

# Breathe

## A Collection of Poetry & Prose from the Residents at St. Francis Farm



Training & Employment Authority

This project was made possible through funding from FAS

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Merchants Quay Ireland provides services to individuals, families and communities affected by homeless and problem drug use. One of our unique programmes is St. Francis Farm which operates as part of a working farm whereby the residents are engaged in the day-to-day responsibilities of farm life. Living and working in a rural environment is a new and enriching experience that affords many of the participants their first ever opportunity of stepping off of the treadmill of addiction and reflecting in a new way on their lives. In addition the programme utilises creative writing and other art forms to introduce the residents to new skills and new means of expression. This current anthology has grown from this reflective space and the experimentation with the new skills that have been developed. It is a mixture of poems, prose, short stories and life experiences. The pieces draw on the different talents and personal histories of some of the many residents that have passed through the Farm. All the contributions are different and unique reflecting the uniqueness of each individual person who took part.

This work is a celebration of the lives of ordinary people who have shared their experience of addiction and shared their experience of recovery.

Merchants Quay Ireland are delighted to publish this anthology and wish to thank all the residents and staff of St. Francis Farm who have worked so hard in bringing this book to fruition.

Tony Goehegan  
Director  
Merchants Quay Ireland

St. Francis Farm is a Therapeutic Community & Training Facility. Here we provide a one year residential programme aimed at providing training in a rural setting to former drug users. The programme provides a unique blend of individual and group development, education and practical skills training in a rural farm setting. Residents are offered training in Animal Care, Farming and Market Gardening, Catering and Food Preparation Skills, Social Skills, Personal Development and Computer Skills.

Since 1998 I have worked at St Francis Farm. During this time I have seen the creative side of our client group expressed through short, stories, poetry, art, music and cookery. This is a side of drug users that society in general seldom sees. I was determined to capture some of the work of clients at St Francis Farm, and in July 2000 the idea of trying to publish their work materialised. Following much research I was put in contact with Ian Laidlow and with support from FAS I was able to start the Creative Writing Workshop where the content for this book was developed. This book presents an opportunity for the voice of people affected by problem drug use to be heard.

I hope that this book, by displaying the creativity and artistry of its writers will serve to counteract the negative stereotypes of drug users that are so prevalent in the media and society.

Joe McGran  
Service Manager  
St. Francis Farm

# Acknowledgements

First of all a big thank you to all the residents of St Francis Farm who shared their creativity, insights and innermost thoughts in this publication.

This publication would not have been possible without funding and support from FAS - Training & Employment Authority in particular Noel Frazer, Senior Development Officer in the Communities Services Unit.

To Ian Laidlow who led this project with such skill we are very grateful.

the

house

An old house

An assortment of people

Enough acres

The resources to use them

A common purpose

That binds us together

binds

us together

# a day on St. Francis farm

Good morning - its 7.45 am. Rise and shine. The start of another day.

There is always plenty to do on the farm: feeding the animals, ploughing the fields, sowing vegetables.

I start the morning off with a group meeting to see what's to be done and where to start. It's simple when I have a good farm manager like Norah. There is always something to be done, morning 'till night, then I start another day.

It's a great place to get to know who I am and to nurture myself back to self-control - to be a

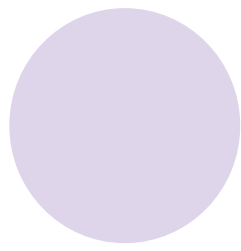
responsible person that I once was. Here I receive careful

guidance to take those first very important steps. After all I am a very talented person just out of a war zone.

Life can begin as I never imagined but everyone, past and present had to earn the chance and it's not by any means easy.

Every person, man or woman, can discover their hidden talent here on Saint Francis' Farm. I have a hidden talent just looking to get out but was always looking in the wrong places. I was using the wrong key but yet I got the wrong door opened so many times. It was a door that I could never close shut.

Then, one bright day, a new door opened up for me and my life began to flourish just like the plants here. I am also



beautiful - but I need to look after myself as I would a beautiful plant - always needing loving and caring. I never realised how important a person I really was until I arrived here on the farm. Here I am learning to take control of my life and there is a great sense of freedom about the farm. I get treated with great respect - one can get their dignity back and be so proud of what they have achieved in their therapeutic stay.

When I first arrived on the farm I was a broken shell of a man but with the help of my Councillor, Ann, piece by piece I am starting to feel human again. Something I haven't felt in a long time - and it's a powerful feeling.

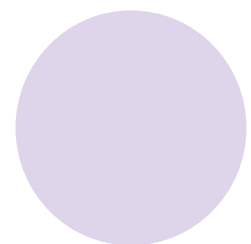
Here on the farm I am part of a team and I feel that I belong to some thing far better than myself. There is a saying: You can do it on your own but

can't do it alone.

That's very true. There is always time for me and my needs. There is a good listener close by who understands my feelings [emotions] and is always understanding - never judgmental towards me.

There are some lovely walks down by the river Slaney and I can take in its beautiful hills and its unspoilt countryside. If I want to, I can go back in history and take Fr Murphy's last walk. He was a rebel leader of the 1798 rebellion. A mighty powerful man in his day, who took on the British Empire and died fighting for his beliefs, but is today by no means forgotten.

There is the local museum where one can get lost in time and see how harsh those times really were.



# Pebbles

Ginger in colour,  
a cat like no other  
Nobody knows who  
is her mother?  
Or if she has a sister or brother?

Running around,  
four feet on the ground  
When hunger strikes  
she cannot be found  
Dragging a mouse to the house  
You won't hear a sound

She sits at the back door  
Waiting for the milk to pour  
Hoping you have a treat in store

But come night fall,  
when there's no-one at all  
She sits in the trees  
And wait for  
her morning call

by sinead

# these Words

I'm with you now as you read these words  
I can see things more clearly than before  
Please don't hurry to be with me  
'Cause we have eternity, just wait and see  
I'll wait for you 'till we are freed  
from the pain and grief our past has brought  
until then, I ask just one thing of you  
please believe these words  
I love you.

# Always

I will always be there for you  
So don't ever forget it  
keep that beautiful smile on your face  
and the sparkle in your eyes  
thank you for the laughter you put in my life  
I miss you.

by mary

# brown blob...

I was working in a hotel as a chef and one of my responsibilities was to delegate jobs for the other apprentice chefs.

One particular day we had plenty of kitchen staff on so, unusually for kitchens, the jobs were scarce. After giving one of the trainee chefs all the jobs that I could think of (apart from maybe eating the food that we had prepared and starting again) I asked him to make some brown bread from a recipe that had been handed down to me.

The only difficulty was that the recipe was enough for twenty loaves and, as I was only finding work for the lad - and we had plenty of brown bread, I asked him to only make two loaves. "Will I take enough out of the dough for two loaves and throw the rest out?" He asked

"No, just divide the amount in the recipe by ten!", I replied. So off he went to do his maths before making his bread. I returned to what I was doing. After about a half an hour he returned looking a little more than distressed.

"This doesn't seem to be working", "Why? Let me have a look". I said, becoming quite annoyed and intrigued at the same time.

"It seems to be growing!" He mumbled. When I saw what was going on in the mixing bowl I could hardly contain my laughter and surprise. The mixture was growing and heaving like the flow of lava down the side of a volcano. I couldn't understand it!

The lad explained that he had divided everything by ten as I had told him and he recounted every ingredient

one by one. He paused when he came to the baking powder. "I don't think that I divided the amount of baking powder " He offered very sheepishly.

"Well, that would explain why the whole mixture seems to be alive." I said, straining to disguise my merriment.

"You'll have to bin it and start again ".

I just about managed to get that out before I erupted into laughter. Unfortunately the fella didn't see the funny side and skulked off to give the brown bread another try.

The bin that was in the kitchen was one of those large flip top bins that could facilitate a refuse sack. It wasn't long before the lad required my attention again.

This time he was even more worried looking than before.

"It's spilling out over the bin now". "Where? Let me have a look "

It reminded me of a B-movie that I had seen called "RETURN OF THE BLOB". The mess was growing by the second.

By now the whole of the restaurant staff had been alerted and were standing around having a good laugh. Eventually I managed to contain the mess and tie the bag up. I was greeted by rapturous applause from all the bystanders, but that wasn't before the "BLOB" had managed to ruin about half of the kitchen.

So let this be a word of warning. If you are cooking to a recipe, try to follow it as closely as possible!!



by julian

# Lambs

Two lambs a day, it's nearly May  
Soon they'll be going out to play  
Not yet ready to eat the hay

Really protected, never neglected  
Mother's always around  
Baa-ing is their sound  
The grass is growing,  
nobody's mowing

Get them out in the field  
Put up fencing to yield  
Out in sun and in rain  
Soon they'll be going  
But won't feel no pain

Sent off for the chop, sold to a shop  
Ready to eat , no more on their feet  
It's a sad old way to go  
But our lambs are not for show

by sinead

# the River

The rain is beating down on the roof of my small hut as I sit and think of tomorrow.

The woman of my dreams will meet me at our special spot by the river. I love her dearly and I have waited for what seems like an eternity. If this rain continues the river will be impassable.

I can't stop myself worrying for there have been problems before with that fiery stretch of water. There must be something I can do to make this meeting possible. The little boat won't be able for the flooded river.

I will set out early and go upriver to the town where I will find lodging's on the other side of the bridge. I will be at the proper place early and surprise her.

As I set off on my travels I think of my special lady.

The rain fell heavily all night and I'm happy that I made the crossing. It would be dangerous to chance it now.

I arrive early and rest under the big tree. Sleep overcomes me and I slip into a pleasant dream.

She shouts my name a number of times before I realise this is not a dream and jump to my feet.

'Where are you hiding?' I call out frantically. My heart sinks when I realise she is not as close as I thought.

I watch her waving from the far side.

by mick

# a story about Luke

Well, Luke was a big man with piercing blue eyes and a rough look about him. His face was like a road map and the years of excess were showing.

Luke was the only man I knew to grow black eyes. Every time we met there was no hello only "Any bossers?" Then "Well, what's happening" he would say with a smile, and a strong smell of alcohol and garlic that would knock a horse down.

"Do you want to go for a drink?" Luke would ask and head to my place, which was a caravan - well a glorified matchbox.

So, when we arrived out there, it was out with record player - I thought of my granny straight away, it was that old. Next thing it was Rock n Roll - Elvis in his prime. I remember Luke doing the hippy shakes.

Luke's hair was gelled up - for what he had. The crack was ninety, the Cider was flowing and Luke, I must say, out-did Elvis. God rest him.

There was a small Cider bottle - empty of course - and this was his

mike. He sang his brains out to Pretty Woman. All Luke wanted was company and to entertain - and he done that well.

Luke was raised by a good family but took off at an early age. He was raised by travellers. They adopted Luke.

Luke often ran amuck with his pony and trap - holding up traffic, swearing and shouting at the motorist. "I wouldn't give you a dog licience, more less a driving licience," he would shout at them.

Luke I miss now - No more Rock n Roll.

I hear that Luke was at the campfire. The Cider was flowing and he took off on his pony. Rode off into the night they say. He thought he was an Indian.

Luke is dead now. Thrown from the pony and hit by the local Bingo bus. There was terrible concern over the pony - nothing about my friend Luke. I miss him so.

by john

# the evil Turkey

He picks and pecks, and sticks out his neck.

He has lots of feathers in any weather.

He bullies the hens  
to go back to their pens,

And walks round the yard without any regard.

I open the gate and realise it's too late,

For he has seen me  
and thinks he can eat me.

I go for the lock and he gets a shock,  
For I gave him a whack and heard a big crack.

I looked at his neck  
and new he couldn't peck,

I had saved the hens and they could leave their pens.

by edel

# a horse called horse

I remember Jeronimo, a big horse. We'd give him sugar lumps. I remember holding my little hand back so he wouldn't eat that too. Ned Snow would lift me onto the horses back, no saddle, then he'd lead the horse around by reins made from blue nylon rope.

It was great - the horsey smell and being that high up. Bare back like an Indian. I always preferred Indians. I think it was that they were nomads. They moved around a lot, brought the whole village with them. They were more free.....or maybe it was sexual....their women were tanned with long black, braided hair. They were more exotic.....whatever the reason, I preferred Indians - although I would have been a cowboy if the opportunity arose....But it

didn't and Ned Snow died and Jeronimo died.

I can't remember who first.

After that the only horses I came across were Kerrygold show jumpers ridden by Eddie Macken or Harvey Smith. Red blazer and fuck you.

Then the thoroughbreds, half horse - half number. Reading the form at 5 to 4 on, a fine filly a snip at only a gazillion guineas.

That was me and horses until I got to Tullow and met a horse called Horse. A wounded animal....like myself I suppose...a bit mad and sometimes pissed off but definitely a horse. Yes, without a doubt it's definitely a horse.

by **stephen**

# the stone

The stone stands there, as it always has, for a long, long time. Just standing being a stone.

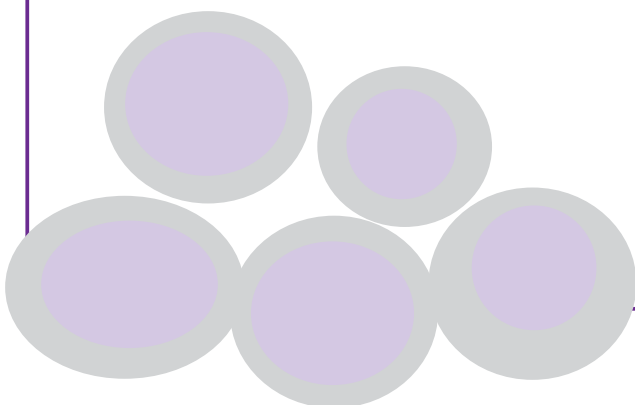
Who put it there? When was it put there? How was it put there? And why? I don't know!

All the cows who eat around it and ignore it (except when they use it as a scratching post) certainly don't seem to know - if they did I'm not sure if they would tell me. There seems to be some secrecy surrounding it. Maybe it's a sentinel just standing guard over the land?

But I know one thing - there is a definite vibe around it. It is imposing amongst the landscape. It juts out against all the greenery surrounding it. If it's not magic then it's certainly majestic.

Maybe it was put there by Aliens, just like a crop circle. Or then again, maybe it was put there by Vikings, or Medieval warriors or Priests. Well somebody, sometime, somehow put it there. And it has been standing there stonelike for years, just radiating its granite grey energy for the cows to ignore. . . .

by julian



# story teller

The old man was known all over the country for the stories he told. Nobody could tell them as good as he could though they were repeated many times by others. It sounded like he knew the people and places he told of. So convincing was he, it was as if he were there.

Young and old travelled from far and wide to hear his tales. Having heard of him many times I set out myself to meet him. There was a long road ahead of me and I prepared myself by bringing meat and bread.

I had gone some miles when I came across a traveller. He was repairing the wheel

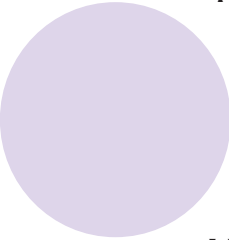
of his old cart and he looked worn out - nearly as worn out as his old donkey.

As I walked past, I noticed he was having difficulty and offered to help.

'If you help me, I will help you on your journey', he replied.

We worked hard and finished repairing the wheel. I offered him some food and we both sat by the roadside. As we ate we chatted and he was soon telling me of his travels. It was not long before I realised this man had been to many places and knew some interesting people.

We continued on our way and the miles slipped by as



he talked and I  
found myself lost  
in another world.

He started to tell me  
of his latest journey as I hung  
on his every word. 'You know  
that the King of Tir Na Nog  
rescued his princess from the  
Dark Knight's castle.'

'Yes.' 'They were married  
yesterday in the Great Hall.'

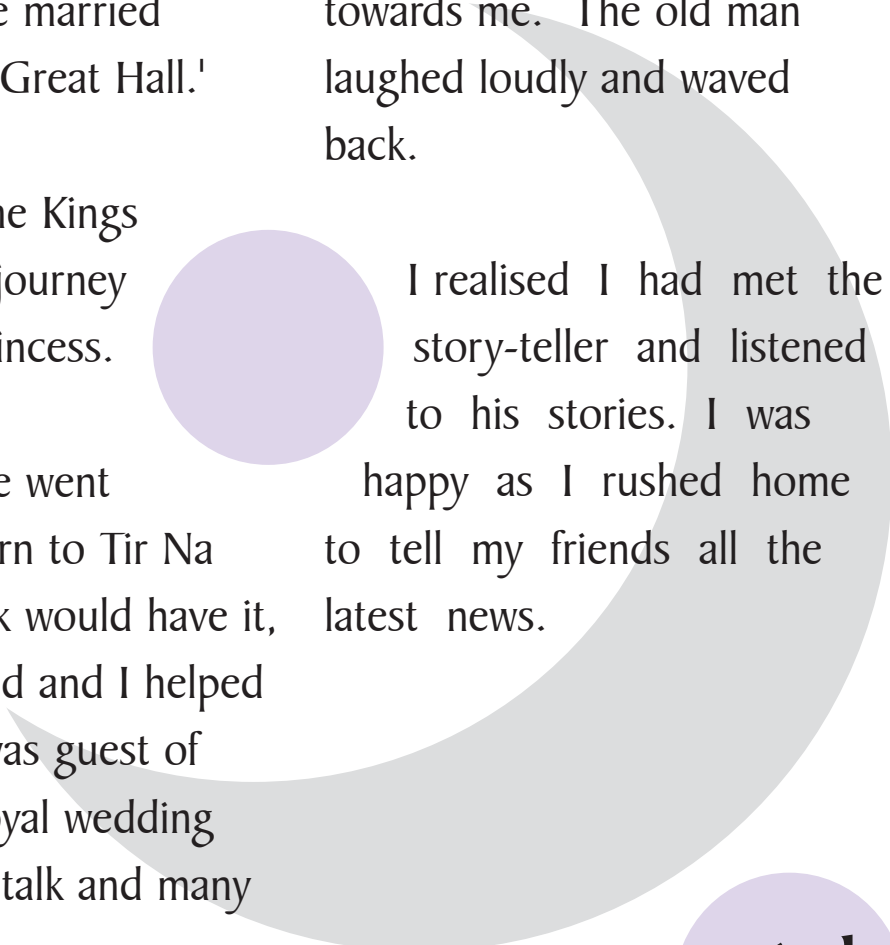
He told me of the Kings  
bravery and his journey  
to rescue the Princess.

'The King's horse went  
lame on his return to Tir Na  
Nog and, as luck would have it,  
our paths crossed and I helped  
them home. I was guest of  
honour at the royal wedding  
and I heard fine talk and many  
stories.'

The cart stopped with a jolt.

'Now,' he said, 'It's been a  
pleasure meeting you and I  
hope you enjoyed your journey.  
Take this turn on the road and  
your home is 1 mile that way.'

This took me by surprise for  
we had travelled far. As I  
waved good-bye he turned  
towards me. The old man  
laughed loudly and waved  
back.



I realised I had met the  
story-teller and listened  
to his stories. I was  
happy as I rushed home  
to tell my friends all the  
latest news.

by **mick**

# trisia la tractor

When there's work to be done  
And I have a need,  
I'll look no further  
Than my metal steed.

A hulking mass  
Of steel and oil,  
Her engines power  
Does replace my toil.

Ploughing and carrying  
Is my bread and butter  
But she never complains  
Except the odd splutter.

When work is done  
And I give her fuel,  
I give her attention  
Like I would a good tool.

For when work comes again  
And I need her power,  
She hauls and pulls  
Whatever the hour.

Her powerful heart  
Is her biggest factor,  
I can't be without  
Trisia La Tractor

by julian

# whopper meal

I wake up about 7 o'clock. It's May now and the sun is up long before me, so is the peacock. I hear him first. I look out the window from my bed. The mornings have been great lately.

Put on my runners and clothes, drink two capfuls of cod liver oil - Yuk! - and swallow my once-a-day-mega-multi-vitamin with a glass of water. Fuelled up, I leg it down the stairs and out the front door.

I jog up the avenue. There are sheep and lambs in the front field so I usually give them a nod and a baaaah! Out the gate and onto the road - there's quite a bit of traffic, cars with people going to work, then it's over the ditch and onto the unused road, alone. There's nobody here, it's banked each side and the mountains are visible in the distance.

It's here I make the hard decision - will I do a half run or a full run? The half run is as far as the standing stone, or the fertiliser bags, or Neds house, or any marker I choose. The full run is fixed. Run down to the end of the road, climb the bank, into the old cemetery and sit in the roofless chapel getting my breath back, listening to the birds.

So the half run is good. It gets me out of bed. If anyone asks "Did you go for your morning run?" I say "Yes". It's a breath of fresh air. It's a good start.

But the full run now, that's my 'Whopper meal with a large Coke', the big Kahuna, the full Monty. It's my body giving a big 'Yes!' to being alive while my heart says 'Thanks a million!'

by stephen



# discovery

I am emotionally on fire

I am trying to

lubricate my emotional pain

The people around me are helping find them

I just want my emotion to rain

If I don't feel them and deal with them

I'll end up dead

The world will not change

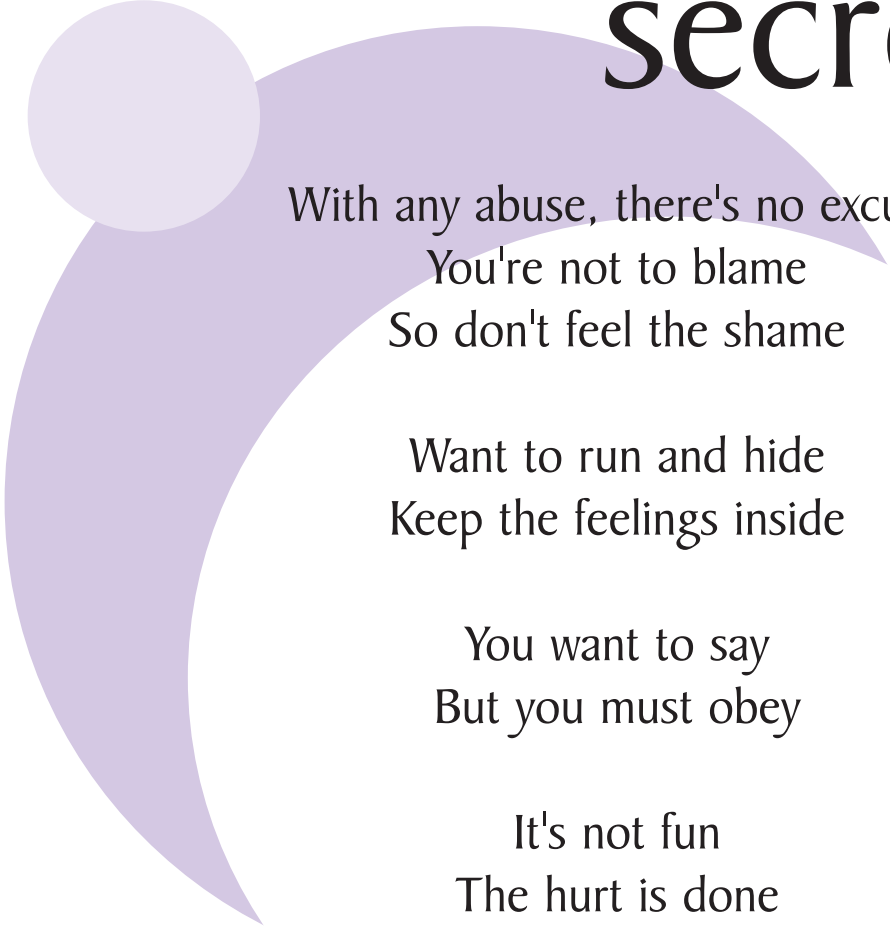
I will change

Derek - I need to know him, love him

To ease the pain

by derek

# don't keep it a secret



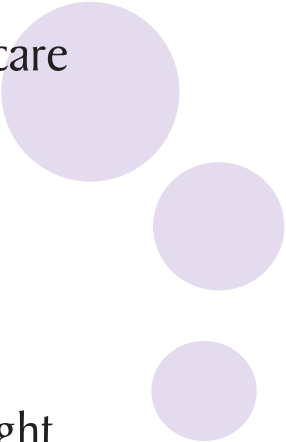
With any abuse, there's no excuse  
You're not to blame  
So don't feel the shame

Want to run and hide  
Keep the feelings inside

You want to say  
But you must obey

It's not fun  
The hurt is done  
Want to scream and shout  
Let it all come out

So tell someone they'll care  
It's good to share  
They will not judge  
Nor will they begrudge



It was NOT right  
What happened that night

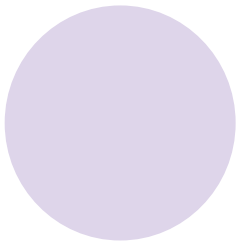
by **sinead**

# billy the drunken beggar

This man has stuck out in my mind from as far back as I can remember. Judging from his appearance I thought that he was really poor. I used to see him every morning on his horse and cart. He had two big iron churns on the back that were filled with the scraps which he collected from hotels and restaurants around the city. They were used to feed the few pigs which he kept in the little yard at the side of his house.

His house was three storey's high and it was really noticeable. He fitted the same description as his home. It was scruffy. His curtains, that were once white, soon became the same colour as his clothing. He never paid for any item of clothing he had. They were hand-downs from his neighbours. They would remain clean for a day or two but would soon end up the same colour as the curtains that hung from his boarded up windows.

Everybody knew him and most of them felt sorry for him. He was living alone and the chances of him meeting someone seemed highly unlikely. Old ladies used to do a bit of cleaning for him but the house never looked any different. He wouldn't even offer them a cup of tea so they stood no chance of getting paid for the cleaning they did. They soon got fed up with it and day by day the house looked worse than ever before.



At twelve o' clock every day he could be seen sitting at the window in the old folks complex eating his dinner, which cost £1, and he made up every excuse so he wouldn't have to pay for his meal. The number of friends he had grew less and less. He was always looking for something for nothing even though he drew the same amount of money as the pensioners he begged from. He then earned the name "The drunken begger".

A year or two later he met this young girl and she soon moved in with him. The cleanliness of his house quickly improved and soon there was talk of marriage. She obviously knew what she was doing. They were married for six months before she filed for divorce. He had told her some of his deepest darkest secrets and I can bet he regretted doing so.

The story of the divorce ended up in the local newsletter. It was the talk of the town for months. This man wasn't as poor as he made himself out to be. He was the owner of the forty or so houses that lined the street. So, from the divorce, she was given twenty of those. He couldn't deal with it and finally hit the bottle. It wasn't long before he was living on the streets. He lived up to the name he was once given. This time it was the truth.....

by **sinead**



# being frank ...

Frank lived in the flat upstairs. He lived alone. He was a nervous man, a paranoid schizophrenic but maybe that's judging him.

I lived on the first floor, in a two roomed flat I shared with Mary. To get to Franks I'd still have to go down the stairs out the front door and give three short buzzes on the intercom. I couldn't just go up and knock on his door because he wouldn't answer it. I had to give the three short buzzes and then walk up and knock gently on his door. Mary said he was mad but I think it was just nerves and sure didn't he have a right to be careful. If Frank was anything he was careful.

The whole thing was Frank's idea. A well planned, carefully thought out idea. I just had to go along with it, do as Frank said and all would work out just fine. Mary didn't like the idea but she wasn't supposed to know about it so her opinion was irrelevant.

“That’s yours!”

“That! That’s fuckin tiny”

“A bit of gratitude please”

“I'm not going in there with that”

“Just take it!”

“I'm not happy with this...and I suppose that's yours”

“Look shut the fuck up...Take it and check it!”

“OK OK but how come you get the big one”

“Cause I'm in charge...now check the fucking gun”

“Relax...I'm doing it”

“Jesus...you're some asshole”

“Me! I'm an asshole? Yeah?”

“Jesus, don't poin...its fuckin loaded”

“Relax ...Now gimme that”

“Quit messin”

“OK I'll take that and we'll start again...this small little one here is for you and the pump is mine...now say thanks”

That's where it began to go wrong...well, actually 29 years ago when I was given the small brush, I wanted the big brush but my brother Colm, who looks a bit like Frank, gave me the small brush. Bigger, smaller, better, worse I never forgave Colm and Frank, I'm sorry but the pump action suits me better.

by **stephen**

# winter in joy

It's been a restless night. I know by the heavy sound of water flowing into metal drums that it's the start of a new day in Mountjoy. The ritual has begun. The names are different but each day is identical.

It's 7am and the sound of footsteps, faint at first then progressing to a heavy rumble like thunder as the screws enter the circle and branch off into their designated wings and the floors above and below in the huge cavernous building.

The sound of peepholes moving, checking to see if everyone is there. The uncertainty of seeing something they don't want to see is always there...Maybe someone decided it was too much and wanted it over and finished. Maybe they fled the prison, the world.

Orders from the circle emanate to the four wings - to the three open landings on each wing - to the basement below. Unlock begins.

It's 8.15 a.m and time for slop out as the lads make their way along the landings to the end of the wings with their pots to discharge the contents. The smell of urine mixes and then hangs.

They make their way to the kitchen with empty trays. In through one door and exit through another with cereals, milk, tea bags, hot water, sugar, bread and

butter and return to their cells.

The sound of doors banging out and locks clicking shut and, eventually, silence as the footsteps recede. Its just another day. Nothing changes.

I'm 44 years old. I'm sick and I don't need this torture. I've been here before - said I'd never be back.

What happened? What the F\*\*\* am I doing here? F\*\*\*ing eejit.

I'm in deep shit. I go into my head about the whole scene. Over and over the episodes repeat...Like a movie... Only this is reality and it bites. I know the feelings - the hurt - the loneliness, helplessness, frustration and anger.

You can't do much with feelings in prison only stuff them.

I can't afford to express emotions in here. I have to look cool, be one of the lads. Stand up or be walked on. People will use you. Things happen - Shit happens. All the time.

The possibilities for conflict are endless and always there. It's not always the troublemakers, the hardman or the bloke that's just made a phonecall and found out something - like his wife has been unfaithful, or maybe she's having trouble paying the bills, or the kids are giving her a hard time and doing the same things that he did when he was young.

The past haunts him. There's nothing he can do about it. He's in prison, confined, restricted and without the responsibilities that he hasn't looked after very well in the past anyway. Anything can happen - and it usually does. Nobody will understand why he lashed out and lost the head. His reaction will cost him time, spent in a padded cell with only himself to talk to and nothing to smoke, no privileges.

It doesn't seem fair to him now and it won't the next time either. Nothing changes.

Then there's the screw that's always pure bad. Mean and nasty all rolled into one - and on top of that has a hangover from the night before. He'd rather be still in bed, warm, dreaming, but no. Instead he's in this god-forsaken place working so many hours day after day, week after week - into months and then years.

He's here to be in control. He has to look and act as if he is and he's playing it by ear as well. This can be a dangerous job. It pays well but he's under pressure and needs the money. The wife and kids, the house and car. This f\*\*\*ing job. Nothing changes.

I eat breakfast in silence or with the radio on very low, savouring any news or information I can get that will keep me up to date on what's happening outside these walls. I may as well be on another planet from where I'm sitting.

The big criminal investigation into a

reporter's murder, the big case being heard in the high court, bank robbery, drug smuggling or extortion. Always handy for conversation. Always sure there will be an interested audience. Somebody else will have inside information to offer on how this stroke was done, how much money was involved and who else took part. The more information gleaned means more time chipped away from the seemingly never-ending day.

Langan doesn't say a lot at the best of times but when he does say something, I would be inclined to listen - as most people that know him would. I know about the shootings, the beatings and his involvement in drugs and the criminal underworld.

He is not yet 25 and already he holds an important position among his colleagues.

He is notorious. He's heading for the top so don't stand in his way. This is a small detour on the way. He's in custody awaiting trial on serious charges.

Business is as usual outside. Witnesses are urged not to make an appearance at the trial. He's optimistic. He knows. Shit happens.

At first I just hear the odd shout outside. I can identify who's talking to who by the voices. Most of what's said is in code or street language. It's the first communication of the day. It maps out the day ahead for a lot of people. Who's expecting a visit,

The conversation usually dictates who's getting what and who isn't. The voices travel from one block to the next and hopefully the parcel will be transported by the unsaid method.

Somebody who's job will take them from one block to another has to be trusted - or the parcel is dropped at the pre-arranged spot. The consequences for failure to comply can be fatal - or at least physical disablement.

A date at the local court is another opportunity to make contact with the outside world and is usually taken advantage of. The golden opportunity doesn't come around very often. Maybe a week, maybe 3 months.

THE HUG - THE KISS - THE DRUG - is grasped with both arms.

20 more arms waiting back in the prison face major disappointment if things don't come together. People have borrowed and been fixed up on the strength of this and repercussions and fall-outs will follow when debts are not paid. The returning smile or the look of sadness says it all.

Shouts will fly between the cell-blocks. THE SYRINGE. THE CITRIC. THE DRUG.

How, why, where and when. How much money. How much drugs. Who must be fixed up and who's to get F"all. If it's not satisfaction, the disappointment and anger will be communicated verbally for the moment.

Threats are made. Violence will follow.

I sit and be with myself at moments like these. The landings are quiet. The screws are gone.

The rush to get every-one banged up again is always obvious. They probably want to get their own breakfast but that's no excuse. People are people. We're all human beings.

I want to be treated like a human being not an animal. It isn't acceptable to treat human-beings like this.

This prison is old, it's out-dated, it's Victorian. Facilities haven't changed much. There is a light on the ceiling with no switch inside the cell. There are no electric sockets. This makes batteries a luxury for the sake of having a radio to listen to and hear what's going on outside.

We now have bunk beds. Sometimes an extra prisoner is housed on the floor to cope with the over-crowding. Three prisoners in a single cell is difficult. With two we manage.

First in has a choice of top or bottom bunk and last in gets the floor. With the piss-pots, food trays, mattresses, blankets, empty cups, plates and left over food it's intolerable. It's an excuse for murder. The last in is usually evicted from the cell but will definitely be housed somewhere else.

I sit and listen for approaching sounds.

I think about my own case. The charges are serious enough -

Possession and supply is serious. There's no way out. I haven't a hope. It's a stretch. I'm on remand awaiting sentence. It's a hopeless situation and there's nothing I can do. I'm trapped with so many other hopeless cases.

The withdrawals don't help. The feelings are all there. The loneliness of not being around my own children or the people I hold dearest. My back hurts, my limbs ache, I'm not sleeping, I'm physically drained, I'm desperate. This is my life at the moment and I resign myself to it.

It's bright outside now as I hear the approaching clatter of foot-steps and then voices.

Iron gates are opened and banged shut as the screws position themselves in the different wings and separate landings.

The Chief shouts out from the circle to his waiting officers in the wings.

UNLOCK.

The rattle of keys and locks clicking open followed by the voices of prisoners calling to each other for dust and skins as they are released.

Finally the noise of my own cell door as it opens. I need to shave and it bugs me having to ask for a razor. It's like I need permission to shave and be a good dog and return it. Razors can be used. They can be victims. Anyone can be a victim. Shit happens. Nothing changes.

The queue outside the Governors office holds the usual familiar faces and I join it. It's the usual suspects looking for permission for the usual phone-call. The usual question is who are you ringing. I would like to tell him to go F\*\*\* himself but I know it wont get me anywhere.

It's 10am. The landings are cleared and we're out in the small yard.

The cold goes through me and I shiver. JESUS! Its fucking freezing! Roll on 12. This is 2 hours I can live without.

I haven't got the energy to kick the burst football. I do a few laps of the yard until I get bored. Walking in circles,,, Need a change,,, I stand against the wall and roll a smoke. The high walls with sky views. My feet are freezing. This is definitely frostbite. I do another few laps. Time drags until finally the screw shouts...

FALL IN...

12am and it's dinner time for the prisoners.

Glad to be in out of the weather.

SAME OLD STORY....SHIT HAPPENS....NOTHING CHANGES.....

by mick

# a friend is ...

Someone who'll care, someone who'll share  
Someone who'll talk, when out for a walk  
Someone who's kind, a friend is hard to find

She's there when I'm sad,  
through good times and bad  
I couldn't ask for more, she's got lots in store  
She can give and can take, she's not at all fake

We have been through a lot,  
and I have not forgot  
It's ten years now, there's just been one row  
But I have no fear, for she'll always be near

Our friendship will last,  
time has gone fast  
We have had lots of fun,  
there's much more to come.

by sinead

# tunnel

Out in the tunnel, with your spade and shovel  
Weeding and seeding  
Spraying water for feeding  
There's digging  
And sometimes lifting

We can go for a bite to eat  
Rest our tired feet  
A lot can happen  
You'll see Norah laughin'

We've had so much fun  
and our day's work is done  
Off for the day  
Nothing more to spray  
Back out tomorrow  
so don't go away

by sinead

# birds (with apologies to alfred hitchcock)

Before I came to St Francis' farm I had a very limited knowledge of birds. I knew what a pigeon was, I knew what a sparrow, a starling and what a crow was - I had seen plenty of them around Dublin as I was growing up. I even kept some pigeons myself for a while, the fancy ones, "tumblers" they are called, because when they fly in the air they do back somersaults or "tumbles". I kept them mostly for their different colours, as I could mix the colours when I was breeding them.

So, when I came down to the countryside, I was a little prepared for the different types of birds that I would encounter. The first things that caught my attention were the peacocks that we have here on the farm. I had seen them in photographs but I never imagined just how colourful and beautiful they really are - even the peahen seems to pale into insignificance when compared with the cock. I suppose she is special in her own right - well she is compared to a common crow!

There are different types of chickens here also, from the normal run of the mill chickens that I have come to recognize from pictures on egg cartons, to Bantam chickens who are smaller than the average hens - though Bantams can match Hens for toughness any day of the week.

Then there are Marans who have the most eye-catching grey and white speckled feathers. They seem to be a little aloof towards the rest of the poultry.

There are the Cayuga ducks. Sometimes they look just plain black but, when the light hits them just right, they have the most amazing hues of green and purple. They seem to live quite a separate life to the rest of the birds. They don't seem to interact with the others unless they are trying to get them away from the feeding trough.

Incidentally, the poultry are all free-range. That means that they are free to roam around the large enclosure that we have built for them.

Last, but not least, there are the turkeys. It has to be said that they are not the most attractive of creatures but boy, are they tasty! The chicks that have hatched are quite a contrast to their parents because they are small and fluffy and look so innocent - even if they do grow up to be big ugly monstrosities.

There are a few wild birds that visit the farm from time to time. Among them there can be found Robins, Wood pigeons, Doves, Blue tits, Pied Wagtails, Thrushes and now, with the warm weather, there are a lot of Swallows making their nests in various nooks and crannies throughout the farm.

The Swallows are by far the most agile and graceful of birds when in flight and they are quite fond of doing some low-level aerobatics. In fact they come so low to the ground that they irritate the six or so cats that live on the farm. It seems

amazing to me that these birds fly hundreds of miles to migrate each and every year and still manage to come back to Ireland. They certainly cheer the place up and are great to watch in the air. They don't even seem to be too intimidated by we humans - they fly as close to us as they do to the cats. I have walked into the shed on many occasions only to be greeted by a group of swallows flying at head height straight out the shed door.

The Blue tits are also very colourful (well they are compared to the sparrows that I was used to seeing in Dublin). They are not as brave as the swallows, nor as agile, but they do add a certain colour to the place.

One bird that I very rarely catch glimpses of is the Sparrow Hawk. I remember it very clearly from my days of keeping pigeons. It was always easy to tell when there was a Sparrow Hawk around because all the Pigeons would tilt their heads to the side in order to get a better view.

I would always get concerned when a Sparrow Hawk showed up as one of their favourite dishes is smaller birds but they are so graceful in flight and they have an incredible ability to hover in the air. They hover to steady themselves so they can pinpoint their prey and then they swoop. This is one of the most brilliant sights to be seen when observing birds. I have never actually seen one of them making a strike but to see one of them plummet towards the ground is enough for me.

The Wood pigeons have a white band around their necks that gives them a "priestly" look. Every time that I see one I can't get that image out of my head. The wild doves are shaped very similarly to the pigeons but on a smaller scale. They are a fawn colour and I think that they are the most timid and shy of all the wild birds that visit the farm. I haven't gotten close enough yet to get a long lingering look at one of them - and that goes for when I am hidden. They seem to be able to detect me even when I am doing my best to be quiet and inconspicuous.

Since I have been noticing these birds a few surprising ones have passed my way. Only last week I was out near the cattle trough and I saw what looked like a Sparrow but on closer inspection it had a yellow head. It looked as if it was a Sparrow who had been dipping its head into a bucket of yellow paint. I consulted a bird manual and it turned out to be a Yellowhammer. It still looks to me like a Sparrow with a penchant for paint.

I'm sure that there are many other birds that I have neglected to mention. That is not because I have no interest in them, it is simply because I don't know what type of bird that they are. The best thing about not being able to recognize a certain species is that I will eventually find out just what type it is. That is enough to keep my interest going for a long time.

by julian

# a true story...

This is a true story. It's a story that has never been told and I will tell you now. It may frighten you and send a shiver down your spine but do not worry yourself too much. You will not die.....NOT TONIGHT anyway. Not yet....

It happened a long, long time ago - too many years to remember - when I was very young. O how the years have passed by. I am old now but cannot forget my terrifying ordeal. If I was as wise then as I am now I would not have to tell you this. Do yourself a favour and spare yourself the experience that has befallen me. Please, please listen....

When I think about it now, it was my curiosity that got the better of me.

My father had always told me never to go near the big old house on top of the hill.

'It's for your own good,' he would say.

He told me this many times. When I persisted he eventually told me of the old woman who lived there.

'That's a strange one that never passes her front door. Few people have ever seen her. She never seems to want for anything.'

This added fuel to my curiosity.

'Where does her food come from? Who provides her with logs?'. For there is always a plume of smoke rising from her chimney. 'How does she manage on her own?'

There were too many questions that I wanted answers for so I decided to find out for myself. I had to find out more about the old lady.

I watched the house - from a

distance at first - and saw no-one coming or going. As time went by I found my curiosity and courage growing. I was very close to the house now. Almost close enough to look in the window - and look I did.

She was sitting by the big open fireplace poking at the fire. She sat hunched over with her back to me.

I looked around the room and noticed there was plenty of food on the table. When I looked back she had turned around and was peering in my direction.

Not the face of a cruel old woman but a young and gentle girl.

She had caught me unawares and beckoned at me to enter, pointing to the door.

'Welcome to my home and please come in.' I heard her call to me with her soft voice.

The door was ajar. I pushed it and entered.

'Have some food and sit with me by the fire. I have been waiting so long for someone just like you.' I heard her say as I sat down.

'More than 100 years have passed since anyone has walked through that door - and I should know.'

I was stunned.

'You will want for nothing.' She said and rose from her chair.

'My home is yours. Please make yourself comfortable. You will want for nothing. Nothing at all - only someone to visit you, to release you,' she said as she pulled the door behind her.

As I sit by the open fire and wait, I think of her parting words to me.,,,,,,

by mick

# surrender

I had entered High Park  
full of hurt and pain

I couldn't speak or talk

I couldn't see myself change

I met a woman called Tara

She helped me crack my shell

Now that I can feel my feelings

My life has started to change

by derek

# it will happen

Time seems to go on forever when you wait for the expected.

I must be waiting hours now and I don't see any change. I have passed the time by doing many small jobs that I have put off and been meaning to do.

I get up from my seat by the window to do another tidy up job. This is boring. I'm running out of small jobs.

The house is spotless and it still hasn't come - but I know it will. I piece together another small part of the large jigsaw. I still don't see the picture that must be there. It won't be long now.

As I look around for something else to do, I see the rain still falling.

It still hasn't come. Still no change.

I fall into the large armchair and sit facing the window. My eyes start to close for I have grown tired and as I curl up on the chair I dream of happy times.

In the sun with friends, football, roller-skating, chasing and having a good time. This is nice and cosy.

My eyes flick open for a few seconds and I see what I have waited for. I see the sun shining through the window - past the football and other toys I have collected and placed on the window-ledge.

I knew it would come. It always does. I'm really very sleepy. Too tired to play with friends. I happily drift back to sleep. To dreams.

by  
mick

# my journey

My journey, which is my truth,  
bears fruit in who I am today.

I seek not your sympathy nor do I ask  
for you to grieve my losses

I ask only that you see me  
through eyes that do not judge

And listen with ears of none prejudice

No longer is my path twisted with hate and anger  
from my memories of wrongs done to me in the past.

These wrongs I now see, helped form the  
paving stones on which my life has travelled.

My path was just like yours, but on a different street.

The twists, turns and detours I took  
were of my own choice and making.

No longer shall  
I carry the burden of shame and guilt,

For to do so would be to  
rob myself of my tomorrows.

by mark

# strokey

Ben awoke, feeling that familiar dry, leathery taste in his mouth. It was a morning for staying in bed but necessity drives and Ben knew he had to get out and hustle.

Reluctantly he jumped out of bed and threw himself into a cold shower, got dressed and headed straight for the door.

There was a full force gale coming from the sea as he made his way to the car parked in the drive. He drove towards the off-licence twenty minutes away which he knew would have sufficient funds to meet his cheque.

On route he phoned directory enquires and got the number of the premises.

When in sight of his target he pulled over to the kerb and dialled the number. With his best Connemara accent he asked for the manager.

"Good morning, this is detective sergeant Bosco Muldoon of the fraud squad, as I speak we are following a young man who has been cashing stolen cheques and he seems to be heading for your premises. We need to catch him red-handed if we are to put him out of circulation. He is now less than one hundred yards from your premises so if he goes in just act normal, cash the cheque and we will be waiting outside to arrest him. Under no circumstances challenge him as he is known to be violent."

"I have been burned a few times by these kite merchants (as they like to call

themselves), so it would be my pleasure to aid in busting this piece of shit".

Ben parked around the corner and walked briskly towards the shop.

"Good morning sir can I help you ?"

"I would like to have a crate of medium dry white wine Hiranell or Sinclair quality in the £100 a case region delivered to my home just down the road before five p.m. I am having friends over. Here is the address. To save me a trip to the bank, if you could take for the wine out of this pay cheque I would be much obliged".

"Mmm £1500? We should be able to manage that".

"You can give me the change in £50's and the last hundred in £20's. Thank you so much"

"Good day to you sir!"

As Ben crossed the road he smiled to himself as he imagined the surprise on Sgt. Bosco Muldoon's face when he received his case of fine wine.

by brendan

# Lucifers lament

Every morn I remember  
as I gazed upon your neck  
at a speed of twenty miles an hour  
to avoid your satanic peck.

Oh how the burden of fear  
would weigh upon my back  
as I hid behind the birdcage  
to escape your vicious attack

When the dawn breaks  
and I feel all of a mudddle  
the first thing that I hear  
is guggle, guggle, guggle.

Christmas was arriving  
and your legs were really knocking  
I licked my lips and looked at you  
and thought of my christmas stocking

I can imagine now as I look back  
the fear that you did feel  
as you heard the farmer approaching  
with his hands as strong as steel

You were christened Lucifer the Turkey  
you may have thought we were bluffing  
but maybe you had the last laugh  
cos you avoided the christmas stuffing

But that day came one morn in march  
where your gurgling had to cease  
when resident and worker shed a tear  
and bade you rest in peace.

by andrew & julian

# St. Francis Farm

There's a place down in Tullow  
called St. Francis' Farm  
It's a wonderful place and its so full of charm,  
There's some sheep and some hens,  
There's a peacock here too,

But the best thing about it is  
the things that we do,  
We get up in the morning  
at a quarter to eight,  
Then we start work at ten I think it's so great,  
We'll go out to the farm and sow up some seeds,  
Then its out to the field to pull up the weeds,  
But the main reason I'm here  
and its why I'm so keen,  
Because at the end of the day

I want to stay clean!

by mark

# cockroach

Feeling used and rather confused,  
I sit at the table to  
see if I'm willing and able.

I looked around and  
seen everyone was there,  
Then looked on the ground,  
and saw a cockroach with hair.

He had a hat on,  
and a nice pair of shoes, and  
was dancing away to those oldey blues.

He had a nice grin,  
then he let a big spin,  
Then looked up at  
me with his hairy chin.

I gave him a wave,  
and bent down to say,  
You should have a shave,  
and go on your way.

by  
edel

potato

and

leek

soup

I get the leeks from the veg field, it's better to bring a knife so I don't have to carry the tops of the leaves or the roots back to the kitchen plus they return to the soil.

The leeks here are massive so about 4 are enough. I grab 2 large potatoes from the shed where they've been for the winter and get 2 cloves of garlic from the pantry.

To clean the leeks slice lengthways and wash the two halves under running water. Then chop into inch long pieces. Peel the potatoes and chop into ½ inch cubes, peel and chop the garlic (its easier to peel the garlic if they are left steeping in water before hand).

Melt a knob of butter into a pot, add the leeks, potatoes and garlic with lots of salt and pepper, stir and cover, leave to sweat for 5 minutes.

Add 1 pint of water and ½ pint of milk, bring to the boil and simmer for ½ hour. Liquidise and serve.

Listen for the Mmmmmm and season with gratitude.

by stephen

# earth

This planet we live on mother earth.  
This is a small planet in a modest solar system,  
a tumbling pebble in the cosmic stream  
and yet....

This home is built of many mansions,  
carved by wind and the fall of water.  
Lush with living things beyond number,  
perfumed by salt spray and blossoms,  
here in a cool cloak of mist  
or there steaming under a hot sun  
earth's variety excites the senses and exalts the soul.

We section soil into fields, gardens, orchards.  
Then scatter seeds and set cuttings and wait.  
Out of sunshine, rain and air  
obliging nature conjures leaf and root,  
grain and fruit-draping our tidy bounded plots with green  
exuberance.

The sun retreats below the rim of the turning world,  
trailing golden rays across the curling waves.

At lands end we may dream of passageways into the deep,  
invitations to explore Earth's halls and  
chambers hidden beneath the sea.

by ray

# addiction

I wake up in the morning with this  
horrible feeling

And my body screams out for something  
that's healing

I shake and shiver and I tremble  
with pain

But my head keeps on telling me I must  
be insane

For insane is a word that I'll  
definitely use

Because I've felt this before and its how  
I still choose

I choose to go out and numb out this  
feeling

But reality will tell me its with my life  
that I'm dealing

So the reason I've wrote this and its  
certainly not fiction

Is at the end of the day I've got a  
problem called addiction!

by mark

