

Autumn / Winter 2002-3

# *Writing-Well Seminars*

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## Writing Well Seminars 2002/03 - Reports

These Sunday evening seminars were part of a programme of regional development for Lapidus in Scotland, which followed the aims of central Lapidus to promote and develop the role of the literary arts in healthcare, education and the community. At each one there was a guest speaker and time for creative and reflective writing, discussion and questions. Beyond this, each seminar developed a distinctive quality [character?] which depended, partly on the approach of the facilitator, partly on the varying configurations of participants. The written reports - respecting the different qualities of each seminar - are each written up differently.

Some participants came to all the seminars. Some came to only one which related to a specific issue concerning them. For example at the *Writing and Dementia* seminar, two participants had relatives who had been recently diagnosed with dementia; at the *Cancer, Poetry and Healing* seminar there were two cancer survivors, and a nurse who works at the recently opened Maggie Centre in Glasgow, a drop in facility for cancer patients.

All the seminars took place at the Meeting House in Glasgow behind the King's Theatre, next to Scottish Opera. A month before each seminar a description was published of it with recommended readings for the forthcoming event. Some of the events were recorded. If this was not possible notes were made, or the guest speaker wrote a précis. (See recommended reading list at end of reports.)

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2002, 7- 9.30pm**

***Giving Sorrow Words***. Facilitator: Larry Butler, poet, convenor of Lapidus Scotland and author of the recently completed feasibility study on the idea of 'Arts on Prescription'. His presentation continued the *Loss of Dreams* theme presented by Ted Bowman in June 2002.

### Background

Larry gave a brief history of how Lapidus has been developing in Scotland. He emphasised how these seminars are not only for Lapidus members, but also for anyone with an interest in literature and personal development: writers, librarians, health and social care workers, artists etc. He outlined some of the previous activities from the most recent to the early days (some of the Scottish events are published in the third issue of the Lapidus magazine). There was *Loss of Dreams*, a special kind of grief, run by Ted Bowman in June 2002; *Poetic Medicine* run by John Fox on 13-16 September 2001; a workshop in Glasgow for health professionals; a day for experiencing the healing power of poetry; and a training day for the facilitators of writing groups. These last three events were co-organised with *Survivors' Poetry Scotland*. There was the *Poetry Healing Project* (co-founded with Graham Hartill - 1990). Both he and Hartill had established links with the National Association for Poetry Therapy (NAPT). Larry attended their annual conference in Washington DC and in Denver, and he met many poetry therapists - a profession which does not as yet exist in the UK. Then there was the *Power of Words* which was a weekly writing group supported by the Glasgow Association for Mental Health (92-4). This led to *Survivors' Poetry Scotland* being launched in 1995 as part of the *Out of Sight Out of Mind* exhibition of the history of psychiatric care in Scotland at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum (1995). The previous year had been the official year of Poetry and Health, and the Poetry Society in London had held a series of meetings out of which came the creation of Lapidus in order to promote the idea of literary arts in personal development.

### Introduction

This first seminar took place a few days before the anniversary of 9/11. The evening began with an ode to inarticulateness by Thom Osborn; an interpretation of the word 'suadade'; and readings from the anthology: *Giving Sorrow Words* published by the National Association for Poetry Therapy (reviewed in Lapidus 2). This small book is distributed free for the cost of postage. Most of the poems are not specifically about 9/11 but rather a general response to personal and public grief. We read three poems: *Daddy, what is the color of Thunder* by Charles Rossiter – about the sudden death of his daughter; *Yes* by William Stafford – about acknowledging our fear of uncertainty whilst also balancing it with hope; and *Caste* by Jennifer Bosveld – about how a full awareness of the finality of death can propel the griever to radically change in his/her life and gain a heightened sense of living in the present moment. With each one of the poems in the book there are suggestions for writing that readers can try out for themselves

*The pain which whispers through every happiness* - suadade

Suadade (Portuguese) - a vague and persistent desire for something that cannot be, a time other than the present time, a turning toward the past or future, a sadness and yearning beyond sorrow, *the pain which whispers through every happiness*. It is the word which most corresponds in its intricacy of meaning to the profundity of intimate mourning at the loss of one's life companion. (From translator's notes in *Sorrow* by Claribel Alegria 1999)

### Discussion

Very quickly the discussion was about the contexts of grief - how it can mean different things at different times and how it can be manufactured for us by the media and how vulnerable we are to this - sometimes it feels as though there's no choice about what to grieve about.

One participant spoke of feeling completely numb, almost indifferent at the time to what happened on 11/9; others said we have to do this to protect ourselves from the media and the choices it makes in our name. Another participant objected that surely one couldn't but be affected by the realisation that the air-hostesses throats had been slit etc. This provoked a torrent of anger from one participant about the way our feelings are manipulated by the media, the hyped-up grief, the way we can't answer back, why we should have to have poetry books about the events on September 11th when there are so many other horrific events happening in the world. He stressed that this had been a consciously, minutely planned attack on the nerve centres (economic and military) of Capitalist power, whereas Capitalist state terror was endlessly meted out on helpless innocent victims. It was suggested that we draw a distinction between personal and public grief in the discussion and this took the heat out of the anger to some extent. There was more discussion about grief as anger; grief as 'video culture'; grief as understood in the expression: 'you cause me grief'; the way people use public grief for expressing personal sorrows, and someone quoted a man who wept profusely when Princess Di died, but had no tears for his father who had died a few weeks before. One participant brought out the point about how grief inevitably makes us more aware of what we have, and more intense about how we value that - 'the flip side of grief' as she put it.

There was a wide range of views and opinions expressed about grief and how we express it - from anger to sadness and how different public and private expressions of sorrow can be. One participant quoted the composer Stokhausen saying: "the images of the Twin Towers toppling was the most aesthetic thing he has ever witnessed". Miming how we mindlessly drink down the news, one participant demonstrated how the media controls our emotional responses.

It felt as though we were beginning to get to grips with defining all these different kinds of grief when time ran out for discussion and we had ten minutes to write. Everyone wrote something and almost everyone read out what they'd written. One participant wrote in poetic form about the

relief she felt in sharing with others this anger in how the media force feed our emotions, and how we have to build our own walls of integrity against it. This thinking, and the feeling of the group by the end of the discussion, is well summed up in the Chinese proverb:

*You cannot prevent the birds of sorrow from flying over your head  
but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair.*

In the last part of the seminar, Larry read one of a series of poems about and for his mother - a poem which he would never publish until after her death. The poem attempts to bring together the personal (child rearing practices of the 1950s) with popular right wing attitudes (which his mother professed) relating to war, race, religion, etc.

### Evaluation

There was a verbal evaluation by everybody at the end. All the participants seemed to have appreciated the integrity of the group; there was empathy for the *inarticulateness* Larry had referred to earlier on with a poem that conveyed how hard it is to find words for strong emotions. Most participants felt that

the balance of the seminar had been right, some expressed surprise and even disappointment that the presentation hadn't been longer and more 'meaty' about the subject. One participant commented how some people are better at masking than others. Another participant felt that the discussion became too political and at one point he felt 'bored and pissed-off'. There was agreement that it would've been better to have had introductions with everybody saying their names. It had been quite a surprise to some people that the discussion revolved much more around issues to do with public rather than personal grief. Nine people attended this first seminar. The low number was due to late advertising. Lapidus only heard of grant aid from Glasgow City Council a few days before the event. Two participants commented that they would have preferred a more formal presentation followed by questions and discussion, but most felt there was a good balance between discussion and presentation.

**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2002, 7- 9.30pm**

**Words for Forgiveness.** Facilitator: Dr. Kay Carmichael, author of *Ceremony of Innocence - a history of Tears* and her – soon to be published Phd thesis: *A Post-Christian Perception of Sin and Forgiveness*. In her writing she addresses these questions: In our post-Christian culture, how do we offer forgiveness, how do we receive it and how does literature help?

Around twenty people came to this seminar. Kay began with the assertion that she finds literature and poetry to be the most important sources for her thinking about forgiveness. She laid out her base-line assumptions from which she develops her ideas: that all definitions of sin are humanly constructed and vary from community to community; that to forgive or not forgive is a choice any human can make but they must understand the consequences; that religious texts are the works of fallible human beings and one must discriminate between the time they were written and the present; that every individual has a responsibility to change circumstances to support their chosen morality, and that the community has a responsibility to support virtuous behaviour and condemn non-virtuous behaviour. Having thus spread her fare she suggested we turn inwards for a minute of silent reflection before taking some time to write about a situation in our own lives when it has been appropriate to forgive, or where we have been unable to forgive. From this exercise people spoke of their personal experiences which were all distressing and poignant, a few people read out what they had written down, and someone read out a poem they'd brought along by Mary Oliver.

### **The Wild Geese.**

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert  
repenting - You only have to let  
the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair - yours.  
And I will tell you mine.  
But meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the soft  
pebbles of rain are moving across the  
landscapes, over the fields and the  
deep trees, the hills and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese  
in the clear blue air  
are heading home again.

Who ever you are, no matter how lonely  
the world offers itself to your imagination  
calls to you, like the wild geese,  
harsh and exciting,  
over and over again  
announcing your place  
in the family of things.  
You do not have to be good.

Kay took the pain and difficulty expressed by participants to affirm just how difficult forgiveness is for everyone. She gave examples of situations where people had not forgiven but had found ways to what she termed, 'restorative justice'. The Christian ethic is embedded in us that we must forgive our neighbour so if someone steals my bicycle and says they're deeply sorry, I should forgive them, but how about returning my bicycle, or giving me another one? If that happens we can meet on the same ground and it will be much easier for me to resolve my feelings of anger, hatred, revenge – all feelings that are valid in this situation. She went on to describe the way people usually struggle to cope at three levels of forgiveness: there are the petty ones that we pocket and deal with passively, there are the ones we struggle to learn from, and there are the ones that force us to try and change the whole situation. She read a poem by Alice Walker that portrays the inner feelings of a woman as she looks at the dead body of her husband. It highlights the dichotomy between the notion of passive forgiveness as the dignified 'mature' response, and claiming the right not to forgive and using it to change your life. At this point the seminar broke into general discussion – there was so much to respond to. People gave personal examples of ways in which they'd tried to come to terms with a breakdown in friendships, or family relationships, where the hurt was great and the sense of loss very painful even when there is some

kind of resolution. Kay asked for our views on the Catholic use of confession – can we learn from this examination of conscience? There was some discussion of the different approach to sin and forgiveness between Catholic and Protestant ethics and this brought us to the wider issue of collective sin, or as Kay prefers to call it, iniquity. The massive iniquities of our present time being: war, poverty, violence and slavery. There was a unanimous decision to break for tea before taking on these issues!

After tea Kay again took to the floor to clarify for us the distinction she makes between personal sin and what she calls, 'structural sin' which may be carried out in our name but over which we have no control. She asked us to think about how we can live together – this beguilingly simple question threw open the discussion for the last part of the seminar. How can we live together in non-damaging ways? On the whole, not surprisingly, people hedged around such an open-ended, broad question. There was talk of how we are living in a time of great change, therefore of much confusion and things that were acceptable at one time are not at another. The individual has to make choices about what he/she can do something about. It isn't tenable to be in a constant state of guilt because you can't respond actively to all the iniquities going on all the time. You need knowledge, both personal and political, and the intention to change.

In summing up Kay emphasised how vibrant people are and how there is hope in finding creative ways to deal with these difficult issues. She took the point someone had made – that a person can learn to forgive another person but not their behaviour. At both an individual and a collective level we are learning to be much less forgiving of behaviour and this is very positive. She pointed to the recent public apologies that have been made: for example the Pope asking forgiveness from the Jews for the way the Church conducted itself during the second world war, and the Australian and New Zealand governments apologising for its treatment of their indigenous peoples and accepting that there must be compensation. She finished the session with a favourite poem of hers by C.P. Cavafy which expresses imaginatively the positive view that even when things look hopeless and we feel overwhelmed, it **is** still worth trying...

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2002, 7- 9.30pm**

***Cancer, Poetry and Healing.*** Facilitator: Valerie Gillies, Scottish poet who has won awards for her poetry and is published internationally; her most recent publication is *The Lightning Tree*. She is also a creative writing tutor in schools and hospitals.

Valerie began the evening by recounting a funny but true cancer story which happened at a writer's conference held in Crieff Hydro in a huge hall. The principal speaker was a lady novelist who, for the sake of anonymity, she called Lilly Brown. Donald Campbell, the poet, and Valerie were there. They had been adjudicating a poetry competition, which was part of the same conference, and were sitting at the back listening to the lead speaker. There were 200 people present. The principal speaker began her talk by stating that "Joyce Grenville had had a cancer, and she had refused all treatments because of her beliefs, and she had died" but she, Lillie Brown, when she was diagnosed with cancer, she accepted every treatment going, and here she was, very much alive. Then she gave a lecture which went over the 40 minutes by an hour and half, till it reached the point when Donald sat up very straight beside Valerie and called out: "Oh God, why did you take Joyce Grenville and leave us Lilly Brown!" So Valerie invited anyone who wished to call out: "Oh God, why did you take Joyce Grenville and leave us Valerie Gillies". She reminded us that there is always a serious side to cancer jokes. Joyce Grenville did write some poems out of her illness and a doctor friend, who died of leukaemia, had asked Valerie to read one at his funeral. He had enjoyed it.

Valerie referred to an article she wrote for the 'Maggie News' produced by the Glasgow Maggie Centre (drop-in support facility for cancer patients) and also published in Lapidus magazine 3. She wished to elaborate and talk about many aspects that were not covered in that article. The following is a transcript of what she said:

'I have been interviewed a few times when trying to raise funds for Maggie's. There are points about healing which I haven't gone into in any of the interviews. I think it is probably clear from the brief outline that when I was diagnosed with cancer, I didn't expect to survive, and far from being one of the people who are brave and bold and filled with determination - the battlers who are always meant to survive - I really felt that it was curtains for Valerie. Because I had had it for a long time, undetected, and because it had spread, I thought this was the end of the road. However, I hadn't taken into consideration the wonderful medical team who immediately pounced on me, and set about trying to get me to survive; it became part of that journey that I actually owed my life to other human beings, and I often do reflect on that. It did take me a while after finish of treatment to imagine I was going to be around at all. There were elements to healing which involved learning relaxation at Maggie's, going along to the clinical psychologist, and writing a journal and showing him the entries in that journal - things I was grateful for in the life that I had, and beginning to write poetry again. It was a time when I felt

it was hard to go anywhere or do anything. I had been one of these very busy people before, here I was not quite sure what I was going to do. But when I got my courage up to leave the shadow of the wing of the Western General, I headed North to Killin. The reason I went there is that I always had a particular devotion to St. Finnan, a 6<sup>th</sup> century Saint who wandered through Scotland and through Strathfillan, Glen Dochart – places like that are associated with him. His silver crook is kept in the National Museum in Edinburgh, the crook that was present at the crowning of Scottish kings. There are several relics of St. Finnan which are left. All of them have been significant in my life. The one that had been previously most significant was the holy pool on the River Dochart where he was meant to have cured people who were insane and brought to him from all over Scotland - to bathe and take part in semi-pagan healing rituals.'

At this point Valerie read her poem *St. Finnan's Crook* and suggested that we look for it in the Museum. Then she continued:

'I set out on my own healing journey and went to Killin to the old watermill which has recently been restored and is working again. For 1,400 years people have kept several river washed water-worn stones of different shapes and sizes and meant to cure different bodily ailments. They are kept in the mill in a glass case – most people don't notice them because they look exactly as if they have been just lifted out of the river. Once a year, on new year's day, the bed of rushes on which the stones lie, are renewed. Rushes brought up from the river and laid with the stones on top. There's a stone for curing ailments of the breast – there was a woman who walked the length of Glen Lyon, which is over 30 miles, to come to Killin for this healing stone. There would have been prayers or certain forms of words when you were given the stone to hold. With any of the healing stones - you say in Gaelic: "blessed be God and St. Finnan", you move the stones three times one way, three times the other way, then three times back again around the area which needs healing. When I went to the healing stones I didn't ask to get better, partly because I didn't expect to get better. One of the extraordinary things about these stones is the sensation of absolute cold as if someone has taken it out of a freezer, but when you hold it against you, there seems to be a radiant warmth comes off it. When I drove away from Killin, I remember feeling as if someone had closed a perspex door between me and my memories of cancer and treatment. It was now something I turned around from and walked ahead. That is a healing experience which I don't usually mention because it is a matter of faith and shows the entirely medieval person I am. I did write a lot after being there'.

Valerie then encouraged us to write about our own touchstone experience; then share our words with one other person. She read her own poem: *Charms against Ill* which begins:

If you fear each dream's new shape  
Take a pebble that waves perforate.  
String it by a piece of tape

Hang it on your bedpost, keep  
Away the nightmare from your sleep.

Valerie continued by explaining that people used to wear arrowheads as protection against witches. She spoke about Ayurvedic medicine and about sounds in Sanskrit. Making sound can make you sound. Reverberation in the heart, so she imagined that when first composing a poem aloud, it could be healing. On a very different note she read a poem she wrote while having chemotherapy:

You couldn't have a serious conversation  
with any one who looks like me  
under the cool cap during chemotherapy.

A cobalt-blue two-layered helmet  
like a Woman-in-the-Wind biker wears,  
the cap comes out of the freezer. Icecrest on it.

When the great wave comes crashing  
and the chemicals rush to my scalp  
the cap stops my hair falling out.

The freezing layer caps the globe.  
I'm under the permafrost, it's preserving  
this nomad woman with her six horses.

Here's my needle tattoo on kidskin, my weird  
colour hair, my strange crescent headgear.  
Let in today's air, I melt away.

fading out the derbyday trampling beat  
of those wild gallops on the high plateau,  
the grip of this hard hat thawing.

The following text is a transcription of the last part of her talk:  
'That's one use of poetry. There are other uses of course. About ten years ago when I was working for Artlink at the Marie Currie Day Centre in Edinburgh with patients with advanced cancer who were not up to writing, but they did like to hear poetry. I remember one young man in his early thirties, who liked to get me to read from the Tweed Journey, which was a journey I took along the River Tweed composing poems at all the different places along the way. He had been a BT engineer in the Borders, and he said: "you take me back to that beautiful country that I can't see again, I can't go there myself". Poetry is one of the companion arts.

Here's a poem I've treasured for a couple of years. It is by one of my writing students who was very ill with cancer at the time he wrote it. What's so remarkable about this poem is that it's about another person in the ward, not about himself or his own illness. It is a very close observation of someone else in the next bed. He had been an engineer, and had only occasionally written poetry.

*Strange Lands*

Here mother ill, they took the family south for twenty years  
And for the usual pittance, worked in service  
came back north for his inheritance  
his father's small holding  
and took a shop

He paused, seemed puzzled,  
his head a sketch in charcoal on the pillow  
"We never had a day off work in all our lives"

After the ulcer and the bypass, he could have given up  
claimed invalidity but carried on  
At last they took a holiday by coach  
to stay the night at big hotels.  
enjoyed it  
would not risk an unknown place too long

Encouraged  
booked to join a four week cruize,  
he paused again

"it should have been last Summer  
then all this"

He meant leukemia, the chronic sort

## **WHAT CANCER CANNOT DO**

CANCER IS SO LIMITED:

IT CANNOT CRIPPLE LOVE

IT CANNOT SHATTER HOPE

IT CANNOT CORRODE FAITH

IT CANNOT DESTROY PEACE

IT CANNOT KILL FRIENDSHIP

IT CANNOT SUPPRESS MEMORIES

IT CANNOT SILENCE COURAGE

IT CANNOT INVADE THE SOUL

IT CANNOT CONQUER THE SPIRIT

IT CANNOT STEAL EETERNAL LIFE

**Sunday 15th December 2002, 7- 9.30pm**

***Reading and Writing on Prescription - A Doctor's View.***

Facilitator: Dr. James Hawkins who is currently working for the charity: 'Good Medicine', based in Edinburgh. He is trained in both Eastern and Western medicine. Dr. Hawkins routinely prescribes therapeutic writing to many of his patients providing them with a hand-out (see appendix) which describes the process and quotes medical evidence to raise expectations in his patients. He has thoroughly researched the subject and claims that there is no longer a debate. 'Writing works', he says, and he asserts that there are many published research papers to justify his position. Most of what he presented at this seminar is published and downloadable from his website:

***www.goodmedicine.org.uk.*** This report is taken from his website.

"the greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives."

William James

"fortune favours the brave"

Traditional Proverb

**what is therapeutic writing?**

Therapeutic writing is a method of self-help. It has been shown to be a surprisingly powerful way of coping both with current life difficulties and with past traumatic events. Typically one writes for 20 to 30 minutes about anything one feels particularly upset about. It is often helpful to write about things that one has mostly kept to oneself. If one writes about the topic on several occasions the emotions are gradually processed. This working through can benefit our health both psychologically and physically.

When writing 'therapeutically' don't think too much about how you are going to express yourself. Don't worry about style or spelling or how the writing would sound if read out. It sometimes helps if you write spontaneously, rapidly and without stopping. Write about your deepest thoughts and feelings. Write personally and self-reflectively. How does what you are writing about affect you and what are the implications for you personally? Some-times, if what you are writing about involves someone else, it can help to frame the writing as a letter to them (whether they are alive or dead). The writing though is to help you, so it is usually best not to post the letter.

Don't worry if what you write seems illogical or a bit crazy. Writing it out helps to start making some kind of sense of what one has experienced. Initially the thoughts may come out in disorganised, surprising ways. That's fine. It is probably best if you don't show what you have written to anybody else – though of course you can if you really want to. Writing knowing that someone else may read what you have written tends to affect what and how you write. It is important if you want to make the writing as therapeutic as possible that you should write very honestly and openly about both feelings and thoughts.

### **when is it most useful to use therapeutic writing?**

- 1.) If you have had difficult or traumatic experiences – recently or far in the past – therapeutic writing may well help you. This is particularly so if you find that thoughts, pictures or dreams about the experiences keep coming back to you, or you avoid anything that might trigger off memories of what has happened.
- 2.) If you are facing current stresses or you are muddled over some issue. You may have thoughts and feelings churning around inside, but you're not necessarily clear what it is you want or what you should be doing about your situation. Therapeutic writing is likely to help you understand your position better.

### **how does therapeutic writing help?**

Therapeutic writing can help us in a number of ways. These include reducing internal, chronic stress; helping us to understand and integrate what has happened; giving us a sense of perspective and control which helps us to move on with our lives; and maybe too allowing us to speak more freely to others about what has happened.

- a.) Therapeutic writing can help by releasing internal stress. If we are holding onto powerful emotions without really expressing them, then the work involved in this inhibition produces internal stress on our bodies and minds. It can wear us down and increase our vulnerability to disease. Although initially therapeutic writing may often be upsetting, it has been shown that it can reduce physical and psychological illness in the weeks and months after you use it.
- b.) Therapeutic writing helps us to understand and integrate what has happened. The act of putting thoughts and feelings into words is surprisingly powerful. Our minds move so quickly that it is often hard to follow a train of thought right through to a clear conclusion. We may well be left with a mound of disorganised reactions which continue to churn inside. Speaking or writing slows us down and keeps us on a particular aspect of what we are facing. Confronting and expressing our deepest thoughts and feelings about a situation helps us to assimilate and learn from what has happened.
- c.) Therapeutic writing gives us perspective and a sense of control. By using therapeutic writing on a series of occasions, how we see and feel about an event or problem gradually changes. Less relevant aspects tend to drop away and the important learnings are highlighted. The problem becomes more manageable and we gain perspective and a greater sense of control. This allows us to work through what has happened and move on with our lives.
- d.) Feeling less overwhelmed and having a clearer sense of perspective can allow us more easily to speak with others about what has happened. Whether we want to do this or not will depend on us and on who is available. It can however sometimes be very helpful in reducing feelings of isolation.

**further comments**

Therapeutic writing is likely to be most useful if it digs deep. It is not meant to be a chance to daydream about revenge or other fantasies. It aims to explore our deepest thoughts and feelings in a self-reflective, questioning, open way. If you have a tendency to put yourself down or see things very negatively, be careful that you don't fall into this pattern when you are using therapeutic writing. Ask yourself what you can learn from all that has happened. How can the outer situation be improved? Maybe it is changes in your inner psychological state that are now more important? How could you view what has happened in a way that doesn't hurt you so much? What small or bigger steps can you take to move forward in your life? Therapeutic writing is a self-help method. It supplements rather than replaces the value of talking to others. If you don't find it is sorting out the situation you are facing, do please consider getting other help. This might involve talking to friends, particularly if they are likely to be accepting and non-judgemental. This may be hard for them however if they feel awkward with emotions or are involved in some way in what you are talking about. Professional help from your doctor or some other therapist may also be very useful.

**Sunday 19th January 2003, 7- 9.30pm**

***Dementia and Creativity.*** Facilitator: John Killick who is research fellow in Communication Through the Arts at the University of Stirling. For the seminar he read poems by people with dementia and he discussed the relationship between language and dementia. This report is in the form of an article John wrote which he sent after giving the seminar.

### **“Why Don’t You Just Lose First!” – Writing & Dementia**

Over the past nine years I have worked as a writer with hundreds of people with dementia – listening to what they have to say, writing it down, or tape recording it and later transcribing, sharing the text with the person, also sometimes with family carers and staff and, with permission, on occasion with the wider world in the form of poems. My predominant impression confirms the psycho-social approach to dementia: that, whatever difficulties they may face, the person is still there, that communication is a fundamental and rewarding activity, and that how we treat the person is a strong contributing factor to how the dementia presents through them.

My work confirms that many of the things that people with dementia say are not nonsense, they are actually subtle and profound, and we ignore them at our peril, if we take diagnosis and treatment seriously. One of our problems is that we are often too blinkered by the medical model to see people as other than a parcel of symptoms to be categorised and prescribed for without any real consultation or consideration. Another is that the language with which we are presented is not necessarily susceptible to logical analysis, being often more emotional and symbolic than rational.

We seem so wedded to the hyper-cognitive in our own society that we cannot separate feelings from thoughts or value the former adequately. One woman speaks of one of her problems thus:

‘I have a problem:  
I have a house on either side of the road,  
But I only have a room in one of them.  
How do I cross the busy road?  
And what happens if I break down the middle?’

She is surely articulating more than the prosaic, and when she goes on to speak of a further problem as a ‘stain’ on her skirt (one that no-one else can see) we shouldn’t be taking that literally either. The woman in a nursing home who speaks of ‘the monkey puzzle’ helps us to a metaphorical interpretation by identifying the puzzle as ‘this place’ and a major part of the problem as the staff in her expression of ‘how to cope with the monkeys’.

The instances so far given are illustrative of the kind of processing people with dementia do with the material given them by the dementia experience.

Now here is the transcript of a conversation between a mother with dementia and her daughter. The mother speaks first:

I was looking at the wall for ages  
Then I realised  
That there was an encyclopaedia hanging on it  
*An encyclopaedia? hanging on the wall?*  
Yes  
*The huge book? hanging on the wall?*  
Yes  
So I said to myself  
'Well – that's doing no good hanging up there' –  
So I went over and took it down,  
And hung it up inside my head  
And you've no idea the difference it's made  
*What kind of difference?*  
Well, I'm learning all kinds of things that I didn't know before  
*Like what? Can you tell me something?*  
The acid and passive  
*Do you mean the active and passive?*  
Well, you could say active but I don't want to  
*Why?*  
Acid is stronger – it takes the surface off  
*Is that important?*  
Yes, very  
*Why?*  
Because then you can see what lies beneath

The concepts 'encyclopaedia' and 'acid' are clearly being used here in a symbolic sense, and the mother is exploring the nature of the dementia she is trying to come to terms with in the only way she knows how – by bypassing logical processes and going straight to the emotional truth she perceives. The daughter gives her own perspective on the conversation in which she takes part as follows:

'My mother encouraged me to look beyond the surface of things, and to live from my deepest self. My questions in it are to draw out of her what she was meaning to communicate to me. In terms of her dementia, it was often my experience that without such questions she would 'stop' as if losing momentum and then would 'start up' again immediately following on from a question – when she could hear in my voice that what she was saying was very important to me and I wanted to understand. I was learning so much from her about how to listen and how to live.'

The idea of 'learning from' a person with dementia is unfortunately, rarely encountered. Unless staff in institutions are sensitive to the unusual processes adopted by their clients they may completely miss the meaning of what they see and hear.

One woman was singing quietly to herself from morning to night and staff pronounced her “happy” and “contented”. When I transcribed the words she sang, however, this is what I found:

I don't know what to do  
I want to go home  
I can sit here but  
I don't seem happy any more  
I don't know what to do  
I want to but  
I can't any more  
I want to lay  
I don't know when it'll be  
I want it so let me have it  
Don't make it so hard for me  
O World, I don't know what to do  
I want to see my sunset  
I want it as it was promised  
I'm waiting for the hour  
I want to see my sunset good

This woman was communicating with herself, confronting death in her lyric, and no-one had any idea of her anguish. On another occasion I heard a mother haranguing her son for regaling her with an endless recital of the trivia of her life. She sent him packing with the shouted words: “The truth is mine not yours!” and “All I'm interested in is my life's going!”

Many people with dementia are close to the end of their lives. It is natural for people approaching death to try and make sense of all their experience up to the present. Why should it be any different for them?

I think the process of interiorisation that many people with dementia practice is worthy of greater recognition. The condition can drive individuals inwards, causing them to put more emphasis on their present memories and the continuity of the inner self. One woman I met was extremely forthcoming on the first occasion. The resulting poem is a resumé of her life in terms of meaningful relationships and occasions:

'There have been other loves  
But none like that of my mother.  
She had birds that came onto her hand,  
Pecked and flew away.

What a wonderful time! –  
We were brought up that way.  
She was very particular  
How and where. I shall not forget.  
She would make little noises  
And then pull it in –  
The string of human kindness . . . .

. . . .My father was a man that spent  
his life with all that was spread.  
He was a beautiful man.  
I looked up to him.  
He would walk a mile  
To rescue one little chick  
He thought was on bad legs.

If anyone came to the gates  
He would get hold of their head  
And shake it from side to side  
And tell them not to come again'.

But at the end of her monologue she says:

'Twice and twice over  
What I think is important.  
My hiding place now is one  
That I can stretch out to  
And run away to for a while'.

On the second occasion I met with her, her mood had changed. She said:

'I don't mind you writing it down –  
I can always alter it . . . .

Who are you? A gentleman?  
No, go and look for one!

I lived on a farm. I still do.  
It is higher up than this.  
I'd take you there.  
But I wouldn't want to take you there  
To start with. *It is mine! It is mine!*

Between you and me, you know,  
It's a battle of wills.  
Why don't you just lose first!

That emphasis on the ownership of her own experience seems crucial. It is as if she had regretted her expansiveness on the first occasion and wished to withdraw to a distance. She is asserting herself and the singularity of her own personhood.

We have to remember, in our zeal to go out to meet people with dementia more than halfway in order to accommodate their inter-actional difficulties that we must also observe a notional line so that we avoid trampling upon their right to privacy and confidentiality. Communication in their field is both a moral imperative and carries with it commensurate responsibilities.

I am very conscious that so far in this article I have only been considering writing with people with dementia. That is because all my experience has been in that area. But there is a whole world of potential personal writing relating to the condition which is not covered by this, and which, so far as I am aware, has been almost entirely neglected. That is, writing by the carer as a form of release, and attempting to make sense of the frequently bewildering and frustrating experiences they are going through. At its least literary this can be an incoherent outpouring of little interest to anyone except, perhaps, others in the same situation, who can recognise their own predicament. The Newsletter of any Alzheimers Association will furnish examples. At its best, which is rarely, this can be a sharing and transforming instrument, capable of interpreting a condition which is mysterious to us all. Duncan Tolmie is the son of someone with dementia and he is writing a journal/book about how he and the rest of his family are coping. His main emphasis, however, is on how his mother is coping. Here is the opening of his chapter on a case conference:

‘The table is round, of heavy blonde oak, and feels expansive under my fingertips. There are six of us gathered around it: six relative strangers who share varying degrees of familiarity, and varying degrees of a common goal. Each of us has met, on and off, at different times and in different places; all of us purporting to be in pursuit of ‘the best thing for Susan’. Now we have been forced into this: an ugly hour of stark officialdom; all of us together, all at once, about to discuss my mother’s long-term future. I regard it as a defining moment. Because, today, as we sit round the heavy, blonde oak table, three lives will be changed forever, with far-reaching consequences.

Only, there is no table; nowhere to lay our pads, our pens. Our cards. That table exists only in my mind, solid and steadfast like memories of my mother before dementia took its toll. There should have been a table; a table to add dignity to the proceedings, a table to stamp them with formality, with respect. My mother deserves no less. Because, sitting outside the Social Work Department in my rain-battered car, putting our lives in perspective, putting off the inevitable, that’s how I imagined it would be.’

.....

*Here is one person’s response to the word “dementia” - written at the seminar:*

demented — demon — demeaning  
de-void of meaning — absent — gone  
gone — other worldly — other  
prophetic — prophylactic — projected  
private — hidden — in touch with spirits  
As a child sometimes I felt demented. I feel it now when I lose something and can’t find it, I curse myself, explode and inflict abuse on myself as if I didn’t matter, nothing matters, I want to smash my computer. And when I feel inadequate, incompetent — out of control, unable to respond, not responsible. Obstinate. Bad. Inappropriate behaviour — drooling, incontinent, immobile, rocking in my rocking chair. Shaking. Shattered. Wanting to die. Wanting to die. Is that like dementia?

There must be many nuances and colours to dementia, Alzheimers — where did that name come from? It all depends on who it is and what has gone before. I remember a story of a man with Alzheimers who had lost all memory of friends, but when some close friends came to the door who had been invited to dinner, he said: “I don’t know who you are or why you are here, but do come in and have a meal with us”. The habit of generosity transcended his dementia.

The black hole, the empty look, the zombie. In body but where is the soul? In the song? She keeps repeating the same words over and over: “I just want to die .. I just want to die”. Her daughter is desperate for her to join in the physiotherapy, but she seems content to be there in passively present - she may join in eventually, perhaps not today. I try to persuade her daughter to stop pressurising her mother to join in. I think her daughter needs more help than her mother. Why can’t we explore that feeling with her, that desire to die. What’s wrong with want to die when your life has no meaning, no joy, nothing to look forward to? What then? My 92 year old friend wants to talk with other old people about death and diing but everyone she meets her skirts around the subject.

Autumn is full of colour and falling leaves — falling apart. The wind blows me into the river and I float away in a dream.

**Sunday 16th February 2003, 7- 9.30pm**

**Ecology and Interdependence.** Facilitator, Gerry Loose, editor, poet, and former farmer. His most recent publication is: *Tongues of Stone* (Mariscat Press 1998). Gerry read from his recent work inspired by his *poet-in-resident* post at the Glasgow Botanic Gardens. He presented the argument for ecology in land, language and relationships.

Gerry began by explaining how intimidated he felt by the title because it had 'run away with itself'. A 'Seminar' felt daunting but if we look at the definition of 'Seminarium' it is filled with possibilities because it means 'a seedbed' which can be filled with both metaphorical and literal seeds. Continuing along these lines he took the word, 'ecology' from its Greek root *oikos* meaning both 'house' and 'economy'. Biology relates to creatures and their habitats – the creature cannot be separated from what it exists in – therefore interdependence is obvious. This essential truth is expressed in the Estonian poet's words: 'the universe is in a grain of sand' and perhaps in Western culture there is too much emphasis on 'selfhood'. A participant questioned this: she felt strongly that the idea of not having 'a self' was a very negative concept because we need an affirmative sense of self and individuality in order to have self-esteem, and we can't respect others, or give 'of ourselves' to others if we don't possess a 'self' to give. This led to a lively discussion about the nature of the self and the multiple roles we play during our lives. Gerry favoured the Buddhist approach, especially the Buddhist notion of compassion that makes no distinctions between living creatures – we should always look for the connections between us. The Japanese Zen Buddhist monk, Suzuki tells us that the expert is often too full of information to be able to meditate properly. One must learn to share in an open way, ask the fundamental questions, and one learns how very little one ever knows:

*In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there're few. This is the real secret of the arts: always be a beginner. Be very very careful about this point. If you start to practice zazen, you will begin to appreciate your beginner's mind.*

Shunryu Suzuki

Regarding Ecology Movements, Gerry asks the basic questions: what's it for? who does it benefit? The answers almost always relate to humans and the uses they make of nature around them for themselves. He asked us to think about preserving natural life for its very own sake – using it for itself – see the landscapes, the rivers, the mountains, the trees as living beings rich, abundant and interconnected. This created more lively discussion since some participants pointed out that science, by its very nature, dissects and takes apart. Gerry quoted from the founder of the Deep Ecology movement:

*....that we can never know enough: 'doctor ignorantia - conscious ignorance. Richness and diversity of life-forms contribute to realisation of these values (that non-human life has intrinsic and inherent value independent of usefulness for human purposes) and are also values in themselves. Richness means we have to have an abundance of life of all kinds. We have to replenish the earth. In this sense, landscapes are living beings and so are rivers. (Arne Naess)*

The basic premise of the scientific understanding of our world is to be as objective as possible in order to better understand nature. Gerry thought that there is an important difference to make between science and technology but we did not delve any further into this topic – our thinking was provoked, but of course there aren't any easy answers.

Next we paired up with our neighbour and Gerry suggested we talk about a personal experience where we found we were in conflict with nature, he asked how we resolved the situation and he asked us to try some writing from the point of view of the element we were in conflict with. We talked. We wrote. Everybody ended up reading out their writing and it was clear that we all enjoyed doing this exercise. My partner talked about the severe problems she's encountering with a wild plant in her garden that is taking over everywhere. Her neighbours disapprove of it and over the weekend she had to do battle with it. I wrote: *I grow and grow – the soil is right for me, the place is good, the pleasure of extending here is exquisite. My shoots can flourish and multiply – here I am, this is me, what I do, what I am – giving the world my delicate colours, my sweet scent, my unique green leaf. The birds need me, the insects need me but many animals try to attack and destroy me. Humans cut me down wanting to dictate my growth. They stunt me – again and again I must struggle to begin again.*

There was a wonderful variety of writing touching so many aspects of this central conundrum about the true meaning of living in harmony with nature. Lastly Gerry posed a question about what the function of writing poetry is. He emphasised the importance of discovering the metaphor that expresses what you are groping for, puts into an image and brings into being the previously wordless thought and feeling, how satisfying and empowering that can feel. He called it: 'electrifying the spiritual' giving us an awareness of what it is to be alive and connected. He feels that the present day explosion of poetry writing has to do with secularisation dictating about how the world is. For him the important element in his discovery of poetry was the way it introduced him to silence – learning to listen to the spaces between the words is like attempting to listen to the non-human world. To finish the session he read us some fragments of works in progress and a poem from *Synchronicities* by John Burnside. This is one of Gerry's poems:

breaking earth  
we work with frost

we trench & compost  
with continents of soil fauna

the tender shoots  
draw up mountain traces

we garden the sky  
with moon & sun & rain

sowing seeds  
we are already harvesting dreams

**Sunday March 16<sup>th</sup> 2003, 7 – 9.30pm**

***The Mythical Journey from Suicide to Poetry.*** Facilitator: Jayne Wilding, who is a writer and poet and also works as a creative writing tutor in a variety of settings. At the seminar she read from her own work and from the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus.

This was an intimate evening with only six people present, but it suited the subject and there was great depth and appreciation of the healing potential of poetry. Jayne Wilding's main aim was to show how she found poetry and myth to be useful resources, after her father and later her brother, committed suicide.

She began with a writing exercise to encourage us to reflect on our own experience.

She asked if everyone was familiar with the idea of 'free writing', and then reminded us of the following guidelines adapted from Natalie Goldberg's book *Writing Down the Bones*:

- Keep your hand moving
- Don't cross out
- Don't worry about the spelling, the grammar or the punctuation
- Lose control
- Don't think. Don't get logical
- Go for the jugular.
- It's your writing you don't need to share if you don't want to

She suggested the following topic: Imagine you are setting off on a journey or expedition, what do you take, what do you carry? After ten minutes we shared with a partner, then with the whole group. My list included:

a shakuhachi flute, a blank notebook, swiss pen knife, Pema Chodron's pocket book - *Awakening Loving Kindness*, and Thomas A. Clark's - *Tormentil and Bleached Bones*, I usually have a snack with me: a flapjack, an apple, banana, and water, always a bottle of water; and my bike goes where I go, it gets me there. Also rain trousers and kagool in the bottom of my rucksack. A plastic folder with leaflets and posters of the latest events I want to promote (including this one); stamps, a few envelopes; South African AIDS badges; a bit of twine for tying long things on my bike. No alcohol, no cigarettes, no petro. Matches and a candle. I usually need to start my journey, to go downstairs, be on my way before I remember what I've forgotten - like floss for my teeth.....

After we shared and discussed our 'free writing' Jayne read a short passage from Stephen Levine's book *Who Dies?*, from the chapter on suicide:

'The other day I heard the father of a boy who had committed suicide say, "Everyone has a skeleton in their closet. But the person who kills themselves leaves their skeleton in another person's closet" The grief and guilt that arise in the wake of a suicide often leaves a legacy of guilt and confusion. Each loved one wracks the mind and tears the heart questioning. 'What could I have done to prevent this?'

No map, no compass, no guidebook. Jayne had to find her own way, and as Steven Levine says:

‘What could I have done? How could I have made life fuller for my loved one?’ A sense of failure arises in the mind, no matter how unfounded. Indeed, those who grieve after a suicide often contemplate suicide themselves. The desperation of ‘What’s the use?’ or ‘Why bother?’ is transmitted to those left behind - perhaps the same questions that propelled the poison or pulled the trigger. A feeling of impotence in the face of life’s uncontrollable changes.’ (p217 *Who Dies?*)

She continues with two passages from *In the Springtime of the Year* by Susan Hill

‘The pleasure she took in caring for the hens was the only thing that had never left her, and she clung to that. This nightly journey down the garden had been one thing, to which she looked forward each day. The hens knew her. They were trusting. And reliable themselves, too, always in their places as darkness fell, ready to be put away. They made small noises which seemed to come from deep within their plumage, dove-like sounds, as they heard her lift the latch of their run’ (p13)

On talking to herself and not talking to others

‘During the first weeks, she had gone up and down the stairs, stood in the middle of this room or that, she did not know where, and talked; about what had happened, and how, about her own thoughts and feelings and what she should do. She had talked to Ben, too, because he was still there, wasn’t he, just behind her shoulder, at the end of the landing, on the other side of the door, and it was sometimes just ordinary talk, she might only say, ‘Hello Ben.’ But for the rest of the time, she blamed him, screamed out resentment, ‘Where are you? Where are you? Why did you have to die? Oh why did you die?’ (p14)

Jayne also talked about how important it was for her to write her own journal - and she quoted from May Sarton’s *Journal of a Solitude* as an example of woman’s experience of loss. She said that May Sarton helped her get up in the morning through expressing blessings in everyday life:

‘In Milwaukee I witnessed a wonderful sunrise over the lake from my bedroom window at Marjorie Bither’s. First, over the flat, greenish frozen water, the horizon brimmed with a warm golden light, then changed to ruddy pink - a wide peaceful opening up as if the sky itself were a huge flower.’ (p105)

‘I feel released from the rack, set free, in touch with the deep source that is only *good* where poetry lives.’ (p26)

Nature and the cycle of the year added to her journey as described by Susan Hill:

‘December came. It was Sunday. Ruther went out of the back door, and walked half way down the garden, to stand, just between the apple trees, in the place she had been that afternoon, when she had felt the shock at the moment of Ben’s death. Her breath smoked on the steel-cold night air, and the grass and vegetable tops were coated with a thin frost, like powdered sugar.’ (p169)

We had a brain storm on the meaning of the word “myth”: symbols - Greeks - oral tradition - supernatural - stories with seeds of truth - heroes - untrue - “let’s pretend” - journeys - religion/faith - exaggeration - “that’s a bit of a myth”.

Then another quote from May Sarton:

‘I have been pondering two passages from Jung. The first is the key to the dangers of sublimation: ‘One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.’ (p95)

And from Liz Greene’s *The Mythic Tarot*:

‘The Greek gods are not the exclusive property of any particular esoteric school, religious doctrine or spiritual path. Amoral yet containing profound moral truths, they predate and permeate our modern Judeo-Christian religious symbols as well as the art and literature of the whole Western Culture; and they remain the most fundamental and precise images to describe the many sided and multi-coloured writings of the human psyche. They are symbols of raw nature, our own raw nature with its deep ambivalence of body and spirit and its mutually contradictory drives towards self-realisation and unconsciousness.’ (p10)

When talking about the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus, Jayne quoted from the play’s chorus and Cassandra who has the gift of prophecy. She said she needed something trans-personal, “the myth held me together”. Archetypal patterns loomed in her life, and as Liz Green explains:

‘Mythic images are really spontaneous pictures, sprung from the human imagination, which describes in poetic language essential human experiences and essential human patterns of development. Psychology now uses the term ‘archetypal’ to describe these patterns. Archetypal means a pattern which is universal and existent in all people in all cultures at all periods of history.’ (p12)

In Natalie Goldberg’s *Writing Down the Bones*, she suggests that:

‘Writers end up writing about their obsessions. Things that haunt them; things they can’t forget; stories they carry in their bodies.’ (p38)

Jayne then suggested that we 'free-write' about either a myth or a story that has helped us; or write a list of our obsessions. I chose to write about my BSC (Bed-Shrine-Coffin) which is where I sleep, meditate, read, and it will eventually be my coffin.

'For now it looks like a bed platform with sitting area underneath. And here I wonder about death everyday: Will I die today? Am I alive today? Am I dead already and just don't know it? Who lives dies. What myths surround death in a cloak of mystery - the underworld. Every culture has its myth, but I don't believe any of them. "Oh yea of little faith". Yeah that's me. Re-incarnation? No. What obsesses me is how I die. That last breath out. That unknown journey alone I want to die well. I'm obsessed with birth too. I love babies. How beings emerge, come into being, where seeds come from. I remember Archie who killed himself in my studio.....'

Natalie Goldberg in her introduction of writing as a practice and to Buddhist ideas, states that:

'One of the main aims in writing practice is to learn to trust your own mind and body; to grow patient and non-aggressive. Art lives in the Big World. One poem or story doesn't matter one way or the other. It's the process of writing and life that matters. Too many writers have written great books and gone insane or alcoholic or killed themselves. This process teaches about sanity. We are trying to become sane along with our poems and stories.' (p12)

Haiku Poets such as Basho and Ryokan, their journey, their poetry, helped Jayne to find her way. One of her other inspirations was the writing of Pema Chodron:

'...loving-kindness – 'maitri' - towards ourselves doesn't mean getting rid of anything. 'Maitri' means that we can still be crazy after all these years. We can still be angry after all these years. We can still be timid and jealous or full of feelings of unworthiness. The point is not to try to change ourselves. Meditation practice isn't about trying to throw ourselves away and become something better. It's about befriending who we are already. The ground of practice is you or me or whoever we are right now, just as we are. That's the ground, that's what we study, that's what we come to know with tremendous curiosity and interest.' (p4 *The Wisdom of No Escape*)

Jayne finished the evening by reading a few of her own poems and one by Denise Levertov, *Talking to Grief*, which begins:

Ah, grief, I should not treat you  
like a homeless dog  
who comes to the back door  
for a crust, for a meatless bone.  
I should trust you.

And a few weeks after the seminar, Jayne sent me this uplifting poem:

Slowly  
(After Henry David Thoreau)

If I could go more slowly  
what would it bring?  
What would I begin to notice  
that I had not seen before

If I could go more slowly  
would the hurt, hurt more  
or would the hurt give way  
to something deeper

If I could go more slowly  
when I came to pick the fruit  
I would not smudge the bloom  
with rough hands

If I could go more slowly  
I would take each damson, each plum  
and place them  
on a blue and white plate.

For is it not, that in going slowly  
we know how to touch the wounds  
and in doing that we know how  
to hold the fruit, our finest qualities.

## **Recommended Reading:**

For all seminars, participants were encouraged to do a little background reading, and were invited to share short poems, prose passages, songs or tell a personal story relevant to the evening's theme.

### ***Giving Sorrow Words - Larry Butler***

Giving Sorrow Words. Karen vanMeenen, Charles Rossiter (2002) National Association for Poetry Therapy. Poems for strength and solace collected after September 11, 2001, distributed free from [www.poetrytherapy.org](http://www.poetrytherapy.org)

Loss of Dreams, a Special Kind of Grief. Ted Bowman.

[bowma008@tc.umn.edu](mailto:bowma008@tc.umn.edu)

Finding Hope When Dreams Have Shattered. Ted Bowman (2001)

### ***Finding Words for Forgiveness - Kay Carmichael:***

Richard Holloway: On Forgiveness, Canongate Books

This is a beautifully written, thoughtful, deeply Christian book which claims to address the question - How can we forgive the unforgiveable? It makes very good use of poetry.

Bernard Schlink: The Reader, Phoenix

Looks at issues of German guilt for the Holocaust in a new and disturbing way. It tests the limits of forgiveness.

Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Scarlet Letter, World's Classics, OUP

This is the story of a seventeenth century woman who challenged the system of moral authority in which she found herself and was seen as unforgiveable. The reader is allowed to make their own judgement.

Simon Wiesenthal: The Sunflower, Schocken Books, New York

The subtitle to this book is 'On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness', and that sums it up. If you only feel able to read one book this is the one to read - followed if possible by *The Reader*.

### ***Cancer, Poetry and Healing. Valerie Gillies***

Dr Rosy Daniel, Living with Cancer, Bristol Cancer Help Centre 2001, ISBN 1 84119 163 g

A positive book for people considering different ways of healing would be:

Bernie Siegel, Love Medicine and Miracles This is the classic,

- so many people read this book

Ken Wilbur Grace and Grit, ISBN 0 877 73 698 7

A moving account of a couples journey with cancer. One of the most readable books by this philosopher/psychologist

Two recent autobiographical accounts:

Ruth Picardie, Before I say Goodbye, Penguin ISBN 0 140 2763 0 0

John Diamond Snake Oil and other Preoccupations, Vintage 2001,  
ISBN 0 099 428 33 4

Both these books are wry and perceptive, written by cancer patients; a note of caution, however, anyone undergoing treatment might not want to read either of these till they were feeling better.

Henri Nouwen: Turn my Mourning into Dancing. W Publishing Group, 2001  
ISBN 0-8499-1711-5

'Moving through hard times with hope' is the subtitle of this book compiled from the notes of the priest and author Henri Nouwen in the years he spent as a pastor for the LArche Community of Daybreak in Toronto. How we can live fully in the midst of suffering.

Green Waters, pocketbooks, 1998, ISBN 0-952 7669-2-2

The Order of Things, pocketbooks, 2001, ISBN 0-7486-6290-1

Two books of poetry - short poems - to inspire us after surgery or during treatment. Anthologies for dipping into when we don't have much strength to read longer pieces.

***Writing on Prescription, a doctor's view.*** Dr. James Hawkins

For more details on the health benefits of writing and self-disclosure in general, see:

J.W.Pennebaker "*Opening Up: the Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*" recently re-published by New York: Guilford Press, 1997, and Louise

DeSalvo "*Writing as a Way of Healing*", The Women's Press, 1999. Eileen

Kennedy-Moore and Jeanne Watson "*Expressing Emotion: Myths, Realities, and Therapeutic Strategies*" by (New York: Guilford Press, 1999) for anyone who wants something a little more academic.

Finkenauer C & Rime B *Keeping emotional memories secret* J Health Psychol 1998;3:47-58 [6587]

Smyth JM *Written emotional expression: effect sizes, outcome types, and moderating variables* J Consult Clin Psychol 1998;66:174-84 [6588]

### ***Creativity and Dementia.* John Killick**

Poems are taken from:

Killick and Allan *Communication and the care of people with Dementia*, Open University)

Killick J. (1997) *'You Are Your Words'* Hawker Publications, London

Killick J. & Cordonnier C. (2000) *'Openings'* Hawker Publications, London

McKinlay A. (1998) *'Inner Out'* Charcoal Press, Rothesay

Benson S. & Killick J. (2002) *'Creativity in Dementia'* Calendar Hawker Publications, London

### ***Ecology and Interdependence - Gerry Loose,***

*Tongues in Trees*, studies in Literature and Ecology

Kim Taplin (Green Books 1989)

*The Green Fuse*, John Button - editor (quartet Books 1990)

*Romantic Ecology*, Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition

Jonathan Bate (Routledge 1991)

*Buddhism and Ecology*, Martine Batchelor & Kerry Brown

### ***The Mythical Journey: From Suicide to Poetry – Jayne Wilding,***

*In the Springtime of the Year* (Penguin Books 1974) Susan Hill

This is a novel about a young woman coping with the sudden death of her young husband.

*Who Dies?* An Investigation of Conscious Living and Conscious Dying by Stephen Levine (Gateway Books Bath Reprinted 1992). There is a chapter in this book, which deals specifically with suicide. Stephen Levine is a poet and teaches meditation.

*The Oresteia.* Aeschylus. A new version by Ted Hughes (Faber and Faber 1999)

The Oresteia was originally written by Aeschylus. It is one of the great Greek Tragedies and comprises of three harrowing plays concerned with the Trojan War and the effects on the royal house of Atreus. There are quite a number of versions and translations; this is one of the best. This isn't a book I would read if you are feeling low.