

# Bow Wow Land



## *The Writer Highway Dog Poetry Competition*

Early in 2020, the Writer Highway and the Theatre Royal and Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, began another popular series of Creative Writing courses, and also decided on an event to take place in May to link with Nottingham Poetry Festival, booking the show, *The Snoopy Question*, by poet Matt Black to be held in the Theatre Royal Dress Circle Foyer. A Writer Highway poetry competition on the theme of dogs was set up, with the intention of showcasing the winning poems at this event, with the winners reading alongside Matt. We even planned to have dog puppets and real dogs in attendance - a doggy poetry fest!

Then something happened that none of us had expected – lockdown. And as for so many others, plans had to go on hold. The theatre closed, and events and courses were cancelled. Again, like so many others, we had to find alternative and creative ways to respond. It felt important to keep people in touch and writing together, the Writer Highway being a programme focused on writing and wellbeing. Promoting positive mental health through creativity had never seemed so necessary.

We took to Zoom, reformatting courses and supporting participants to take up the challenge of online workshops. The competition went ahead and Matt did the judging. On 11 May,

instead of gathering at the theatre, humans and dogs gathered together on Zoom to hear Matt's comments on the poems, readings by all of the winners and a short performance from Matt, all ably hosted by compere Barry Harper. A good time was had by all, so much so that we decided to gather all of the poems entered into an electronic format to be accessible more widely on the Theatre Royal and Royal Concert Hall website, with linked recordings of some of the poems read by the respective poets on you tube.

I would like to thank Matt for his adaptability and positivity; all who entered the competition and later took so readily to the challenge of Zoom; valued Writer Highway partner David Longford, for his support and skilled editing of the you tube recordings. Special thanks also to Writer Highway volunteer, Bobbie Brotherton, who was so invaluable in helping to organise the event and who has also created and illustrated this wonderful collection of poems to share.

We hope you enjoy reading and listening to all the poems.

Cathy Grindrod

The Writer Highway

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# Aunt Margaret

Aunt Margaret was a nurse –  
the kind you'd better not moan to  
or WOE BETIDE, which was also  
the name of her seaside house.

Aunt Margaret gave for presents –  
jewellery boxes that sang,  
pink balaclavas, Swiss clocks  
with cuckoos dropping chocolate eggs.

Aunt Margaret let me eat a whole packet  
of cream crackers and best butter  
followed by green blancmange  
and never said 'that'll teach you my girl'  
as she air- freshened the sick.

Aunt Margaret's house was upside-down -  
its tiny, square-paned windows peeping  
from the cliff and on the red sofa  
squashed in the inglenook,  
her tiny chihuahua, Bruiser, lived.

Aunt Margaret sent us out to play  
all by ourselves. One day, we chatted to all the strangers  
in the local park and when we told her said, *good*,  
lifting one buttock from the red sofa  
to free Bruiser, who she'd sat on again by mistake.

*Cathy Grindrod*



## Shaggy Dog Stories

'Did anyone have a dog?' was all Pam said,  
and out they all came –  
Prince Dougal Dandy,  
Max and Kate the Alsatians,  
two racing greyhounds, Pepper,  
and that poodle which once broke its leg,  
lifted it feebly afterwards whenever told off,  
stole the ball off the park footballers,  
sneaked into the swimming pool  
then lay by the fire stinking of chlorine,  
for an encore, ate the pantry concertina plastic door.

Not to mention all the other people's dogs  
we were scared of – the Jack Russell  
outside the phone box door  
holding a hostage for a whole hour,  
the Doberman that made Pam take the long way round  
and finally Bert, sixteen and a half years old,  
blind and stumbling in the vet's surgery  
but knowing all the furniture by heart at home.  
Bert, who'd never go out in the rain,  
Bert who loved the snow,  
Bert who, for a while, lived on for all of us.

*Cathy Grindrod*

*Written for participants in an Elderly Day Centre in Chesterfield  
in response to their stories about dogs in their lives*



## *Notes from the Competition Judge*

Dogs have many languages, we now know, such as the significance of the many positions they take with their ears, their extraordinary vocabularies of smell, the dance of their tails, the expressions in their soulful eyes, but it would be hard to suggest that they are natural poets of language, as we know it. No sign yet of a greyhound John Keats, a labradoodle Carol Ann Duffy. No doggerel as yet written by dogs. But more seriously, now that we have domesticated most dogs, and put ourselves into the position of being their guardians, it is up to us to understand them, to give expression to their experiences, and to give voice to their worlds and concerns as best as we can.

I'm thrilled to say that this wonderful anthology of poems, arising from The Writer Highway dog writing competition, does exactly that. The range of voices is moving, profound, funny, down to earth, and affectionate. It barks, whimpers, yelps, growls endearingly, whilst telling us of the world of dogs, very often through dogs' own watchful eyes and feelings. These fine poems speak of our deep love and need for dogs, and of the very central heart of the hearth position (or more often sofa position these days) which mutts, hounds, pedigrees, rescues, mongrels, pooches and all the other doggy varieties occupy in our lives.

The poems move us because they are well crafted, full of sharp and sensitive details, tell great stories, find interesting angles and ways of tackling the subject, and put their finger on serious and moving truths.

I want to thank Cathy, and David, and The Writer Highway, for inviting me onto this journey. Whilst I have been slowly voluntarily turning into a dog, over the last year or two, because it simply IS the best way to go, it's good for me to keep doing human things. And this darned lockdown hasn't helped at all. I roam the garden and chew bones, jumping up and twirling with doggy joys, dogs who are blissfully unaware of the current worries in the human world. I recommend it. Keep being more dog every day, I say.

So judging the competition that led to these poems has been excellent human activity for me. And the results are here in this book, and are brilliant. So, thanks to you, and hopefully our evening is rearranged before too long, before I become so canine that my poems will be purely ruff ruff.

*Matt Black*

# Feral

I didn't have much choice.  
The humans left me behind,  
but I'm good now, found my groove,  
Maccadees, burger bars, low-impact lifestyle.  
I like it unplugged, offline, letting go,  
got myself a ventilator shaft for the winter,  
nice little friendship group.  
We sniff around town together,  
read the pee-mails, just chill out.  
You gotta stay cool, be smart,  
and I prefer this, the outdoor life,  
off-grid, off-collar, no "walkies!"  
bit of free love.  
It's not easy for the mums, I know,  
and having no vets is a tough one,  
but we don't have to be polite,  
don't have to stay clean all the time.  
We eat the odd rat, but nothing big.  
We're not wolves – that's so stupid! -  
bit of snarl and bite sorts it out,  
we don't want anything heavy.  
Anyway, think of what humans do!  
Bloody cheek! And how they skirt round us,  
with those scared looks -  
*Sorry, you're too close to wild.*  
*We don't trust you, want you,*  
*love you anymore. What are you?*  
*Not for us. Go away!*

*Matt Black*





## **For My Dog is a Life-Saver**

For he is warm and smells of damp fur and nuzzles my leg  
reassuringly

For he sits next to me on the sofa, through the long nights,  
through the years

For he looks up to me with big, patient eyes

For he loves me to scratch him under the chin

For he is not from the job centre, or the NHS, and he does not  
ask questions

For I have to get up in the morning, to feed him biscuits and  
water, and he slops his chops

For he needs to go out in the backyard to relieve himself

For I am proud to clean up after him

For while people come and go, he stays

For I can rant, or throw a cup at the wall, or tell him terrible  
secrets, and he never thinks the worse of me

For he constantly hunts for socks, under the bed, in the kitchen,  
under the settee, and when he finds them he hides them from  
me

For he is wise, and understands me, and he helps me to accept  
myself

For he does not care or worry about my scars or my past

For he is much simpler than my family, and so I am blessed

For he does not care about Facebook, or Instagram

For he does not read newspapers or worry about climate  
change

For he is an oasis of light in a world of darkness and arrows



## **Dog Poem**

I have never had a dog  
I have had cats  
But what is the difference?  
They both have four legs  
And a tail that wags  
They both give love and never ask why

My wife would love a small dog  
I ask her why?  
We now have no cats so it would be fine  
But why a dog I ask?  
No reason, but why not?

What sort of dog?  
A nice little one, to sit on my lap,  
What like a cat?  
Well yes, a nice little one  
A poodle, with a mix of something.

Who is going to take it walks?  
Well, you are,  
Who is going to bag up its mess?  
Well you are, you are good at things like that,  
You were a plumber.

And if I am not here who is going to do those jobs?  
We will wait till you get back,  
I can't see a problem,  
You won't have to go out so much,  
You can always take the little dog with you.

I think we should forget it,  
It will be OUR dog and WE will share it,  
In fact you take it out and bag the mess  
I will have it sitting on MY lap.  
Alright, we will give it some more thought.

*Alan Carlyle*



## Lola the Lurcher

This golden mutt, sleekly spare, smooth-bellied,  
Is no model dog, nor even a purebred soul.  
She has no kennel name, no hyphenated tag  
To mark her out as special, cement her worth.

She trots, unnoticed, past pedigree pooches  
With their unctuous airs, prim barks, haughty looks.  
Her demeanour is meek, her conduct exemplary,  
Seeking never to stand out from the pack.

Brown eyes watch all with mute appeal, sighing,  
Turning in dismay to her fleece-ridden basket  
Head down, ears flat, tail low. Dismissed,  
For the duration of my fragrant evening meal.

Until she's called forward, calm urges to return.  
For scraps taken, so gently, by teeth that can snap  
A hare's neck in a twitch. Chops licked for a moment  
To relish the flavours that tempted her so.

Now she's invited to share my warm sofa, curl up  
Beside me, pointed chin on denim knees.  
Her chocolate gaze holds no challenge, just trust and  
Acceptance of love I hold for her in saving my sanity.

*Annie Newman*



## Faithful and True

Into our lives you bounded  
Sitting in the palm of my hand  
Deep brown soulful eyes  
Black fur glossy like wet coal  
Leaving paw prints in our hearts

Fleeting a ball of fluffy fun  
In no time at all large nose  
And long floppy ears  
Gentle giant Labrador  
Greeting us with your soft toys  
Faithfully waiting by the door

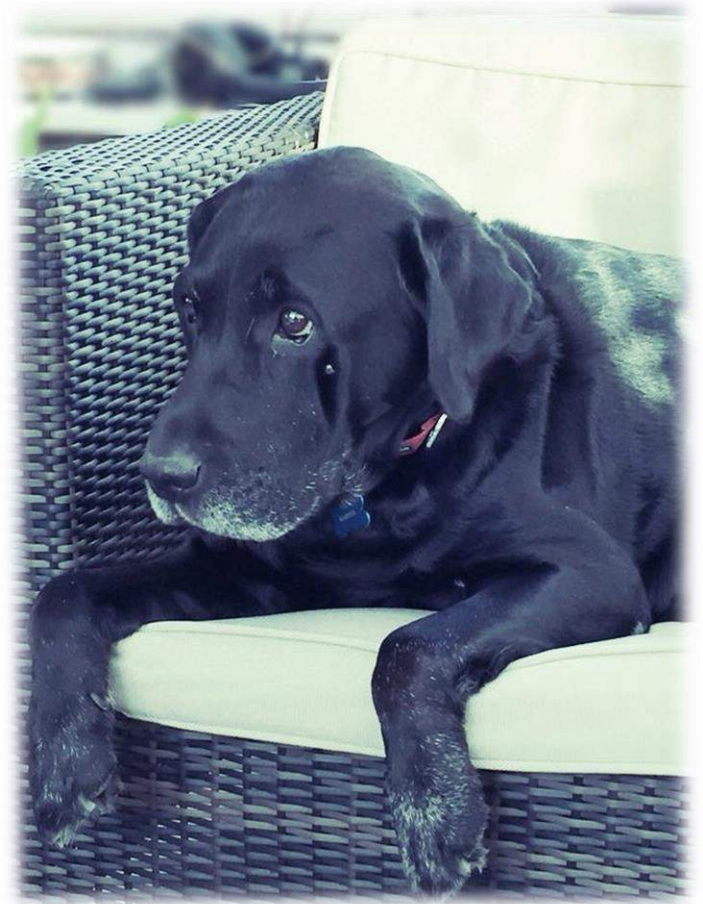
Furiously wagging lead pipe tail  
Pounding everything in its path  
Jaws leaking rivers of water  
Head-butting doors seeking our attention  
Always a pup never seeming to age

But walks soon became shorter  
And sleeps stretched out longer  
Grey hairs sprouting spirit weakening  
Peacefully padding around the field  
On your way to eternity

Piercing pain in our hearts  
Quietly passing in our arms  
Now a new star shines in heaven  
And when we receive the call we'll  
See you waiting faithfully by the door

*RIP 'Jack dog' 16/2/18*

*Barry Harper*



## **Pawing Through Isolation**

Marked Down, at four months,  
too old to sell full price.

You peeked through your crate,  
white stripe wobbling down  
a chocolate face.

Rump and barest  
stump of tail waggled  
when we passed.

Amber eyes implored  
'Please take me home.'

You loved us all equally,  
brought our family closer,  
chased after balls. We  
raced after you, took  
endless walks together.

My son had lived in his own  
world, till you made us  
part of bustling life, when  
'can I pet your dog?' became  
a hand that pulled aside

our curtain of loneliness.  
We were people talking,  
to others. Sometimes,  
conversation stretched  
beyond those first few words.

Safe and snug in our duvet tent,  
you protected us as thunder  
roared, silver lightning tore  
the sky, leapt towards windows,  
shook the house.

Your wet kiss erased nightmares,  
soft body snuggled in a lap  
eased heaviness from painful days.  
One poke of a paw reminded us, then,  
I'm here and so are you.

*Bobbie Brotherton*





## Gin Lane Hogarth

Grrr!

'Ere we go again,  
only 'alf past ten and  
'E's dead drunk already .

Just look at 'im!

What a disgusting sight!

Red eyes,

dribble all down 'is filthy shirt,

shoes missing ...

I feel ashamed to be seen wiv 'im, I do,  
a decent dog like me.

Now there 'e goes, peeing 'is pants.

Grrr! Disgusting!!

What idiot said a dog's best friend is a man?

'Umans! Pathetic creatures!

Give me a dog any day;

much more civilised creatures.

You wouldn't catch a dog peeing 'is pants, would you?

If it weren't for those vittles 'e's supposed to be  
delivering

I'd be off like a greyhound.

But I know once he starts snoring,

I'll be able to nuzzle my nose under his ballads

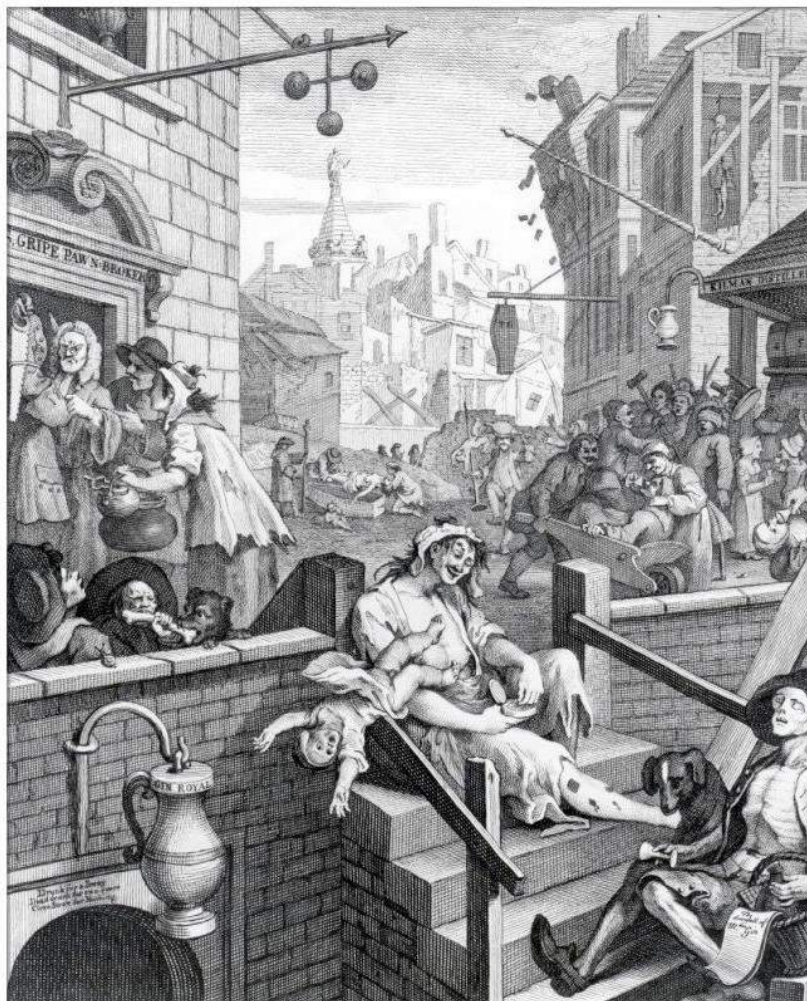
and into that basket,

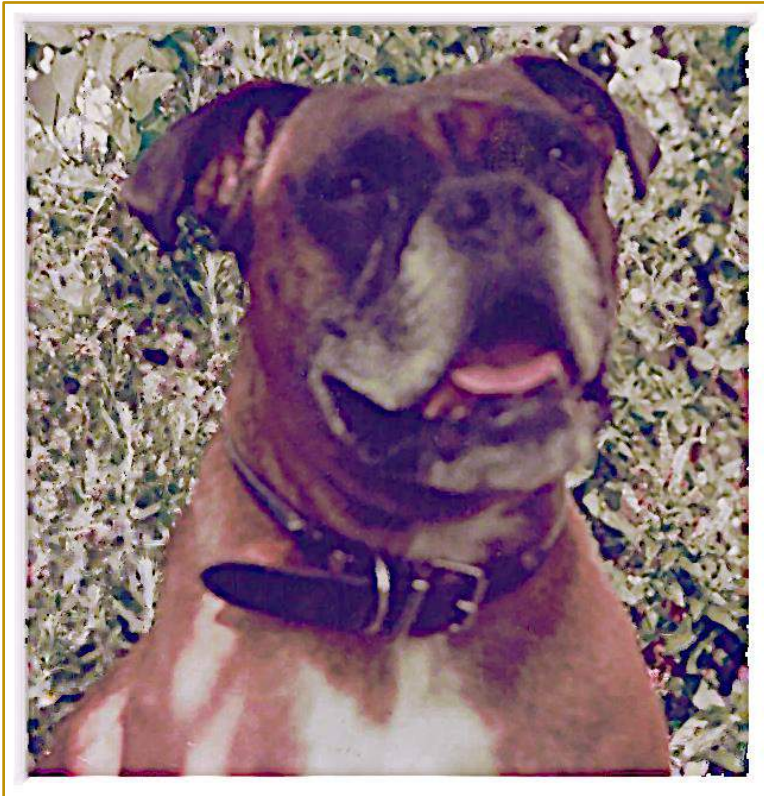
sink my teeth into one of those juicy pies.

Grrr!

Mind you, if they've come from Nellie Lovatt's pie shop,  
I think I might give 'em a miss.  
I don't fancy man-meat pie!  
Ugh! You don't know what you might catch!  
Isn't it terrible what they put in pies nowadays!  
You just can't trust a pie shop, can you?  
I think I'll go and have a sniff and a scratch wiv me  
old mate Fredo over there  
-at least 'e's got a bone,  
You can always trust a good bone.  
Grrr!

*Bobbie Prime*





## Ralph

Big stick carrier  
face slobberer  
bum wagglor  
bed bouncer  
swift runner  
river swimmer  
beach-ball buster  
cow-pat roller  
yoghurt-pot licker  
upstairs creeper  
beanbag sleeper  
messy eater  
*not me* farter  
duck chaser  
cat hater  
scene stealer  
people lover  
joy bringer  
fun creator  
memory maker

*Bobbie Prime*

## Shaggy Dog Story

Bouncing along springs in your legs  
full of swagger and glee  
darting and dashing, playful and free.  
frolics in the park, woofs with delight  
retrieving some grubby old stick  
chasing a favorite ball  
constantly ignoring my call  
haring around, paws in the mud  
sniffing a tree, tail going mad.  
Oh what pure joy to be found  
for a dear faithful hound  
walking the Rec in the rain.

*Chrissy Thornhill*



## Bella

My brother's house was full  
Upstairs slept Andrew, Simone, baby Emelie and me  
Downstairs my two older sisters, my nephew Hector  
Our dying Mum in the sunroom

A decision is made to buy a dog now  
A beautiful black Labrador puppy  
Big floppy ears, four clumsy paws

Bella her name, a bed on the stair landing  
We took turns sleeping on the window seat  
To listen out for our mum's breathing

Bella didn't like to sleep alone  
She whimpered and cried, waddled up the stairs  
Trapped between gate and banister,  
two paws in the halfway, two on the stairs

Stuck waiting to be rescued  
Our mum called out - "Is there anyone there, it's Margaret  
here, I need some water please"

Bella could wait

*Diana Bosworth*



## Family Pets

Growing up dogs were a big part of our lives  
On the sheep farm of the working ones  
Zekey was our favourite

We moved to Arapaepae Road, a busy highway  
Boom a boxer cross, our first pet  
He grew too big to keep

Gill was next a pedigree black Labrador  
Named after Andrew's first love  
Gillian from Primer one

We had her from a puppy  
With her four clumsy paws, large floppy ears  
She was our constant companion for years

Gill liked to snack at the compost heap  
Someone forgot to take the peelings out of the plastic  
Poor Gill had a painful death

Her legacy was Basil her son  
A golden Labrador  
He didn't have any traffic sense

He tried to cross the busy road but didn't make it  
Mum said no more dogs after that

*Diana Bosworth*



*Maternal advice to a puppy*

## **How to be a Dog**

First of all, you have to train  
your humans to your will.  
If they go out in the rain,  
sit down inside quite still.

Cultivate eyes that plead,  
perhaps hold up a paw.  
That should get what you need  
and often so much more.

Walk time chosen just by you,  
but best avoid the dark.  
If you're not sure what to do,  
just stand still and bark.

Outside humans like to play,  
they throw balls and sticks and rings.  
You mustn't run away,  
you have to collect these things.

Some humans are a special kind,  
give all the help they need.  
You are their eyes if they are blind,  
so keep them on a lead.

You must learn to read their minds  
and give a helping paw.  
Love, loyalty and be kind.  
That is the Canine Law.

*Elizabeth Sanders*



## They Always Lick Me When I Cry.

Four brown eyes  
watch my every move.  
Two wet noses tickle my skin.  
Happy wagging tails,  
dripping licking tongues.

Lying on the floor  
Pilates on my mind.  
Serious movements make me strong,  
impossible with them around.  
Jumping, tugging, playful mode,  
why else would I be on the ground?

With their sausage bods I'm smitten.  
With gentle mouths,  
I'm never bitten.  
Soon sleep abounds,  
curled on my tum,  
who else?  
I'm their devoted mum.

But when I cry  
tears for my son,  
they change their game.  
They stop and listen to my sobs  
and lick away my tears.  
But what will happen when they die?  
They always lick me when I cry.



*Janet Armstrong*



## Urban Sheepdog

He's your uber-cool streetwise sidekick, hyper-connected through the wavelength of his lead, but unleash him and he flows like a brook through the park, gathers you in the oxbows of his meanders. No city nine-to-five for him - he keeps a farmer's time. Wet nose in your face at dawn and instant-coffee eyes that perk you up for work - no time to play. The sticks you throw are sheep to stalk in stealth mode, belly low to dew-damp grass, his gaze unflinching before the fetch. He's partial to the urban life. A taste of pilau rice from late night takeaways goes down a doggy-treat. He works out weekly at the canine gym, and though he'll sleep on a rug, he always prefers to snore amid the snowdrift of your crisp and clean Egyptian cotton sheets. But see, his muzzle's flecked with moorland brown. He dreams and his paws shake like a new-born lamb.

*Jan Harris*



## Archie Boy

Vizsla, soft mouth, gun dog,  
Wiry coat, eyes light grey with blue fleck,  
Wise, watching, wistful.  
Takes my hand in his soft mouth,  
Walks me into the house,  
Job done retires to his bed.  
Ginger peppered loping legs,  
He walks miles and miles,  
Happy days,  
Hope in old age his dreams are good ones.



*Janet Gibson*

## Pack Mentality

We were the biz,  
We ruled the gaff,  
We roamed in a gang,  
We barked and bared our teeth,  
We clung to each other, in a never ending loop,  
We were needy, not as tough as we looked,  
We were all the same, lonely and desperate,  
The dog warden put an end to our woes.

*Janet Gibson*

## Gertie

I walk Angelica's dog.

Angelica works strange hours and is grateful  
and, in her clipped French accent, says

'I thank you so much, Jerome'

(thus she corrupts my name)

'and Fifi loves you.'

I know Fifi loves me

but I do not love Fifi.

Miniature French poodles do not walk –

they tiptoe, and tap-tap as we cross

the precincts and avenues

and I feel foolish with Fifi,

with her top-knot and large pink and green tartan bow;

but I dog-walk for Angelica.

When we sit outside cafes on warm days

Fifi wants to jump into my lap and kiss me,

but Fifi has halitosis!

I call Fifi 'Gertie'

because I once knew a Gertrude,

an old woman, squirrel-faced, brown-toothed

who suffered with halitosis –

double-halitosis, if that is possible,

and who always wanted to kiss little Jerome

(when I am with Fifi I think of myself as Jerome)

Gertrude's husband, John, had been gassed  
in the Great War  
so he probably didn't notice his wife's breath,  
or, perhaps, she just didn't kiss him.  
Once I said 'Gertie' in front of Angelica.  
'Gertie?' she asked, 'What is Gertie?'  
'An English term  
for a Miniature French Poodle's gait' I replied quickly.  
'Gait?' she queried.  
I smiled into Angelica's grey eyes, and thought  
'Oh, Madam, will you walk? Madam will you talk?  
Madam, will you walk and talk with me?

*Jeremy Duffield*

## **Sirius**

I am Sirius of Canis Major; Dog Star.  
I have been here since before the beginning of time,  
before the ancient Greeks told tales of me,  
the favourite hound of Orion  
the hunter with his unbreakable club of solid bronze.  
It was I who chased Lepus the hare,  
who bated Taurus the charging bull,  
who saw my master walk on water.  
I am red in tooth and claw  
and at my master's feet  
ride the heavens for all eternity.

*Jeremy Duffield*



## The Gift of Dog

This time I would like a dog.  
My dog will be my good and true friend.  
My dog will be by my side through thick and thin and back.  
My dog will not run off while I scream like a fool.  
My dog will not laugh when I cook.  
My dog will not groan at my jokes.  
My dog will watch every move I make.  
My dog will know my moods.  
My dog will care how I feel.  
My dog will keep me safe.  
My dog will share my life.  
My dog will love me and not you.  
But who am I to wish for such a gift?

*Julie Burke*



## Factory girl

I wonder where the puppies are,  
then circle and sniff the cushion bed  
of only my own scent.

I settle chin on paws  
eyes half-closed,  
weary legs fold and rest.

I wonder where the cages were,  
harsh words, raging faces,  
hands that forced, grabbed and struck,  
burning chains and biting itch,  
the hungry cold  
concrete huts.

I blink and twitch, startled  
by a sudden voice,  
but this hand raised gently strokes  
until head lolls and rolls,  
eyelids droop and close,  
fear and pain of fertile years disappears

except in febrile dreams  
of half-remembered tone and gesture,  
when I relive, cower, and wonder  
where the puppies went.

*Julie Filimon*



## Friendship

You again my friend,  
shall I play psychological games  
so you wonder if I've escaped from the house  
or been zapped up by aliens.

I sense your perspiration in the air,  
we negotiate, I wag my tail.

Sometimes I will stop rigid on a walk,  
once in the middle of the road  
steadfast, immovable  
I was airlifted up and out with your arms.  
We became friends,  
as we got to know each other's ways.

Now I'm older, my hip is more arthritic,  
a cyst on my face,  
my owner says she thinks I have dementia.  
My memories come and go  
a web of tenuous threads  
everything transient.

*Julie McHugh*



## Bow Wow Band

In Bow Wow Land  
the dogs have formed a band

Dalmatian pounds the drums  
while the Dachshund strums

guitar. Playing fiddle  
there's the Beagle

Maestro Poodle on piano  
Springer Spaniel sings soprano

to the boogie-woogie sound  
of the Basset Hound

blowing tenor saxophone  
with the Bulldog on trombone.

The Greyhounds are a-grooving

the Whippets are a-whooping

the Westies are a-yapping

the Corgis are a-clapping

the Terriers finger-tapping

the Scotties are a-swinging

the Staffies are a-singing

to the be-bop sound

of the Bow-Wow Band.

*Lizzie Dunford*





# I Could Tell You Were Trouble

(An ode to Tigger)

I could tell you were trouble  
When you hid in the kennel  
Too scared to say hello

I could tell you were trouble  
When you slipped out day one  
To get mounted by a Jack Russell

I could tell you were trouble  
When you launched yourself off the cliff  
Chasing a seagull

I could tell you were trouble  
When you chewed through the door  
In my sister's new house

I could tell you were trouble  
When you got caught on the sea buoy  
As the tide was coming in

I could tell you were in trouble  
When you got the tumour  
And they had to operate

I could tell you were in trouble  
When you taught me how to stroll  
No longer able to rush

I could tell you I was in trouble  
When your eyes said enough  
And I had to let you go

*Lyn Kent*



## **A Dog's Life**

Cold, black swirling water  
Pulling down into a dark abyss  
Eyes half open.  
A millstone around the owner's neck  
Transferred to mine  
By hands I thought I knew and trusted  
No-one listening

A sudden jerk, gentle hands pulling  
Free from icy, near frozen water  
Eyes wide open.  
Body wrapped in swaddling clothes  
A life in meltdown rescued  
By hands not yet known but trusted  
Someone listening

*Margaret DeBarr*



## Banjo

Boisterous Banjo bounces back and forth,  
just leaving puppy stage.

Playing.

Bounding off with infant energy,  
chasing after the stick –  
his love.

Dashing back, he presents his treasure.

Again, again, he cries,  
barking.

Once more the stick arcs across the sky  
and excited Banjo gives chase.

Again the stick's brought back.

Bouncing Banjo leaping  
higher.

A final throw and then we must go home.

Dog sleeping in the car –  
played out.

*Malc Fritchley*



## Nero

Nero stands nearby, ball in mouth,  
sleek black coat shining in morning sun.

Teasing.

Poised, alert, he waits for an approach.

Move in his direction –

he's gone,

at Whippet speed.

Far side of the field.

Then slowly back again,

walking.

Closer and closer he comes -

with his ball-in-mouth grin.

Almost in reach

he drops his prize and glances over,

willing a step forward.

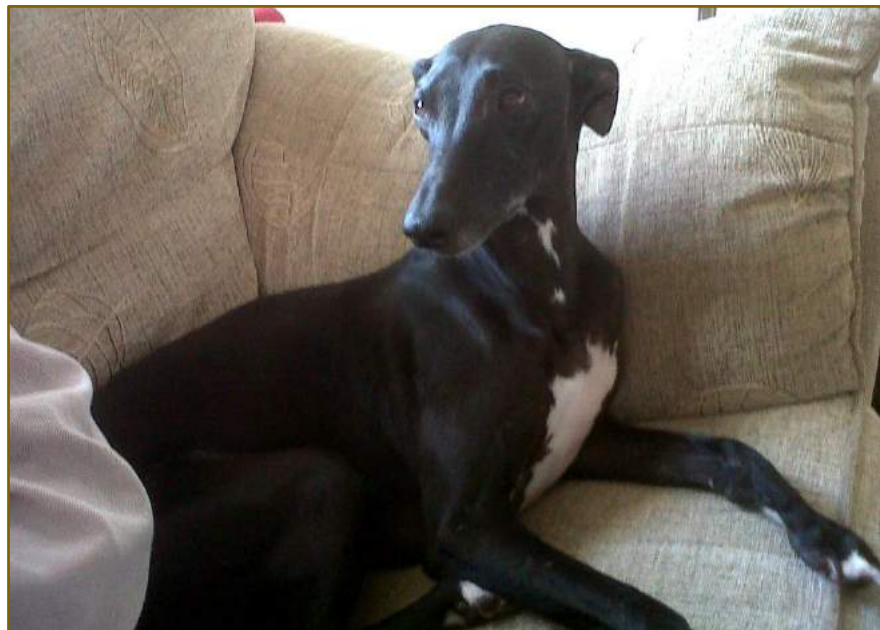
Watching.

Reach for the ball and Nero's away.

Ball in his mouth again,

of course.

*Malc Fritchley*



## Christmas Dogs

Now that Christmas is over, the New Year has begun,  
Leaving happy memories of all that Christmas fun.  
We enjoyed all of our presents of clothes or top CDs  
And appreciate those gloves and scarves when the weather  
starts to freeze.

There are so many lucky people who received a Christmas pet,  
With a year's subscription of payments to the vet.  
Many of these Christmas pets go to a decent home,  
But there are so many more, left outside, alone.

Some folk think that it's trendy to own a pedigree dog,  
A nice fashion accessory lying sleeping on the rug.  
But dogs require commitment, and taking for a walk.  
It is hard for them to tell you, because dogs cannot talk.

The novelty soon wears off, especially when it's cold.  
The puppy becomes a nuisance before it's six months old,  
It really must be house-trained or there's dog poo everywhere,  
On the carpet in the living room, or half way up the stairs.

A tiny puppy soon grows up to be a full sized hound.  
It's full of fun and energy and soon drags you around.  
Some dogs need lots of walkies, plenty of exercise,  
They also need injections, or the poor dog dies.

Just go down to the kennels and see what you find there,  
Hundreds of abandoned pooches, unhappy, in despair.  
Expressions on their faces of expectancy and hope.  
They are victims of owners who found they couldn't cope.

There are Terriers and Mastiffs, and grim looking Greyhounds,  
And different kinds of cross-breeds, pacing up and down,  
Alsations and Retrievers ,and Labradors as well,  
Living in tiny kennels. For them it must be hell.

They're all unwanted animals, some rescued from the street,  
Relying on donations of tins of doggie meat.

They'll only live for so long before they're put to sleep,  
Space is at a premium, and they're very dear to keep.

Many were Christmas presents for children that they loved,  
But when they fouled the carpet, in the garden they were  
shoved.

So remember, if you haven't time to take it for a jog,  
When you go Christmas shopping, please, don't buy a  
Christmas dog.

*Mel Hill*





# The Dog I Grew Up With

Our Judy lived in a cardboard box under the kitchen table.  
When our Mam was tired from seeing to us five kids  
she would shout “ger in yer box, ‘yer allus under me feet.”  
Our Mam wasn’t a lover of dogs.

Our Judy would lick my face when I crawled under that table  
to forget about Malcolm Dolby playing kiss-chase with Sheila  
Booth.

I would bury myself in her fur and say “I love you Judy” when  
our Carol slapped me round the ear-lug for messing with her  
pan-stick.

Our Judy would put her head on my knee at mealtimes  
and stare at me until I gave her crusts from my cheese on toast.  
One Christmas she ate the chocolate teddy bears  
our stupid Matty left under the piano stool for safe-keeping.

Our Judy would sit outside the gate when the sun shone  
and wait for Jip up the road to come and do his courting.  
By the time autumn turned our Mam had got rid of the pups.

Our Judy and me grew up together.  
She was a good dog.

*Pamela Senior*





## One Very Regal Pekinese: Ming

Her snooty persona filled every room,  
every need met by devoted Aunt Polly.  
Her menu, served cool, at noon precisely,  
small delicate pieces of poached chicken  
served on a bed of rice, in her personalised dish.  
One mint imperial given at one o'clock, to aid digestion.

A tuft of hair, tied up with red ribbon, sat proudly  
on her crown. Long flowing locks of almond hair  
brushed to perfection, at every touch and turn.  
Large bulbous eyes, aside a flatly squashed nose,  
deeply dark spheres conveyed moody volumes.  
They could charm, plead, ignore, or snub outright.

One winter's day she went missing. Lunch and  
mint imperial untouched. Uncle Sid ordered a  
search party. Panic overwhelmed. Aunt Polly fainted.  
We roamed, MING! MING! MING! MING! called until dusk.  
The Police were informed, Ming had no outdoor skills,  
much preferring her indoor cushion and being pampered.

On the doorstep, the Landlord of the BLUE BOY pub.  
Under his arm, a bedraggled version of MING, head lolling,  
unkempt coat, missing her red ribbon, clearly hung over.  
He told she was found licking beer from the slop trays.  
Amused by her drinking, regulars kept her topped up  
He reckoned " the hair of a dog" just might revive her.

*Rae Gray*



## The Key

Maternal Grandmother's maiden name?

Cursor stalled. Unable to proceed with  
request to compile a family tree.

A side of the family unknown to me.

Born in Nottingham, one of many siblings,  
Her name was Mabel. She married Thomas Dring  
had two Daughters, Mum and Aunty Connie.  
Her death came when I was an infant, that's all I knew.

Mum rarely spoke of family, but I recall an  
elderly 'Aunty Lily' calling at Christmas.  
Her visits were always short lived, urgently  
needing to hurry home to 'Boy.'

Sepia photographs, professionally captured  
flashed smiling strangers in Victorian dress.  
A generation past? Who are they, friends or family?  
One face felt familiar, a young version of 'Aunty Lily?'

By her side sitting proud, was a dog. A huge husky type,  
a groomed fluffy mane. His tongue lolled, huge, black and long.  
Could this be 'Boy'? My key to open the family tree?  
Recorded in an elegant script, LILIAN PERRY, age 21.

*Rae Gray*



## This Too Will Pass

She was assured that it was  
a piece of cake  
to reconnect the mains.

Thick wire mesh  
coiled untamed  
loath to bend to her will.

'I will take this horse to water'  
she muttered  
squeezed in the cupboard  
where no cat would ever be swung.

Crouching, standing, cursing  
'Plastic to metal  
metal to plastic  
square peg in a round hole'.  
Blameless tools  
discarded on the floor.  
A fit of sorts  
not hand in glove.

On with the mains  
On with the phut phut phut  
as the runaway horse  
sprayed smack in her face.

Keening stilled  
by three soft toys  
nudged into crossed legs  
slowly squeaking bone  
against bent head  
frantic licking  
of tear soaked hands.



*Rosemary Rosser*

## Poetry at Low Tide

Dogsbody leaves  
arching prints across wet sand,  
looping morning calligraphy,  
such words I can never make,  
mixing stone and water and sky  
to hushed sea sounds and drift.  
Waders haver at the shore line.  
Will she won't she chase today?  
Dogsbody takes the air  
and the rhythm of the place.

*Roy Young*



# Retired Greyhound

Crack.

The hare is on the loose.

Trap opens.

Start running now.

Keep ahead.

Don't look back.

Faster, faster.

Trap two is in the lead.

That's me again.

Winner.

Snap.

The hare is on the loose.

No, it's not.

I'm stuck here,

still as a stone,

waiting for god knows what.

Say cheese?

This is so boring.

Even the trees are evenly spaced.

Loser.

*Sue Byrne*



# Georgiana

She's such a

bikkie beggar

cake snatcher

shoe chewer

toe biter

face licker

bum sniffer

hole digger

ball catcher

fence jumper

cat chaser

hair shedder

mud splasher

walkie taker

friend maker

that everyone calls her Georgy.

*Sue Forrester*



## Dee Dee

The terrier's nose twitches side to side, drinking in  
the smells of the sea.

Her legs accelerate across the beach.

Joy abounds as she keeps up with her sheepdog 'brother',  
ten years her junior.

She races him to reach the ball ... and wins!

Back end tucked under, running like a rabbit in her delight,  
Ball carried easily between her teeth.

Her tail wags, and she barks - high excited yaps.

"Throw the ball!" she demands.

Now she's a flash of white, nose black and bright,  
As she sets off again in determined pursuit.

A sudden stumble.

Unsteadiness betrays her as she slows,

Her once tan face now silver grey with age,

The one eye that she still possesses winking up at us.

Her bleak prognosis is impossible to forget for longer  
than a fleeting moment.

But she is so beautiful in old age, and so loved.

The friend that remained when there was no other,  
Steadfast and loyal by my side.

The little white light in the darkest days,

Her small, smooth body curled up on mine

Our time together is drawing to a close,  
Her life is approaching its final scenes.  
But I am grateful for the decade we have spent together,  
Glad she was the stray I chose to take home.

She is the one that paved the way, the very first.  
My once in a lifetime dog, unlike any other,  
And my heart will always be hers.

She gazes up at me, mouth open in what can only be a smile.  
We head across the beach, for a final time.  
Her pawprints and my shoes marking the sand together.

*Susanna Walker*





## Rescue Dog

Watching my dog sleep, he twitches,  
yelps, shudders like aftershocks  
of a time unknown. Life scavenger.  
His breathing slows.

If I could step inside his dreams  
I'd sprawl with him where tall grass enchants.  
We'd snap our sharp teeth at carp  
that shimmer in unknown waters,  
lap sunshine dropped in puddles.  
We'd leap at busy butterflies  
or chase our tails; steal into henhouses  
to ruffle feathers and wolf down eggs.  
What vagabonds!

But love is blinded. My dog's eyes open,  
milky as the moon. He flinches, moves towards  
my voice. His days are few.  
He doesn't know the darkness will not end.  
I'll be his guide.

*Teresa Forrest*



## Crufts 2020

Seven perky friends face their final assessment;  
Elsie, a red setter, all flowing style,  
Drago, the Romanian Old English Sheepdog,  
Cuddly welcoming if you know the language,  
the Bichon Frise, a bundle of white candy floss with eyes and  
mouth;  
all edges, the graphic black toy poodle;  
and then Maisie, the humble wire-haired dachshund.

Like the others, she has been up since six am,  
walked, groomed, pampered,  
graded, tested, judged,  
selected.

The final judgement, and it is Maisie,  
compact, sturdy and perfect of her type.  
Her owner beams, leads her into the lap of honour  
around the vast stadium,  
Half way round and ... stop.  
That is not a second tail I see appearing ...  
Maisie looks round, approves her creation.  
A flash of blue plastic, and owner swoops firmly.

All trace is gone, and before you can blink  
Maisie is back on the stand;  
smiles, strokes and plaudits.  
Compere Clare grins, says  
“A dog’s gotta do what a dog’s gotta do.”

*Tony Challis*



## Rescue Dog for a Day

Alfie: dog of a friend.

Personality: daft as a brush,  
thinks puppyhood should never end.

It came, therefore, as a surprise,  
to find ancient doggy-wisdom  
hidden behind those cute brown eyes.

He knew, as soon as I did,  
it was bad. He catches my eye,  
nods, 'I've got this.'

Rucksacks spew foil covers,  
chocolate, hot sweet tea, jumpers.  
Alfie snuggles closer.

He decides, on balance,  
Mountain Rescue can be trusted,  
but he stays in touching distance.

He poses for a Facebook shot,  
ponders life of a rescue team,  
but really, he likes the life he's got.

Later, he raises a schnauzer eyebrow  
at a broken leg resting on a comfy sofa.  
A brief nod, and we agree,  
to hell with, '*no dogs on the furniture*'.

*Trish Kerrison*



## *13 Winning Poems*

First	Jan Harris	Urban Sheepdog
Second	Pamela Senior	The Dog I Grew Up With
Third	Annie Newman	Lola the Lurcher
Highly Commended	Susanna Walker	Dee Dee
Highly Commended	Roy Haines-Young	Poetry at Low Tide
Commended	Bobbie Brotherton	Pawing through Isolation
	Jan Armstrong	They Always Lick Me
		When I Cry
	Jeremy Duffield	Gertie
	Mel Hill	Christmas Dogs
	Rae Gray	One Very Regal Pekinese: Ming
	Teresa Forrest	Rescue Dog
	Bobbie Prime	Gin Lane: Hogarth
	Julie Filimon	Factory Girl

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