About These Four Letter Words

Over the years Leek U3A's Creative Writing Group has had a supper evening and presented such collections as this. They each had a broad theme, from "The Blue Dress", "The Write Track", "Underground Press", "Cross Roads", "School Days", and "Family Matters" as well as the "Jubilee Jottings". This time we have broadened our scope for creativity to write around our letter words: cool what!

Every week this small group of wordsmiths meets for two hours of a Wednesday morning and wonder how remarkable it is that friends can so quickly pen original, witty, dry, moving, inspiring, historical, hysterical, clever, vivid, funny, whimsical, magical, mystical, weird, anthropomorphic, fascinating, fantastic, factual, fictional, surreal, romantic, challenging, evocative, emotive, nostalgic, diverse, different, unique and unbelievably enviable lines of prose, poetry, verse and even worse. Above all the lines scribbled down on initially empty paper have a remarkable resonance with the broad and varied life experiences of this well-seasoned scriptorium of writers. So, a phrase can convene conversation and a single word whisk up a meringue of memories.

Because our 'Creative Writing' is not a taught course, there is no right and wrong, only preference and maybe taste. Nevertheless, it is a learning experience in the truest sense. Styles and interests become clear and also expand, change and develop in an atmosphere of mutual respect, support and encouragement. In writing we reveal something of ourselves so there is an element of risk when our efforts are shared but, as we neither compare nor judge, we can hone and experiment with confidence; authors writing our selves into our own life story.

If this is food for thought we trust it is as satisfying as the supper table - a writers'-cum-readers' digest. Welcome to our feast with words.

With best wishes from:

Mick, Ena, Alan, Kim, Rob, John, Maureen, Julia, Margaret, Ann, Margaret, Vera, Margaret, Kath, Sheila, Trevor.
The Four Letter Word by Mick Bentley

Many years ago now I decided to get my head down and do some studying. I chose English because I liked it. One of the topics discussed was the use of the four letter word, which of course has always been linked to swearing, or vulgar and offensive speech. We were told that most originated in the Saxon language and are the oldest we utter. After the Norman invasion our rulers spoke French and it was the parlance of government and of the upper classes and those who wished to climb the social ladder. It was the common people who clung on to the good old Anglo Saxon. Consequently we often ended up with two words or more for the same thing, one considered rude or impolite and the others used in polite, sophisticated or erudite company. Hence the reluctance to use these common words, words which in other circumstances, such as the shop floor of British Industry would be uttered without a qualm. So, any word which originates in the French, or Latin or Greek for that matter, could be termed ‘posh’ (origin unknown). Take the word excrement for example. Quite a common word and used often. There is another word which I cannot possibly pronounce because of the polite and refined company I am in! Which carries the most impact? I would say the less polite. Walking along the street it is doubtful whether you would hear ‘I have just put me foot in some dog excrement’, from someone nearby. Far more likely that the words would be ‘I have just put me foot in some dog s…t! Many of these so called vulgar words occur in great works of literature. The King James 1st Bible is one.

Having been given this assignment I decided to refresh my memory of those evenings at Leek College. I discovered that recent research has shown that many of these four letter words were not Anglo Saxon at all and that those that are would certainly not be considered swear words. Most were, according to one author, much later arrivals in our lexicon. She wrote that recorded language from Anglo Saxon times is rare, being restricted to educated ecclesiastics and it is therefore doubtful whether in such an environment there was the enthusiasm to use swear words, as many originate from religion, and would be considered off limits to say the least. Some other words with four letters are considered inappropriate to some people. ‘Work’, to some perhaps, while ‘shop’ maybe to others. I refer of course to those among us who do not like shopping. I personally think most are quite acceptable and enrich our language, and anyway, as I am a most cantankerous old fart I shall please myself whether I use them or not. That, possibly unacceptable four letter word, is, by the way, one of the oldest in our language.
I saw a donkey
One day old
His head was too big
For his neck to hold
His legs were shaky
And long and loose
They rocked and staggered
And weren't much use

He frisked a bit
But wasn't quite sure
Of the trick of it
His queer little coat
Was soft and grey
And curled at his neck
In a lovely way

His face was wistful
And he left no doubt
That he felt life needed
Some thinking about
So he blundered round
And then lay flat
On the ground to rest

He looked so little
And weak and slim
I prayed the world
Might be good to him
John and Hazel lived in a small terraced house in a large town, six large factories in the area gave employment to hundreds of people, who just like John and Hazel lived in terraced houses. The wages though not large were adequate, and they filled their rented home with furniture from second hand stores and hand me downs. Hazel had a small sewing machine, she made curtains with material she bought from market stalls, she also made clothes for herself saving money.

John had made the small concreted back yard into a pleasant garden area, filling tubs and containers with flowers and vegetables which sustained them through the year, Hazel bottled and made preserves from the gardens bounty. He was also quite good at woodwork, making a couple of garden seats for them to sit and admire the pretty garden.

Soon their thoughts turned to the idea of having a family but although their friends seemed to have lots of children, none came their way. They bought a small dog and took him for long walks in the local park, it was here that John became interested in the roses grown in large beds, he started to experiment at home, soon roses adorned the few bits of wall that were left, several containers had different types of roses in them.

Hazel admired the effort that John put in to developing a new type of rose, he spent many hours in the garden. One plant seemed to be a little different than the rest, they were all healthy, no fungus or black spot, but this rose was above all the others in vigour and health, but no flowers.

He tried all he knew to get it to bloom, special feeds, more sunlight, less sunlight, still no flowers, but lots and lots of vigorous growth. Perhaps it had received more feed than it needed, he reduced the amount, no difference, but it continued to flourish.

Then, wonder of wonders, Hazel found she was expecting a baby, well the rose was left to itself for a while, John continued to water and feed all his plants, but of course his attention was elsewhere. Then at last in the middle of July, Hazel gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. John was over the moon, the baby was called Rose.

Towards the end of the month, Hazel called John into the garden, and they both gazed in wonder at the rose bush that had been neglected for some time, it was covered in perfect small buds, some of which had opened, and gave forth the most delicious fragrance, it was unlike any rose he had seen before, he had done it, John had grown the perfect rose.

They looked at the rose and looked at the baby, I think I shall call it 'The Present' said John, it went on to win many prizes and provided them with so much money it was the best present they had ever received, apart from Baby Rose, that is.
ODE TO THE COMMON MAN by Rob Willis

Politicians! All they can ever do is just to politicise. Ex public schoolboys. Know they’re clever and wise. Done the Oxbridge circus, so a job is guaranteed. Never worked in pots nor pits to earn what they need.


Forever in British society, there’s been social stratification. Probably the same scene in and through every nation. There are always those who can and do. Let’s not forget. There are those who never will. But everything they get.

Common man, a labourer, works hard to earn his bread. Some is written about this man, not enough is ever said. Rich boys don’t like common folk, nor anything they say. Don’t like him nor her, not anyone earning weekly pay.

It’s all about salaries and bonuses, for doing really well. Minimum pay. Hourly rate. Won’t make your wallet swell. The Brexit vote it rocked their boat. A pecuniary stench Pervades those Remaining, but how much they’ll never tell.

*****
“Jones, stand up you ignorant boy. When I asked for a story only using four letter words I expected you to use your imagination with the numerous four letter words in the English language. What do I get but a string of swear words of the worst kind. It shows what a limited and useless mind you do have.

There are words like Love, Milk, as in milk of human kindness, and Pain, which you obviously suffered in order to concoct this travesty. The English language is full of nuances and descriptive phrases which your primitive mind, straight from the gutter, cannot appreciate. What is your excuse you ignorant little Turk? A four letter word incidentally Jones.”

“Well sir, I think you have a narrow mind and are taking the easy way out. May I continue O Learned One. Thank you sir.

You are correct in assuming that most of the words were shouted out with some force when I hit my finger with a hammer.

If you care to swallow your indignation and check with Collins English Dictionary, the most modern one, you will find that nearly eighty per cent of these words are entered there and details from whence they came. Some come from Latin, some from Greek and some from corruptions of Old English and so I offer the thought that their use is an exercise in social history which may not be appreciated by some narrow minded individuals.

Yes sir, I will collect my books and go to the Headmaster for being insolent. I am glad you recognise yourself. Six of the best will indeed concentrate my mind. With regard to the letter to my father. He is a Trade Union representative and he will be proud of my stand against brainwashing ....

“Jones, you are the most ---- ---- ---- ---- ----!!!!!”

“Probably sir, but please do not use language of that nature. You know I am a very sensitive soul and my feelings are very easily hurt according to my mother and who would dare to contradict her? She says that the English language is so varied and beautiful it is only an idiot who would want to restrict it to four letter words.

Yes, I will certainly now go and take my punishment, sir.”
Talk Talk by Ann Baxter

I had to call Talk Talk call centre. I am a Talk Talk customer and they were doing good deals to try to make up for their carelessness in allowing some spotty youths to attack their servers and steal information. I take a deep breath and dial. Answered immediately by a robot who tells me about their amazing TV packages but I'm soon through to a pleasant young gent who is courteous and understandable.

"I am looking at my personalised quotation on the Talk Talk site offering half price for a year".
"OK. Do you want a television package with that? They're amazing value."
"No thanks."
"Could I ask why not?"
"I don't have a television and I don't want one."

At this revelation people often start talking to me as if I'm a sad mad old woman, but this young man takes it in his stride. We agree the contract and he says he will need to transfer me to another department who can set it up for me.

Music starts, interrupted by the robot telling me about the amazing TV packages.

The robot checks in telling me that there will be a long wait, their operatives are very busy, but it's usually better between twelve and four. I think she means midnight to 4am! She takes the opportunity to remind me about the amazing TV packages.

Thirty minutes. 'Click ........beeeeeeeeeeeeeeep'. Cut off.

Shall I try again? Oh what the hell.

Past the robot, who tells me about the amazing TV packages, then on to a new man. I go through my story and he tells me that he can do that without transferring me elsewhere.

"That contract comes with an amazing TV package."
"It doesn't mention that on my personalised quotation."
"All our offerings come with TV now, they're amazing value. I'll send you the gizmo box."
"I don't want it. I don't have a television."

Silence.

"You could buy one."
"I don't want one."
"Tell you what, I'll send you the gizmo box and then you can connect it when you get a TV."
"I don't want it, I just want broadband and a land line."
"In that case I'll have to transfer you elsewhere."
"I won't get cut off will I?"
"No, you won't get cut off, it will only take a few minutes, I promise."

Forty minutes later I notice the robot has stopped telling me about the amazing TV packages. Maybe she got bored. Eventually I'm answered by a lady in a terribly noisy call centre. Her microphone is picking up every other operator, and it sounds like a riot is taking place.

"I want to sign up to the contract in my personalised quotation."
"oh yes, the 18 month contract."
"It says twelve."
"That one is for 18 months."
"Why does it say twelve then?"
"I will have to speak to my manager. I'll just put you on hold."
"No no, don't go! Don't leave me. I'll have your amazing TV package if you stay." But it's too late.

Mercifully, after only minutes she is back, and tells me, grudgingly, that I can have the new contract for twelve months, and after going through the tees and cees in fine detail, none of which I can hear, it's all done. She wishes me a wonderful day. She hopes it's the best I ever have. Well, it wasn't the best ever, but I had succeeded where many have failed!
Best Pals by Kath Gosling*

However careful we are, accidents will happen. One of my two best friends was my mobile phone. She was with me all day and slept on my bedside table. Her main resting place was in my trouser pocket, which I would pat several times a day just to make sure she was there. While I mainly used her for texting and setting the alarm I always felt safer when she was with me, especially when walking downstairs.

But, dear readers, I accidentally murdered her!

'Why?' and 'How?' you might ask, did I come to kill my best pal? As she is no more I have had to get another mobile mate to accompany me. But it is not the same. This one has different ideas and so far, not as friendly or easy to get on with. He hides things from me and is a bit temperamental.

Here's what happened. I am by nature a bit clumsy and should wear a bib when I have my dinner. On this particular day I was eating curry. When I got up from the table I noticed there was a red stain on my new cream cardigan jacket. I rushed to the sink to rub on a bit of "Vanish", and put it in the washing machine.

On this occasion, I don't really know why, I had put my friend in my jacket pocket. When I took the washing out, she fell on the floor dead, drowned in fact. I was distraught, shook her but as she had no mouth could not give her the kiss of life. I remembered what someone told a friend when his phone fell into a mug of coffee. So I filled a basin with boil-in-the-bag rice and immersed her in it for the rest of the day and overnight.

But she never recovered.

My other best friend is Harry, my hot water bottle. Though he nearly always wears a jacket, he is really hot and is lovely to cuddle when we go to bed together.

*****

* This piece was originally written by Kath when the Creative Writing group's 'Homework' for the week was - Accidents Will Happen.
Little Fairy FEEL by Kim Clowes

The caress of the summer breeze
The soft touch of the snow
The feel of warmth from sunshine
Are made by me you know.

I have a secret recipe
It was handed down to me
It's very very precious
And under lock and key.

I use it on the swans down
And on tiny babies skin
And on the wings of dragon flies
When their courting days begin.

I make a lovely silky touch
Which I use for waterfalls
And a very springy touch
For moss on old stone walls.

I make a velvet feel for pansies
And one of quite sweet “pain”
I call that one NOSTALGIA
And throw it up memory lane.

I have to go - but I'll be back
I'm going to tell you how
I'll send a kiss with the evening breeze
And plant it on your brow.

*****
Experts by Julia Holt

I am a “Jack of all trades, but master of none.” I know this because Paul told me. Paul is an expert at most things. I know this because he told me. Paul understands how things should be done. He told me that, too.

Last Thursday we bought a new desk for when I do the correspondence and accounts for Paul’s business, when I’m not teaching. As Paul says, everybody knows teachers only work part-time, so it gives me something to do as a change from housework. Even though Paul says I’m not much good at that either.

Unfortunately, my desk, was literally on its last legs. The left front leg was knocked off when we moved it into the cupboard under the stairs – “the office”, Paul calls it – and so it has been propped up on bricks for 15 years. But last week Paul wanted a pen for his crossword and stubbed his toe badly on one of the bricks.

Paul decided perhaps we ought to buy a new desk, well a replacement desk, because as he says, it’s only for me and my little jobs, so we didn’t want anything fancy, did we? We had a look in the second-hand shops, but couldn’t find one, so Paul said the best value for money would probably be Ikea. So, we went and coincidently the one that was cheapest, Paul decided was the best one. When we got it home Paul said that as it wouldn’t take long to put together I could help him on Saturday morning, before I did the week’s shopping and he went to have lunch with his Mother.

I know now that I shouldn’t have, but I thought I was being helpful after work on Friday, when I unpacked and laid it all out carefully, in order, on the living room floor. I was sure I had checked that everything was there, twice, but as Paul says being an incompetent woman, I must have thrown a bit away when I took all the packaging to the tip before he arrived home from the pub on Friday evening. He says he does most of his business at the pub. Unfortunately, when Paul came to put it all together next morning, there must have been a bit missing, because he really struggled. He was extremely angry with me and told me that I should not interfere with things that I didn’t understand.

When I got off the bus with the week’s shopping, at nearly 2 o’clock, the car was still in the drive. Paul doesn’t normally get back until after six. I generally work on his accounts or, “play at school” as Paul calls my marking and lesson planning, while he’s at the pub or a football match.

When I got in, he threw his screwdriver at me and said, I’d have to go back to Ikea on Monday, to get the desk replaced and, if they insisted we had to buy a new one, because I had lost a part, then I’d have to buy it out of my pocket money – I wasn’t on any account to touch the housekeeping money! Then he slammed out of the house and I assume he went to his Mum’s, although he didn’t get back until after 11 and she is normally in bed by 10.

He wasn’t pleased that while he was out, “I’d bodged the desk together anyway I could!” He’s sure it’s not level, but he says if I want to work at a wonky, lop-sided desk that’s up to me. Now, I know I’m no expert at judging things, but the desk seems fine to me, but then as Paul says, “I’ll accept anything, won’t I?”
Stop by Alan Barr

Stop pulling faces and sticking out your tongue
I’ve endured your insults for far too long
Go away and play in another street
I’ll find a new friend to share my sweets

Stop casting your eye on that girl she’s mine
We’ve been together for such a long time
Go away and find a girl of your own
We’re getting married the seed is sown

Stop shooting guns at me in a trench
This war is cruel with death and stench
Go to a table and talk about peace
I want this horrid conflict to cease

****
Her life had been ripped apart; she had no choice but to start again, afresh. It had been the most frightening time of her life but looking back now she could see more clearly. From no choices left, she had progressed through many decisions. How easy it had been to disassemble her former life. Gone was the familiar stability, continuity, routine; gone were her comfortable day, all of that had simply floated away, lost in the critical pursuit of survival.

This place she had found. At first it had taken on an alien dullness in the wintry light, the walls seemed drained and lacked something only available on a sunny day. She felt so alone, an old photograph which had sustained her through dark days before no longer comforted her. The weight of her loneliness was imponderable, so she declined to ponder it. She powered through a to-do list of massive life alterations in the same way she had previously listed her shopping requirements.

Finally, three years on, she felt she had stopped running, she had worked hard and was now the manager of an antique shop in a small market town, miles from her previous life. The day she stumbled on the job, she couldn’t believe her luck; the elderly owner had felt unwell and had been grateful for Clara’s assistance. A visit the next day had resulted in a cup of tea, a long chat, a job and the use of the flat over the shop. It was meant to be, thought Clara. It would be several months later that she started to think, too easy, much too easy.

Clara was left to run the shop as she thought; the only stipulation was not to display any of the goods from the cellar. It was after a buying spree that Clara first ventured into the cellar. She desperately needed storage space for mixed boxes that would require time consuming scrutiny. She was relieved to find the cellar almost empty, a sweeping brush and several battles with cobwebs cleared more than sufficient space. Two weeks later she was bringing up the last box for sorting when she realised that it wasn’t one that she had bought. She remembered the owner’s warning but curiosity overcame her. He obviously didn’t mean this box she thought, all that is in it is this peculiar object; never seen anything like it before. She left it on the counter while she went to see a customer and promptly forgot all about it. The box had slipped behind a chair, spilling its contents under the counter.

It was two days before she had cause to look for it. A customer had entered the shop and immediately went to the mysterious object. It was after a buying spree that Clara first ventured into the cellar. She desperately needed storage space for mixed boxes that would require time consuming scrutiny. She was relieved to find the cellar almost empty, a sweeping brush and several battles with cobwebs cleared more than sufficient space. Two weeks later she was bringing up the last box for sorting when she realised that it wasn’t one that she had bought. She remembered the owner’s warning but curiosity overcame her. He obviously didn’t mean this box she thought, all that is in it is this peculiar object; never seen anything like it before. She left it on the counter while she went to see a customer and promptly forgot all about it. The box had slipped behind a chair, spilling its contents under the counter.

As she came round she tried to lift her arm to shield her eyes from the bright light, panic surfaced when she realised someone was holding her hand. ‘It’s OK Gran, it’s Stephen; you are in hospital after a nasty fall. The doctor says you will be fine after a good rest.’ ‘Book’, she croaked. ‘Don’t worry Gran, I have your book here. Now you get better soon. I want to know what happens to Clara’. Nan sank gratefully back on the pillows, squeezed his hand back, ‘So do I, sweetheart, oh! so do I’.

The Mystery by Maureen Turner
Those Four Letter Words by Ena Glogowski

While four letter words queue up to be used
They can be reinvented and sorely abused.
Some folk involve them in prose and in verses,
While others adopt some for swearing and curses.
Expletives turn up in all shapes and sizes,
Four letters are one of their many disguises.
They cause intakes of breath, and eyebrows raised high,
Or superior looks, eyes turned to the sky,
Although others accept them as part of life's way
On a regular, run-of-the-mill, working day.
If four letter words show up while you're here
They'll be used with discretion, so, please, never fear.

****

Queue is the only word
which when its last four
letters are removed it is
pronounced the same.
"I didn't think you were the Blackpool 'type'," a friend said to me when I stated my intention to visit the north west coastal town. But then I reflected that the outing also included a stop at Clevelys which I understood to be on an attractive location and as I had never been there I felt the agenda, in all, might prove appealing.

The coach left Biddulph at 9pm and we reckoned to be in Blackpool at about eleven. Unfortunately, the driver was obliged to follow a diversion and it was nearer twelve when we finally dropped off across the road from the Tower. It looked so big, standing close beside it - I had to walk half a mile along the promenade to get it on a photograph.

The promenade itself, stretching for miles along the coast, looked very inviting for a walk especially on a sunny day with the temperature in the twenties and just a gentle breeze blowing. But I decided to explore the town first, crowded though it was. I passed a group of children queuing excitedly to have a go at blowing vast bubbles into the air and a Caribbean youth emitting a loud noise, unidentifiable as music, in accompaniment to his guitar. I hurried past without putting money in his box.

There was a lot of other sound, emanating from the open doors of amusement arcades, that I disregarded also and passing Marks and Spencer's, decided that this was as good a place as any to have some lunch. After the satisfaction of a pot of tea and teacake I emerged from the store and spotted, close by, the Winter Gardens Theatre. A glance at the billing informed that, currently showing, was the musical Jekyll and Hyde. This impressed me, being upmarket, I thought, as the U3A Singing for Pleasure group has recently performed some of its numbers.

The Winter Gardens and Grand Theatres were among new buildings constructed during the Victorian era, following the advent of the railway which brought hoards of visitors and settlers to the town. In 1851 the population of Blackpool was 2,500. By 1951 it had risen to 147,000.

I was now feeling the need to escape all the noise and bustle and so I transferred to the promenade at last and proceeded to walk. With the sun on my back I walked and carried on walking. After a time I could see what seemed to be a small resort in the distant haze. I realised it was Clevelys where we had expected to go in the first place. But I couldn't go that far, having already walked for an hour and being faced with the return journey. I also needed to allow time for another pot of tea, probably in M&S again.

During the course of the day I picked up smatterings of conversation on behalf of many people. Reflecting upon the words of my friend, I considered that there is no such person as a "Blackpool type" any more than there is a "Stoke" or a "Leek type". Blackpool, along with its history, its entertainment and its culture, can be enjoyed by anyone. And if they're doing a trip to see the Illuminations this year, my name will certainly be on the list.
Bird Song by Margaret Fowler

Robin sang sweetly
When the days were bright.
Thanks, thanks for Summer!
He sang with all his might.

Robin sang sweetly
In the Autumn days
'There are fruits for everyone
Let us all give praise!'

In the cold and wintry weather
Still you hear his song.
'Somebody must sing,' said Robin
Or Winter will seem long'.

When Spring came back again,
He sang, 'I told you so'.
Sing the Seasons back to Spring
For Winter's sure to go.

*****
The Four Seasons by Kim Clowes

My name is Mother Nature
I make the Seasons four
I give to you the prettiest sights
That you ever saw.

In each and every meadow
There's new life every day
Birds begin to build their nests
And lambs begin to play.

First the birds pick up messages
And they begin to sing
Then creatures wake from Winter sleep
And say my my it's Spring.

The lovely sound of waterfalls
The splashing of the sea
The whisper of the summer breeze
Were all prepared by me.

The warmth, the air, the earth the Sea
Spread happiness and cheer
And everybody smiles and says
How lovely summer's here.

Soon the trees are dressed for Autumn
More beautiful each day
The colours are breathtaking
And steal your heart away.

Then Autumn leaves begin to fill the air
Floating like confetti till all the trees are bare.

I'm needed now in Lapland
I really have to go
To make the crispy crunchy sound
In freshly fallen snow.

Bring logs and hot chocolate
Look out at my wind and ice
Then snuggle by your fireside,
All cosy, warm and nice.
Owl by Ena Glogowski

Owl glided to his regular squat in the hollow oak. Day was dawning. The sky was streaked palest green and delicate yellow. Night was successful for Owl, although not for numerous voles and other small rodents unfortunate enough to attract his attention. He was handsomely replete and ready to settle for his daily slumber. As the sun peeped across the horizon the sky turned night's indigo to morning's brilliance. Chill nocturnal breezes changed to a sunny "hello". Owl settled in his regular place. All was as it should be for him. The whole day was his to slumber through. He dozed. One eye was, however, always "at the ready", on alert. You never could be certain if a delicate morsel might fly by within pouncing distance.

"Always be aware," his mother had taught him, "Survival is essential. A happy owl is a watchful owl." Being on obedient little fellow he had listened to his mother's advice, and was guided by it. Now he had grown to adulthood it had become his normal routine. He had hunted through the hours of darkness. He had eaten. Now he had all day to be in the peaceful shelter of his oak. Although still aware of all around him he dozed off until night claimed the world again. Owl was as content as he could possibly be. Others remained cautious. You never could trust Owl - not entirely. He was certainly a clever fellow, but a "feathered friend" would not be on accurate description. Ask any small rodent!
Daphne was well known for her gentle manner and her love of her husband and family. She was a wonderful housewife and a dedicated mother. Over the years, in addition to looking after her husband and children, she created and tended a moderately large garden, which produced a large quantity of food for the family table. She had a great knowledge and ability for plant propagation and memorised many botanical names for the flowers she grew.

Her children from oldest to youngest were John, William, Carol and Christine, only a year separating each child from the next one. At 17, John left home to go and live with his girlfriend of a similar age. They lived some twenty miles away from Daphne in John’s girlfriend’s parent’s house, which complicated Daphne’s ability to see John, as they had no means of transport. Daphne’s husband David, could see the sorrow the separation of mother from son was causing and managed to find enough money to buy a car. Problem solved, as far as seeing John was concerned but John was not happy with his new family and needed to move to a place of his own.

William got involved with “bad company” that turned him into a drug addict. He refused treatment and all too often he turned up on Daphne’s doorstep wanting money for drugs and in spite of his unpleasant attitude, Daphne sometimes persuaded him to wash and change his clothes before he went off again to who knows where.

Carol was the odd one out. She just got married and had children as her mother had done. Unfortunately, she too lived a good distance away but not far enough to stop Daphne and David paying a weekly visit to her third daughter, her husband and grandchildren (presently three in number).

Christine lived locally with her female partner and set up a craft business. She attended local fairs and had market stalls where she sold her produce. Amongst all her troubles and woes, a bitter blow was dealt when David died. Daphne and David had been childhood sweethearts and both had only known each other. Daphne said she could only do what she did because David was always there to support her.

Now she had no option, she must carry on and do what she had to do for her children. She moved home to a smaller property but a larger garden ~

There she grew and tended food and flowers
Where the odours filled her life with power
To carry on her pastoral role
And live her life, her kids to console

The eighty years her life has spent
In service to her family content
To feel she had done her best
Without a thought ~ for she was blessed
With a heart as pure as the morning sun
*Help* being her guide to everyone
Dawn's pale fingers appearing in the east, touched a small bird who upon waking began to sing, in a matter of moments it seemed the whole bird kingdom arose and as one gave thanks for the new day. A new dawn chorus had begun, the very air vibrated with the sheer volume of sound, as the birds sang in exultation of the new day.

Soon gold and pink spread across the skies as Phoebus rose and began slowly pushing the moon away, Luna fled, along with her acolytes the stars, following the dark night around the globe.

Phoebus rose even higher, and where the warmth of her rays touched the valley, a light mist rose to greet her. Soon the clear morning light revealed the dew soaked vegetation, small pools of moisture trapped on the leaves and grass, began to glow, and prisms of light shone forth.

Spiders webs adorned with globules of morning dew shone and gleamed, resembling diamonds draped around the neck of a beautiful woman.

As the suns rays caressed Dawn's face, she rose from her bed, pink of cheek and gold of hair, opening her window, she leaned forth to meet the glory of the new day, she listened to the bird song, melodic, harmonious, glorious, a fitting tribute to Phoebus.

Dickon, the farmer's son walking the kine along the track, was gladdened at the sight of Dawn greeting the day from her window, he had seen the day begin, seen Phoebus chase Luna from the skies, this Dawn who waved to him from her window was another glorious dawn.

He rambled the track slowly following the beasts who were in no hurry at all, as they gathered the dew soaked grass. Birds fluttered in and around the hedgerows gathering unwary insects to take back to nests built within the hedges which contained eggs and new chicks.

Flowers wound their way through the thickets, the morning sun picked out the promise of fruit and nuts to be gathered later in the season. Dickon paused to watch a pair of squirrels chase each other playfully around the trunk of a tall beech tree, they had a drey somewhere nearby Dickon was sure.

Soon farm buildings came into view, to be sure it was only a small farm, but it served to keep the family alive.

Dawn touched the thatch and at once it became alive with colour, the moisture on the thatch shone with the colours of a rainbow, wisteria crept up the walls unchecked and bedecked the front of the farmhouse, even the duck pond glowed red and gold, as Phoebus spread her colours happily over the land.

Dawn, thought Dickon, was the best time of the day, when the night had fled, owls had ceased their hooting and flown home on silent wings, and all earth's wonders were revealed.

Dawn reigned supreme over a new day.
Rain was falling softly on the roof of the cabin, background white noise that helped him to think, to relax. The sky was clearing to the west, fine weather creeping in from the coast. For Will this was a place of sanctuary, somewhere in which to hide, as he still needed to from time to time. From early childhood when he climbed into the wardrobe to escape his father’s anger, he had a constant need for solitude.

He had learnt to be tough, but every hardship he had endured he had tried to turn to advantage. As a child he had learnt patience through suffering, until the time came when he knew he must leave.

Everything had come to a head when his father had accused him of blasphemy after hearing him exclaim “Damn!” in a moment of frustration, and what followed was another cruel beating for using “four-letter words”. Will knew that the man’s religious fervour only provided justification to indulge his sadistic cravings. He could take the pain, but not the injustice. There would be no more cruelty, even though it meant abandoning his plans for academia to seek anonymity on the streets. He would make his own way, and deny his parents the pride in having a son at Oxford. The only four-letter word he used as a parting shot was to describe his life as hell ... and then he disappeared into the dark corners of the city’s underworld.

Hungry and sleeping rough, he discovered things he’d never have otherwise known if he’d followed the path set for him. It was only by abandoning everything that one could understand the value of things, all the possessions we have and take for granted, and also the intangible things ... sorrow, kindness, anger, love and hate.

He refused the lure of drugs, headed away from the life of a junkie – turning instead to junk. Through work he made a life, and it was junk that gave him hope.

To everyone else the bike on the rubbish skip was merely junk. But Will could see that with a little time and care he could have a machine that was worth something. From then on he began hanging around council refuse yards and skips, looking for the value in discarded things, returning them to usefulness, learning how to cost and to name a price.

And all that he’d achieved, the money, the house, the cars, were not really so important, because he’d learnt to trust again and grown to love. From his cabin in the grounds of his estate came the sounds of birdsong and the voices of his children playing. His family understood he needed to retreat into his own space every so often, and he had come out here today with the idea of beginning his memoirs. Instead his journey through memory had brought him to a place that he’d been searching for all his life. A place called home.
Fine Time
by Ann Baxter

Pour beer
Love beer
Pour wine
Love wine
Pour more wine
Pour more wine
Lose time
Stay late

Open eyes
Sore head
Pain! Pain!
Feel sick
Hate wine
Hate beer
Hang head
Quit beer
Quit wine
Quit pubs
Stay home

That Mary?
Come over?
Okay mate
Come soon
Pour wine
Love wine
Pour more wine
Pour more wine

*****
I'm Montgomery Marmaduke, at the moment, I am the youngest of the Marmaduke clan. I've 14 brothers and sisters, Muriel, Maurice, Malcom, Maude, Millicent, Murdock, Montmorency, Marcus, Montague, Matthew, Madonna, Molly, Mitchell and Medway. We all live with our parents Sid and Ada under the bath in Mrs. Jones' bathroom.

Mum often tells the story of how they came to find their home. One cold autumn day, after she and Dad had only baby Muriel and they had been washed out of their summer accommodation, under the floorboards of next-door's outside lavvy, they were searching for a warmer, drier winter home, when Whiskers the cat came stalking down the entry. Mum admits she was frightened, after all Muriel wasn't very big and Mum was pregnant with Maurice, Malcolm, Maude, Millicent and Murdock. Suddenly Dad spotted that a wire had been removed by the back door and it exposed a tiny hole. With a lot of shoving and pulling they had all squeezed through just before Whiskers had pounced.

Once inside, they took their time surveying this potential property. As Mum said when you've got a growing family you don't want to be moving all the time and this time she wanted the best. Well, when Mum saw the primrose bathroom suite, that was it, she was smitten. She fell in love with it instantly. As she said it was like the sun was shining all the time. They moved in immediately and none of us ever want to move.

Mrs. Jones didn't realise we were here for a long time, but one day she spotted Mitchell run behind the bathroom cabinet. Mum had warned us not to go out in the daylight, but Mitchell has always been a bit of a rebel. He said he wanted an adventure to see the great big outside world. He was sick of only going into dark recesses – he wanted light! Now look where his adventures have got us?

Mrs. Jones brought Whiskers upstairs first. We all stayed huddled quietly together under the bath and although he could smell us he couldn't reach us. Dad says Mrs. Jones won't know how to remove the bath side – I hope he's right!

Just to be on the safe side we've all been told we've got to stay close to home for a while. Dad will go out on food hunting expeditions on his own at night. It will be very dangerous, but as Mum is pregnant nourishing food is essential. Last week Mrs. Jones left some cheese out, which was great because it meant Mum got plenty of calcium. It's just a matter of the rest of us sitting tight and waiting for Dad to return.

Terrible news. We waited all last night for Dad to come home. He didn't. Mum's not sure if Whiskers has caught him, or if he's done a bunk and left us. Mum says nothing else for it, we'll have to find a new home. We've spent the day packing up and are flitting tonight. On one of his expeditionary journeys Mitchell says he found a way into the basement. It won't be as pretty as here, but it will be dry, so that's where we're going tonight. Wish us luck and may all you mice be little ones. Bye bye.
Hope by Trevor Siggers

There's Hope in Flint. Hope all goes well. There's Hope in Devon and Durham, oh yes, and one up the road in Derbyshire. Their Frith postcards probably had, Hope to see you soon, Love Auntie Nellie, on the back. Hope so. Did you know there are, all told, fifty Hopes throughout the world of which twenty-six are in America, five in Jamaica, three in Norway, one in South Africa and, would you believe, one in Pakistan?

In the US there are 102 places with hope in their place name but what is it? Is it wishful thinking? Christian was encouraged by Hopefulness in Doubting Castle. Last year the idea that Leicester would survive the Premier League, let alone win it, would have been a kick-about with fantasy and score hopeless on the dreamscape scale!

The outgoing President, Barack Obama, had Shepard Fairey's symbol for his first term in 2008. Much of what voters hoped for by way of greater equality, recognition and respect for the person, and a fairer distribution of wealth and opportunity has yet to be realised. Indeed, the popularity of one of the forthcoming candidates for the world's top job seems hopelessly bizarre, as well as deeply worrying, given that some of his strongest supporters may never have the brighter future they hope for given the cards he may deal out.

By the way, Hillary's hubby, Bill, was born in Hope while she presently lives in it. Oh yes, and as has been pointed out to me, her Grand Old Party rival, Donald's name was shortened by Saxons and school boys to f--t.

I am disturbed that hope might be what you do when you can't think of anything else; when you can't see a plan of action; when you cannot visualise and progress to a future. Wilkins Micawber's 'something will turn up' is a delight to read; but to live by?

Faith is of the same family as hope; I reckon at least cousins. And, Charity or, as I prefer; Love? Sure, I'll go along with that. It's positive and practical. It requires imagination but is a 'doing' word. Hard? Certainly, especially if you think fair and firm can't be in the mix but don't confuse it with soft or a kiss.

No, sorry, but hope alone just doesn't do it for me. It's not good enough. It's a word not a way. Not a lead to follow. See where I'm coming from? Hope so! But, hold on. Neither I nor my family are drowning in an overcrowded dingy and desperately seeking a future. I'm not being dragged into a Syrian prison. Deal with the deliberate inhumanity of humanity? I imagine there's only hope to energise and sustain our spirit?

Is it Dante's Hell where you "lay down all hope" while an artist/photographer can insert the image of a red rose at Auschwitz? It's today's life coach, TV evangelist and secular psychologist who advocate positive thinking and visualization to enrich our lives and even enhance performance. We're back to Leicester and the sports scientists.

The placebos used in medical research show hope may be the only remaining variable aiding recovery. So it is 'real'. It is a critical component in the treatment of post traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. However, beware; one doctor's hope in a new course of treatment could be a denial of reality and prolong a patient's pain unnecessarily.

OK, I'm done. Using the adage - 'Get it written, get it read, get it right' - and great 'feed-back' (2X4 combination) from Ann and Allen on previous versions I've called it a day, left the remnant of Pandora's curiosity ajar to close with wiser words from Disraeli who advised, 'prepare for the worst, but hope for the best'; and Albert Einstein who urged us "Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow."
Feel Good by Maureen Turner

You’ll feel good as new, no more pain and pills
Soon have you running up peak park hills
New knees you see after waiting so long
A complete success, nothing went wrong
They forgot to say you will be 2 years older
Very unsure, certainly not bolder
But I'll have a go; I'll start on the flat
New boots, new gloves and woolly hat
You will feel good when we see to your eyes
A bright new start, what a surprise
I’ve waited so long, the world very dim
Couldn’t distinguish between a her and a him
Cataracts gone, new glasses a must
Oh dear! Now I can see all of the dust
But I count my blessings, no matter what the cost
Without my sight so much would be lost
I do feel good now the teeth are in place
I stare in the mirror, is that really my face
I can smile, and grin, and laugh out loud
Hold up my head, tall and proud
I can eat almost anything, not like before
I wouldn’t have dared say, can I have more
I used to splutter, dribble and click
But the thought of those implants still make me feel sick
That just leaves the hips, they must wait a while
I want to enjoy life, feel good and smile
Another operation has no more appeal
Than being a contestant on 'Deal or No Deal'
Be thankful for what I’ve got for a time
Besides there's no money, not even a dime
So goodnight, God bless have a good night’s rest
Up with the lark, keep busy, that’s best

*****
Bet you have heard of some peculiar Christian names but none more weird than mine – namely Arthur Fungus Jones. How can anyone call their son Fungus? I will explain. It was when the priest was writing on my certificate. He and my father had been on his home-brewed beer and my father’s speech was more than a little slurred. When asked what the name was to be he replied, Arthur Fergus Jones. To the priest this came out as Arthur Fungus Jones which he wrote on the certificate. He knew that my father was writing a book about mushrooms and other local fungi and so was not surprised. My mother hit the roof and insisted that it be changed – all to no avail. She regarded the priest as a drunken old fool and he thought her a busybody. He refused to alter the certificate. “Everyone has the right to call their son whatever they like. End of discussion.”

My father was quite pleased and when I grew up I went with him and began to make rough sketches of the different kinds of mushrooms and these I turned into watercolour paintings for the book he’d get published some day.

I became quite good at the drawing and painting and decided I would become an artist. Some other school work suffered especially English literature. I was just not interested in poetry and said so to my father. He volunteered to compose a poem for me and although I was sceptical I agreed. This is what he came up with and for the first time in my life I got an “A”.

Magic Mushrooms
Magic Mushrooms cleansed my mind
The stone of logic gone
Silently my senses freed
In a soothing healing wind.
Storm clouds in a turquoise sky
Elfin boats in silent line, with
Moonlight running for the beach
Where home, rest and safety lie.
Magic Mushrooms cleansed my eyes
Of traffic’s noise and grime
Moon crazed traveller of my mind
Surely this way madness lies. by A.F. Jones

I thought it was totally crazy but my teacher liked it and said I had a most appropriate middle name!
Four Letter Words by Rob Willis

All four letter words are just words with only four letters. So from a simple beginning we eliminate trends and setters. We also exclude the beverages, ale, lager, whisky and rum. Fortunately, we have the vino tinto, red wine, our old chum.

So what is it about four letter words, and why are they rude? Who labelled them all nasty, and declared them to be crude? You must never, ever, use them over the family dining table. Consider the evil of Cain, and the sad fate of his brother Able.

There are blue, coal, long-tailed. How we all love great tits. Just so many four letter words, to describe any Lady’s bits. Vikings, Angles, Saxons, Normans have all freely donated Four letter words. Words to be neither under nor overstated.

As time ticks by, words mutate and grow a different meaning Like woodland plants. Dead straight. Bent, or slightly leaning. Each generation invents new words to label a new situation. Constantly evolving, through each and every global nation.

*****
I Understand You Have A Room by Mick Bentley

Summer time was a grand time to live in the Grumble with the profusion of wild flowers, bird song, insects humming and the tops of the tall trees swaying gently in the breeze. The stream at the bottom was usually just a trickle and even that dried up altogether in a very dry year.

Mabel, Wilfred’s long suffering wife wanted a holiday. ‘We haven’t been anywhere for years’, she exclaimed. ‘Who on earth would want to leave a place like this in summer time’, retorted Wilfred. ‘Anyway, we are going’, came the emphatic reply. The trouble was that Wilfred was short of cash and holidays were expensive. It was a visiting mole which kept on suddenly appearing from God knows where in many of the rooms of the old badger sett that gave Wilfred the idea. ‘We shall let a room and earn some cash’, he stated. And so it came about that an advert appeared in the Humps Valley Post and Times about summer holidays in the Grumble.

A few days later Wilfred heard a grunt outside and on investigating was confronted by a huge wild boar, the likes of which he hadn’t seen since medieval times. ‘I understand you have a room to let’, said the boar. ‘Yes’, said Wilfred, somewhat taken aback. ‘Do come in’. The boar looked very fierce. It had pale beady eyes and huge tusks. ‘My name is Twacey’, said the boar, ‘may I see the woom?’ Wilfred showed him the room, thinking that Tracey was a most inappropriate name for such a huge beast. Suddenly, Doris appeared through the wall, - her speciality. On seeing Tracey her mouth fell open revealing her tonsils and nicotine stained teeth and she trumped. It was a good one, or as Chaucer would have put it: ‘She let loose a fart as loud as ‘twere a thunder clap’. This was a very un-fairy thing to do and Wilfred was very embarrassed.

This unfortunate occurrence was somewhat alleviated by the appearance of both Brendon O’Badger, Jocky McBadger, a couple of squirrels and Mr Twit and Mrs Twoo who had been on the way to school but had heard that something was going on. ‘Where do you come from?’, enquired Brendon of Tracey. ‘Just the other side of Twocote’, said Tracey. ‘There are lots of old bores round there and it is getting a little crowded’. Everybody was coming to the same conclusion and that was that Tracey had not just come for a holiday but to move in permanently. This presented a problem. Not only were wild pigs fierce and notorious for rooting up the ground thus making a mess, but the smell - my goodness what a pong! This was becoming more apparent as Tracey, who was obviously tired stretched out on the floor and began to doze off.

‘We shall have to have a meeting of the Humps, Grumble and District Trust,’ whispered a squirrel, ‘to decide what to do’. ‘We may even have to have a referendum’. ‘Oh no!’, groaned Wilfred, putting his head in his hands. A holiday suddenly seemed a good idea!
A Slow Happy Ending by Margaret Cooke

Slow was progressing (very slowly, as you might imagine) along the patio at the top of the garden. It was such a long way from beneath those logs over by the fence and he seemed to have been crawling for ages. Still, the lawn was nice and slithery after the morning rain so that helped a bit. He stopped to take a breather and turned his head around to see how far he’d come and then looked in the opposite direction to see how far there was yet to go: oh, not too bad. He reckoned he was a good two thirds of the way towards that shady bit in the herbaceous border that was home to the big hosta plant with its lovely succulent, variegated leaves. As he came nearer to the plant his mouth began to water at the prospect of the gourmet dinner he was about to enjoy and which was surely well-deserved after so much exercise. Getting close, the tips of the leaves, stirring a little in the breeze, seemed like beckoning fingers urging him to partake of his meal.

But what was this? Footsteps in the garden and suddenly SHE was there in her big brown wellington boots and before he knew it she had scooped him up onto the shovel and holding him aloft she cried, "You wretched slug! If you think you're going to eat my hostas - forget it. You can find your dinner in the wheelie bin," and with that she pushed him off the shovel and into the wheelie bin that was full of garden rubbish. Then bang! The lid closed down on the bin and he was in the dark. Did he feel scared? Well no, not really. He was probably going to die in here, but no matter. Slugs didn't have a very long life. He understood that. He would just rummage around a bit and then fall asleep.

A while later, just before nodding off, Slow remembered something: all those eggs his mate had laid under the logs at the back of the garden - they'd soon be hatching out. He smiled to himself. He was going to get his own back. Such a happy ending!
Fine by Trevor Siggers

What's the forecast?
Fine.
How' re you feeling today?
Fine.
How does my hair look?
Fine.
Does my --- look big in this?
Ye - ~ No. It's FINE, Dear. Truly!
The gold fish is dead.
Fine.
And the parrot.
Fine.
There's a fly in my cereal.
Fine.
I'm having an affair.
Fine.
I'm pregnant.
Fine.
It's the milk man.
Fine.
We don't have sterilised anymore!
Fine.
How's your hearing?
Quarter to ten.
You've got a ticket on your car.
Fine.
Probably:
I'm getting tired of this non-conversation.
Fine.
Is that all you have to say before I finally go?
Fine!