree blossom resplendent, like "fluffy clouds that have

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come to earth", as my daughter so delightfully describes them. I deeply inhale the refreshing air unique to woodland, the scents of flowers, and of soil. I touch the bark, the leaves of trees and plants, some dry and rough, others smooth and cool, or soft and downy.

It is only a real love for nature that will save it from destruction. A felt experience, a life of rich memories, of personal connection with place and other species, will have a much greater impact and potency to bring about change than a million facts and abstractions.



The paradigm of our times silently influences our attitudes and beliefs. Creative thinkers—poets, artists, explorers, cutting-edge scientists and the bold, questioning, outspoken young people emerging into adulthood—push out the boundaries and challenge the status quo. The resistance of society to such potential change is very great, and these people may be seen as weird and eccentric, or worse, vilified, feared and ostracised. It takes a critical mass of work—of action, connection and heartfelt intent—to burst the dam, to break the surface tension of the bubble; then the paradigm shifts, not gently, but seismically, shaking our complacency, and suddenly we are living in a dazzling new world, because we are seeing it all as we never have before, awake and alive, with our gloriously fresh, wide open and grateful, newborn eyes.

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### Fern Hill by Dylan Thomas

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs  
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,  
    The night above the dingle starry,  
    Time let me hail and climb  
    Golden in the heydays of his eyes,  
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns  
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves  
    Trail with daisies and barley  
    Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns  
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,  
    In the sun that is young once only,  
    Time let me play and be  
    Golden in the mercy of his means,  
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves  
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,  
    And the sabbath rang slowly  
    In the pebbles of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay  
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air  
    And playing, lovely and watery  
    And fire green as grass.  
    And nightly under the simple stars  
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,  
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars  
    Flying with the ricks, and the horses  
    Flashing into the dark.

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white  
With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all  
    Shining, it was Adam and maiden,  
    The sky gathered again  
    And the sun grew round that very day.  
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light  
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm

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Out of the whinnying green stable  
On to the fields of praise.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house  
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,  
In the sun born over and over,  
I ran my heedless ways,  
My wishes raced through the house high hay  
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows  
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs  
Before the children green and golden  
Follow him out of grace,

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me  
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,  
In the moon that is always rising,  
Nor that riding to sleep  
I should hear him fly with the high fields  
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.  
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,  
Time held me green and dying  
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.



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### From interviews with Richard Croasdale (of Each Step)

*When the evacuees came, I remember the caretaker in certain classrooms bringing in extra desk. You see, we sat six at a desk, and they brought these other desks in to accommodate the evacuee children as well. And they were mainly from London round where I lived. The evacuee children were from London.*

*I remember palling on with some them, they were great lads, you know, great boys, little girls as well, they were smashing. Although, some of them, believe me, it wasn't pleasant, some of them they actually came here, they were actually lousy and filthy, from London. If you want to know a film, well just watch 'Goodnight Mr Tom', that's a film, 'Goodnight Mr Tom', you'll see what I've told you now, how some of those evacuee children did suffer. In fact they lived better here than they'd ever lived in their life down London. Although everyone wasn't kind to them even up here. Some of them, they'd get into a house where they wasn't tret right. No. 'Cos they had to take them you know, you'd no choice. They'd come and knock on the door and you had to take these evacuee children in. You'd no choice. By law, you had to accept them.*

*We had a shelter in the back garden actually. And I can remember the men coming, I was only a child of course, you know, coming, pulling the coal shed down. And the builders coming, and building this brick air raid shelter in the yard, and it was for three families. Well I'm saying three families, it was two actually but, there was me and me mother - me dad was away - there was me and me mother, the landlord next door who owned our house, and his son that had the house at the other side. Ours was an end house, ours was the biggest yard, apart from his yard, ours was the biggest so they decided to put the air raid shelter in our garden.*

*Mum would wake me up and shout 'C'mon Richard, c'mon, we're going to the air raid shelter', and then old Mr Bradley come, knock on the door, 'Come on Doris, come on, come and get in the shelter', and we'd all get in the shelter and sit there till the all clear went. And old Mr Bradley and his son, they'd be out in the yard, looking up at the sky you see, and looking round, 'cos German planes came over. See people only think Blackburn had two bombs dropped on them, that's not correct. They had five. There was a bomb dropped on Ainsworth Street, the first one was in Bennington Street, the other two was dropped in the fields between the Gas works and*

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*the Electric works. There were two bomb craters in those fields. The fifth bomb was an incendiary bomb that fell in the back yard of the Bastwell Arms Hotel and it was kept behind the bar as a souvenir for many years.*

*Sometimes when the sirens would go, it would be during the night, at 1 or 2 o'clock of a morning, the siren would sound, and we used to have to get out and come out of the house and go in this air raid shelter in freezing weather in the middle of winter, really cold. And we had like a form inside, we're all sat there with like a candle in, all sat round, with the blankets round us, waiting for the all clear.*

“

**No one has yet realized  
the wealth of sympathy,  
the kindness, and  
generosity hidden in  
the soul of a child. The  
effort of every true  
education should be to  
unlock that treasure.**

EMMA GOLDMAN

GH

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### Extract from Goodnight Mr Tom by Michelle Mogorian

'Yes,' said Tom bluntly, on opening the front door. 'What d'you want?'

A harassed middle- aged woman in a green coat and felt hat stood on his step. He glanced at the armband on her sleeve. She gave him an awkward smile.

'I'm the billeting officer for this area,' she began.

'Oh yes, and what's that got to do wi' me?'

She flushed slightly. 'Well, Mr, Mr . . .'

'Oakley. Thomas Oakley.'

'Ah, thank you, Mr Oakley.' She paused and took a deep breath. 'Mr Oakley, with the declaration of war imminent . . .'

Tom waved his hand. 'I knows all that. Git to the point. What d'you want?' He noticed a small boy at her side.

'It's him I've come about,' she said. 'I'm on my way to your village hall with the others.'

'What others?'

She stepped to one side. Behind the large iron gate which stood at the end of the graveyard were a small group of children. Many of them were filthy and very poorly clad. Only a handful had a blazer or coat. They all looked bewildered and exhausted. One tiny dark- haired girl in the front was hanging firmly on to a new teddy- bear.

The woman touched the boy at her side and pushed him forward.

'There's no need to tell me,' said Tom. 'It's obligatory and it's for the war effort.'

'You are entitled to choose your child, I know,' began the woman apologetically.

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Tom gave a snort.

'But,' she continued, 'his mother wants him to be with someone who's religious or near a church. She was quite adamant. Said she would only let him be evacuated if he was.'

'Was what?' asked Tom impatiently.

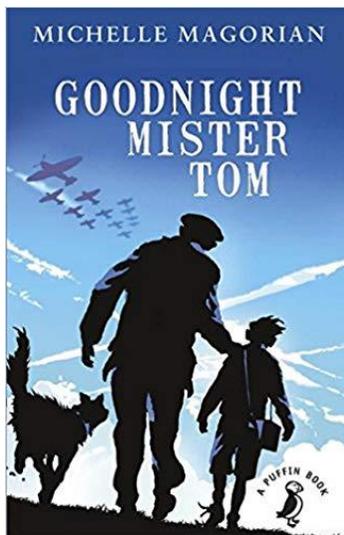
'Near a church.'

Tom took a second look at the child. The boy was thin and sickly-looking, pale with limp sandy hair and dull grey eyes.

'His name's Willie,' said the woman.

Willie, who had been staring at the ground, looked up.

Round his neck, hanging from a piece of string, was a cardboard label. It read 'William Beech'.



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### In Mrs Tilscher's Class, by Carol Ann Duffy

You could travel up the Blue Nile  
with your finger, tracing the route  
while Mrs Tilscher chanted the scenery.

Tana. Ethiopia. Khartoum. Aswân.

That for an hour, then a skittle of milk  
and the chalky Pyramids rubbed into dust.

A window opened with a long pole.

The laugh of a bell swung by a running child.

This was better than home. Enthralling books.

The classroom glowed like a sweet shop.

Sugar paper. Coloured shapes. Brady and Hindley  
faded, like the faint, uneasy smudge of a mistake.

Mrs Tilscher loved you. Some mornings, you found  
she'd left a good gold star by your name.

The scent of a pencil slowly, carefully, shaved.

A xylophone's nonsense heard from another form.

Over the Easter term, the inky tadpoles changed  
from commas into exclamation marks. Three frogs

hopped in the playground, freed by a dunce,

followed by a line of kids, jumping and croaking  
away from the lunch queue. A rough boy

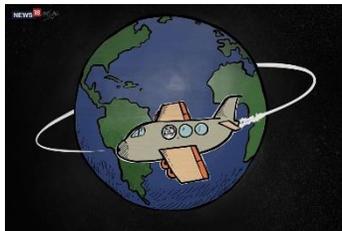
told you how you were born. You kicked him, but stared  
at your parents, appalled, when you got back home.

That feverish July, the air tasted of electricity.

A tangible alarm made you always untidy, hot,  
fractious under the heavy, sexy sky. You asked her

how you were born and Mrs Tilscher smiled,  
then turned away. Reports were handed out.

You ran through the gates, impatient to be grown,  
as the sky split open into a thunderstorm.



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### **WWII Poem from the Archive WW2 People's War BBC**

*This poem was submitted to the People's War site by Michelle Bullivant on behalf of Joan Punter and has been added to the site with her permission.*

*(Written by my aunt Joan Punter (nee Toller) whilst attending Miss Winnie Chandler's infant school, Richmond Road Cambridge. c.1940's)*

### **A Child's Home Front Poem by Joan Toller**

Do you remember a red roofed school  
A handful of shell for your sums?  
They gave you a Mickey Mouse gas mask  
And a pack of American gum.  
Do you recall when your dad was on leave,  
Dancing around like Astair?  
They dressed you up like Shirley Temple  
With a big ribbon bow in your hair.  
At night sleeping under the table  
While bombers droned over your heads,  
And granny said "Won't it be lovely,  
when we can sleep safe in our beds",  
One day they said " The War's over!"  
Grannie sang of the Alley and 'Sal'.  
When Vera sang 'White Cliffs of Dover'  
And the bells rang 'for me and my gal'.

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### Upon One Starry Night by Charlie Budgen

A four-foot view from my little eyes,  
The lights all out, just sequin skies.  
The wail of the sirens and shouting of men,  
Frantically running to the garden again.

'Into the bunker!' I heard my mother shout,  
Blimp overhead blocked the stars out.  
The crashing of bombs, flashes of light,  
Hiding for safety on this starry night.

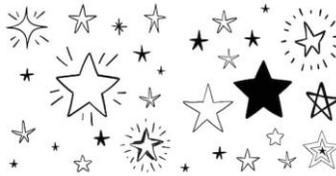
The bunker door closes heavy at last,  
Shielding our family away from the blast.  
A bed, a table, some food and a match,  
A wall filled with days marked by a scratch.

Silence soon fell as we prayed for the best,  
My brother still shaking in his vest.  
My mother in tears beneath candlelight,  
We thought of families upon one starry night. .

The final all clear after hours away,  
Coming to sunshine, deceiving the day.  
The house is all flat now, we have nothing left,  
But rubble and crumbs - a true German theft.

Our home a plot, not a meter in height,  
My mother collapses on seeing the sight  
Homeless and helpless, a cold evil sting,  
They've ruined our lives and stolen our wings.

Now I sit and remember the horror and fright  
How my family suffered upon one starry night.



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### Extract from Interview with Ann, Joan K. and Joan R. (of Each Step)

**Joan:** We were quite lucky really. We were a family of three. My father was in charge of the bleach and dye works, which eventually did the khaki for the uniforms, so my dad was never around and my mother did everything. It was hard work for her obviously, but she also had a gift of sewing, so she swapped her coupons with the doctor's wife's coupons so although we weren't very rich at all, that just gave the edge, that little bit of extra. My father grew all vegetables and fruit and everything and I felt that we lived quite well. We had good food, good meals, and we were all together.

One of the scariest things was, a doodle bug came over, and I can remember it now, it coming and then stopping. And you knew that when it stopped going - and it dropped right across from our house and we all huddled under the stairs. We were all terrified. My father was away, and my mother had a hard time. She came from a farm, the family, but they were quite a bit away. Yes it was, there were pluses and minuses really, but I can remember quite good things in the war. Lovely vegetables and y'know, things like that.

**Ann:** that's where I used to go under the stairs. Mum said 'get in there quick, they're coming again'.

**Joan:** You would've thought it was scary under the stairs wouldn't you? If a bomb dropped. But that's where we all huddled, under the stairs. They eventually built shelters. Eventually.

**Joan R.** We had good games. Because my father worked at the mill we used to get lots of cats and kittens. We had a nice doll's pram, we dressed the cat up, tied the back of my doll's pram to my brother's bike, and we'd tear off round the garden. And often it tipped everybody out

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but we just loved it. Dress, bonnet and everything and it just lay there sleeping.

We lived across from a farm so we were always playing at the farm. We had quite a nice childhood, until one night when the doodle bug came and terrified us. That was really scary when it stopped. It did drop in (Gregson) Lane and it smashed a whole cottage. And this Sunday afternoon we all walked up there to have a look.

**Anne:** whereabouts in Gregson Lane?

**Joan R:** Beyond Bournes Row

**Anne:** Oh I know where Bournes Row is.

**Anne:** My dad went to war, and when he came back he came in, and mum said I cried and said 'strange man'. I thought it was a strange man. I didn't know me dad. I didn't know him at all.

**Joan R.** We were a bit isolated. There were not many houses near us so we didn't really get into (street parties). There'd be things done at school I'm sure. We certainly didn't have many parties.

**Joan:** See were lucky in a way because my best friend, he had a butcher's shop, so they used to send things for me mum, because everything was in rations. They'd send a quarter of ham. Funny, all aspects of it, isn't it?

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Siren calling  
Freedom bombs  
Falling  
Locked and loaded  
Dispatched  
And falling

Tear-stained stares  
Last regrets  
Knuckle white prayers  
Guilty conscience  
Over unsaid words

Missile blasts  
Searing lungs  
And blinding flash  
Saying I love you  
Choking gasps

Shielding her son  
Holding him tight  
A mother dies  
Glassy eyed  
Deaf to his cries

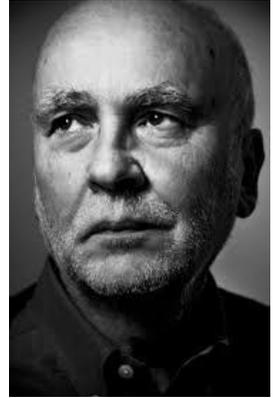
Men in suits  
Listening to lies  
Now you've been  
Democratised

By  
Tracey Wilkinson

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### Try to Praise the Mutilated World

BY ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI TRANSLATED BY CLARE  
CAVANAGH



Try to praise the mutilated world.  
Remember June's long days,  
and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.  
The nettles that methodically overgrow  
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.  
You must praise the mutilated world.  
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;  
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,  
while salty oblivion awaited others.  
You've seen the refugees going nowhere,  
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.  
You should praise the mutilated world.  
Remember the moments when we were together  
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.  
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.  
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn  
and leaves eddied over the earth's scars.  
Praise the mutilated world  
and the gray feather a thrush lost,  
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes  
and returns.

From *Without End: New and Selected Poems*.

*Adam Zagajewski was born in Lvov, Poland, in 1945; as an infant he was relocated with his family to western Poland. He lived in Berlin for a couple of years, moved to France in 1982, and has taught at universities in the United States. Zagajewski writes in Polish; many of his books of poetry and essays have been translated into English.*

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### Fighting On By Henry Lee

I see no gleam of victory alluring  
No chance of splendid booty or of gain  
If I endure – I must go on enduring  
And my reward for bearing pain – is pain  
Yet, though the thrill, the zest, the hope are gone  
Something within me keeps me fighting on

*Henry Lee was born in Pasadena, California in 1915. A Lieutenant in the 31st Infantry Regiment, Lee was posted to the Philippine Islands in early 1940 and captured by the Japanese after the fall of Bataan on 9 April 1942. During his time in camp, he composed a number of poems that he recorded in a small notebook.*

*In late December 1944, Lee and 1618 others were put on a transport ship to be sent to Japan as slave labour. Before leaving he hastily concealed his diary and volume of poems under his prison hut and left word with fellow prisoners in his barracks to have his writings dug up if they were ever liberated*

### Three Years After By Henry Lee

“Teach me to hate,” I prayed — for I was young,  
And fear was in my heart, and faith had fled.  
“Teach me to hate! for hate is strength,” I said  
“A staff to lean on.” Thus my challenge flung  
Into the thunder of the clouds that hung  
Cloaking with terror all the days ahead –  
“Teach me to hate — the world I loved is dead;  
Who would survive must learn a savage tongue.”  
And I have learned — and paid in days that ran  
To bitter schooling. Love was lost in pains,  
Hunger replaced the beauty in life’s plan,  
Honor and virtue vanished with the rains  
And faith in God dissolved with faith in man.  
I have my hate! But nothing else remains.

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### **Fact File: Women's Land Army - June 1939 - 1950**

The Women's Land Army (WLA) was established in World War One, but was re-founded shortly before the outbreak of World War Two, in June 1939, to provide extra agricultural labour. The government feared that if war broke out there would be food shortages. Britain, then as now, relied heavily on imported food, and it was thought that imports would be threatened by anticipated German blockades. In addition, many male farm workers were expected to join up, leaving a shortage of labour. The government was also keen to increase food production by reclaiming pasture and unused land for growing crops.

Women were initially asked to volunteer for the WLA. However, in December 1941 the government passed the National Service Act, which allowed the conscription of women into the armed forces or for vital war work. At first only single women between 20 and 30, and widows without children, were called up, but later the age limit was expanded to include women between 19 and 43. Women could choose whether to enter the armed forces or work in farming or industry. By 1943, more than 80,000 women were working in the Land Army. They were nicknamed Land Girls.

The Land Girls did a wide range of jobs, including milking cows, lambing, managing poultry, ploughing, gathering crops, digging ditches, catching rats and carrying out farm maintenance work. Some 6,000 women worked in the Timber Corps, chopping down trees and running sawmills.

All of these women worked long hours, especially during the summer, mostly outdoors and often in cold and rain. There was minimal training and most women were expected to learn about agricultural work while they were actually doing it. The Land Girls lived either on the farms where they worked, or in hostels.

They came from a wide variety of backgrounds, with more than one third from London and other large cities. Some were homesick, and many farmers were initially sceptical about employing young women on their farms, but people soon came to realise how useful most of them were.

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

Initially, Land Girls earned £1.85 for a minimum of 50 hours work a week. In 1944, wages were increased by £1 to £2.85. However, as the wages were paid by the farmer, rather than directly by the state, it was difficult to ensure that everyone was paid properly.

There was a Land Army uniform of green jumpers, brown breeches or dungarees, brown felt hats and khaki overcoats. As the Land Army was not a military force, however, uniform was not compulsory. The WLA badge depicted a wheat sheaf as a symbol of their agricultural work. There was also an official magazine *The Land Girl*, and a special song:

***Back to the Land, we must all lend a hand,  
To the farms and the fields we must go,  
There's a job to be done,  
Though we can't fire a gun,  
We can still do our bit with the hoe.***

The WLA came under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture, but its head was the formidable Lady Denman. Married to the former Governor General of Australia, Lady Denman was a leading figure in the Women's Institute movement, and had a close interest in rural affairs. Her home, Balcombe Place in Sussex, became the WLA headquarters. Each district had its own WLA representative, who was expected to ensure the Land Girls were being treated well and were working effectively.



The Land Army was disbanded in 1950. Although the work was hard, conditions were often bad and the pay was low, many women enjoyed the experience, and formed lifelong friendships with fellow Land Girls.

*The fact files in this timeline were commissioned by the BBC in June 2003 and September 2005*

# Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

## Land Girl Poetry

### From Bedfordshire Women's Land Army

*Many land girls wrote poems while in the WLA. A few had them published in local or national newspapers or magazines. Vita Sackville-West edited a collection that has been added to the Imperial War Museum reprint of her wartime record of *The Women's Land Army*.*

*Many others were ditties, which were recited locally by hostel girls or set to popular songs of the day. The anonymous verse, below, lays claim to a vital role for the Land Army as an essential wartime national service, keeping the nation fed:*

### Who won the War? by Anon.

Who Won the War?

It wasn't the WRENS who won the war  
Whatever the WRENS may say  
It was the Women's Land Army  
They won it making hay

It wasn't the ATS who won the war  
They never fired a gun  
It was the Women's Land Army  
Spreading cow muck by the ton

It wasn't the WAAFS who won the war  
Though they said they did, and how,  
It was the Women's Land Army  
They even went to plough

It really was the land girls  
Who won the war, you see  
They heeded all those posters  
And they DUG FOR VICTORY

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet



### THE SONG OF MOULTON

*Published in The Land Girl, No3, Vol 1, June 194. Written by the first batch of Land Girl trainees at Northamptonshire Institute of Agriculture*

We get up at six in the morning,  
We all look so haggard and worn.  
The cocks are all crowing – we're yawning,  
We wish that we'd never been born.

The cow she won't give any milk,  
The calf it will go the wrong way.  
The unit's in such a mess up –  
Oh! take the dam thing away.

We set off with haste – no one lingers,  
To cut off the sugar beet tops.  
We hack off the tops – of our own fingers –  
And mingle the gore with the crops.

They're treating the poor sheep for foot-rot,  
They're giving them Wellingtons too;  
But if only they'd look at *our* blisters  
They wouldn't know whose feet to do.

Ooh aye and ye bonnie wee lassies,  
Just one thing I've learnt on the farm –  
It's more than our miserable life's worth  
To let an old cow come to harm.

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### **The Women's Land Army by Rose Perritt**

A world of chaos, a world at war,  
Destruction as never seen before,  
A world of heartbreak, world of fear,  
And misery so hard to bear.

Armies wrong, and Armies right,  
Marching forth to kill and fight,  
And lo, the toll of death was high.  
An Army came, but not to kill,  
Only hungry mouths to fill,

An Army clad in brown and green,  
About the countryside was seen,  
Around the farmyards, on the roads,  
With horses, carrying heavy loads,

A women's army, firm of hand,  
Had come to conquer on the Land.  
In lonely ones, or gangs together,  
In strange fantastic English weather,  
That never a moment may be lost,  
In tearing winds and biting frost,  
They tended livestock, planted seed,  
Tilled, manured, conquered weed,  
Picked potatoes, cabbage, beet,  
So that England still could eat.

Now a world at peace, a world still mad,  
A world all blasted, weary, sad,  
A lot more hungry mouths to fill,  
The green Army is needed still,  
Little reward will come their way,  
But beauty in their hearts will stay,  
That comes to those that understand,  
Love of a horse, the love of the land.

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

**Hilda Kaye Gibson** (1925 – 30 December 2013) was a member of the Women's Land Army from 1944 to 1946 and campaigned to gain official governmental recognition for the service of WLA members.

In later life, Gibson was a poet, and was interviewed a number of times on BBC Radio 4 about her experiences as a Land Girl.

She received the badge of recognition in 2008 during a Prime Ministerial reception at Downing Street.

### **THE LAND GIRL LOOKS BACK** *by Hilda Kaye Gibson*

60 Bright summers and 60 Green springs  
60 chill autumns have melted away  
Some wrinkled autumns have vanished  
In flames.

Hair that was golden is turning to grey  
Nighttime in Norfolk was silent and still  
Sunsets were glorious filling the skies  
Endless horizons and demon east winds  
Whirling the fast freezing snow in our eyes  
Someone was fighting by proxy for me  
I took his place in the village he knew  
Gown shop to hen huts from feathers to furs  
Hardships were plenty, luxuries few  
Calm and content in a world full of strife  
Etched on my memory, a time of my life



## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet



*Hilda Gibson wrote this before 6 December 2007 when the Labour Government announced that the wartime efforts of the Women's Land Army and the Women's Timber Corps would be recognised with the presentation of a special badge commemorating their service that can be worn on Remembrance Sundays and at other ceremonies.*

*After the announcement, Hilda said, "To receive an award honouring the wartime work of the Women's Land Army is a powerful and touching recognition....To serve one's country in its greatest hour of need, in whatever capacity, for me, remains memorable."*

### **No Medals Will Be Won**

Oh to be a Land Girl back in you know when;  
The cows inside the cowshed and the pigs within the pen;  
Bad tempered roosters crowing, hens laying germ-free eggs;  
Pecks and scratches here and there, and flea bites on our legs.  
Timber corps is busy; sawing – felling trees.  
Seems more like a labour facing Hercules.  
Farewell to the rodents demolishing our crops,  
Goodbye to things that creep or run and everything that hops.  
Oh mother, send me calamine: my face is pink and peeling.  
Hot sun pierces through my Aertex shirt; strange patterns now revealing.  
Rising early morning animals to feed.  
Long hard days of threshing; harvesting the seed.  
Oh mother, send me mittens for the frost is on the beet.  
My hands are numb and raw with cold: I've chilblains on my feet.  
No drilling, no saluting, never the rank and file.  
Not so much clothed in glory as dressed in country style.  
We bring no glowing accolades. For us no cheers will start.  
Ours is a gift worth more than gold: a proud and steadfast heart.

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### **Children's University Poetry Competition**

*Children from local schools were invited to create their own poems for a competition facilitated by the Children's University. They were also invited to the University College Poetry Slam and could collect stamps for their CU Passport by entering.*



Below are some of the poems they submitted.

### **Childhood poem, by Afiyah (year three)**

We sing joyously  
Enjoy the warm sun with friends  
Laugh without a care.

I look back at my memories  
Having fun at sleepovers, birthdays and parties  
Making my dreams come true.

Now I am all grown up  
With many things to do  
Wishing I could go back to those days of freedom.

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### **She, by Fatima ♥♥♥ (year five)**

She held my hand from birth

She always puts me first

She taught me how to talk

She helped me balance when I first started to walk

She bought me fun toys

She gives me great joys

She always protects me from danger

She saves the day like a power ranger.

She stays up all night when I'm ill

She always pays the bills

She is full of energy

She makes decisions so cleverly

She has a heart of gold

She gives unconditional love

She is a friend, a playmate, a role model

She is a cook, a teacher, a nurse.

She loves me dearly with all her heart

She hugs me tightly

She keeps me safe

She is my guardian angel.

I love you so much

Long life to her

For there's no other

Who can take the place of my dear mother ♥

Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet  
**When I was small..., by Muskaan (year three)**

When I was small  
I used to fall  
That's because I couldn't walk  
But then I started to talk.

Even if I was never  
Really ever clever  
When I got things right  
I felt so bright.

Sometimes I felt sad  
When I found out my dad  
Gave my brother more sweets  
But my mum always gave me more treats.

I've grown up wearing glasses  
That help me do better in classes  
My teacher now gives me more passes.

I now no longer fall  
But I'm still not that tall.



Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet  
**Childhood poem, by Mohammed Esa (Year one)**

I like playing on my scooter and my bike,  
I like jumping on the trampoline and sometimes taking a hike.  
I like to run, jump and skip and sometimes I trip.  
I have a bruise on my head,  
If you look closely you will see it is big and red.  
I like the blue sky and the green grass,  
The sun makes me happy and I will always try.

**Childhood, by Zac (year four)**

Cuddles is what your parents give you  
Happy is what it makes you  
I love it when my parents do it  
**Day** after, day after, day after, day  
**Having** fun  
**On** cold winter days, board games we play  
**On** hot summer days in the park we run  
**Days** of our CHILDHOOD we always remember.

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### Childhood, by Zara (year 2)

Playing in the park  
Before it gets dark  
Eating ice cream  
All the children scream.  
Riding on a bike  
It's what all the children like.  
All my friends play  
With me every day.



### Halima's poem (year one)

My hair is golden brown  
I wear a golden crown  
I have a medium-sized soft nose  
And mummy gives me chores.  
I have rosy-pink lips  
I play with big toy ships.  
I Have chunky funky legs  
I wash my clothes with a sparkly, red peg.

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### **My prayer for Life, by Maryam (year 4)**

Before I went to bed at night  
My mum would always remind me  
To kneel and pray and pray dua  
Before going to sleep.  
And it is always nice to know  
That God hears everyone's duas.

I always say thank you God for  
All you have given me.  
I never need to be afraid  
Because God is always with me.

I always try to please my  
Friends and family so then I never fear.  
I always do dua for  
My parents for them  
To have good health.



## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet



### **My Childhood, by Madina (year 5)**

It all started at my childhood  
When I wanted to be as good as Robin Hood.  
I was to be as sly as Mr Fox  
And hide in my toy box.  
Get a car  
And eat a chocolate bar.  
Stroke my neighbour's dog  
And walk her in the fog.  
Pretend to make a cake  
Which was fake.  
Get a job  
And my far cousin's name is Bob!  
Now they are my goals for  
When I become an adult

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### **When I was small, by Madina (year one)**

When I was small

I had a big fall.

When I was small

I played with a ball.

When I was small

I got bigger and bigger.

I got tall.

When I was small

I got a call.

I went to the mall.

When I was small

I climbed on the wall.

When I was small

I did gymnastics in the hall.



## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### **These are my feelings as a child, by Fariah (year 4)**

Cheerful I am every day  
Happy is always my feeling  
Inside me is so excited  
Like any child I am so bubbly  
Delighted I am all the time  
Having fun is my style  
On the moon I feel like when I am proud  
On it I feel joyful  
Do you see my feelings? I am beaming!

### **My Childhood Memories, by Ummarah (year 5)**

Climbing trees and spying on people was always fun  
Hide and seek outside with friends until Mum shouted 'come home'.  
I always loved my old childhood games  
Late nights with my torch when mum thought I was sleeping  
Doodling on the walls because they would look amazing!  
Holidays collecting colourful sea shells on the beach  
Outrageous tantrums which I could never have now.  
Oh these were the days I wish I could have back.  
Don't ever wish your childhood away, it's the best time of your life!

Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

**C** is for Chocolate that you enjoy 

**H** is for Happy times that you have 

**i** is for Ideas that generate in your mind. 

**L** is for Loving parents that Love you every day 

**D** is for dance the lessons you take. 

**H** is for Harry Potter the novel  to read.



**O** is for outside with your friends

**O** is for Occasion a special family occasion. 

**D** is for Dream don't give upon them  
where ever they take you.

Poe by Ebony K  
Year 6  
St Aidan's primary

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### **Mehek's poem (year 6)**

Children making dreams come true

Happy things, for instance my first day at school

I look back at the good memories I've made

Leaving the past behind me whilst I start a new chapter

Dearest things that I love stay in my heart

Of all the things I look at my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday stood out

Opening new presents filling my day with joy

Dreaming all my life, waiting for the next chapter.

### **Childhood, by Beybars (year three)**

Children love school

Because it's cool

Children love treats

It's fun to eat.

I love my dad

He is never bad.

I love my mum

She cooks nice food – yum!



## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

Children have to go to bed early  
But before that, they should brush their teeth  
To keep them pearly.  
Children read a book  
And then tell their friends – look!  
Children love treats  
Although it's bad to eat.

I do hard work  
Don't do low work.  
Children should do chores  
And help their parents shopping in stores.  
Children are the best  
They are looking for success.

Sports is fun  
You could love to jump and run.  
All the children should appreciate  
Their parents' efforts, and be passionate  
About helping those less fortunate.



## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### **I love! by Aisha (year four)**

I love my grandad  
I love my grandma  
I love my family  
Especially my grandpapa.



I love strawberries  
I love pears  
I love grapes  
But not that kiwi with spiky hairs.

I don't like unhealthy foods  
I don't like fizzy drinks  
Especially the boiled eggs  
Poof! They stink.

I don't like my sister fighting with me  
I don't like her when she calls my name and steals my things.  
I call my mum and she comes  
She says 'don't worry, I will buy you your favourite fairy wings.'

## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet



### **4 Seasons, by Leena (year five)**

Autumn is the season of the perfect weather and coloured leaves

Winter is the season of cold and sadness and where snow brings joy!

Spring is the season of the magnificent flowers and the delicious fruit growing

Summer is the season where the sun puts smiles on children's faces and holidays begin.



## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

### Want to have a try?

#### Some photos to inspire your own writing:

To start the creative process, consider the following photos and ask yourself some questions. For example:

- ❖ Where and when was this photo taken?
- ❖ What are the children thinking?
- ❖ What can they smell, think, hear, feel?
- ❖ What are they looking for?
- ❖ What might they find?
- ❖ Where are their parents?
- ❖ Who is taking the photograph and why?



## Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet



Small Stories Project: Poetry Slam Booklet

## **WWII East Lancs Childhoods: 'Sharing Stories, Making Memories'**



### **Were you or a family member a child during WWII?**

Staff at the University Centre at Blackburn College are collecting stories about what it was like to be a child in Lancashire during the Second World War.

If you are interested in taking part, you can get involved in the following ways:

- Write a story
- Be interviewed by our researchers
- Take part in activities with children from the Children's University
- Participate in craft workshops

For more information contact one of the project leads:

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