

A TRIP DOWN



A selection of songs, poetry and short stories 1999-2009

By Jim Bennett

A TRIP DOWN JINGLING LANE

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This collection is dedicated to the poets of the PK Poetry List
and to Lesley Burt who has found a new voice and a new career.

This is a private publication

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Dockland

he was born in a dockland an age ago
remembered winters covered in snow
and the smell of the Boss White and verdigris
leaves breath like the wind through leafless trees
no more

he recalled the depression how he begged for his job
but the boss was a bastard and the foremen a sod
he had to join queues to get picked for a day
but often went home without any pay
they were treated like dogs

he can still hear the sound of the one o'clock gun
that kept the ships true till their voyage was done
now he sits at the Pier Head and gazes to sea
and he remembers the stories and tells them to me
he tells them to me

he tells of the long walk to Birmingham
on the road that was trodden by many a man
and the promise of work that turned into dust
he worked where he could and did what he must
to survive

he remembers the ships that sailed from the port
and the ones that he built and the ones that they fought
and the smell and the sounds of fire in the night
seeing his brothers going to fight
in a war

he can still hear the sound of the one o'clock gun
that kept the ships true till their voyage was done
now he sits at the Pier Head and gazes to sea
remembers the stories and tells them to me
he tells them to me

how the salt in the water took skin from his neck
he was deafened by riveters up on the deck
and shouts could be heard from men down below
he hears them still and he's ready to go
their calling to him

all the sounds and the smells of the Liverpool Docks
are still in his blood and hold him like stocks
now he sits and remembers the things from his past
to him they're real but fading fast
they're fading fast

he can still hear the sound of the one o'clock gun
that kept the ships true till their voyage was done
Now he sits at the Pier Head and gazes to sea
remembers the stories and tells them to me
he tells them to me

Dockland is the lyric to the opening song from a musical about the lives of a Liverpool Stevedore family. It was loosely based on my dad's life. Written between 1999 – 2002 it was produced as a musical play for schools. It toured Liverpool schools during 2008.

The Death of Père Ubu

I dreamed of a poet who died today
his words strangled in my throat
left paper imitations
to tease us
like clouds on imaginary landscapes

I dreamed of an artist who died today
images in dust
hang on a plaster wall
pictures of a place
illuminated by his light

I dream of a man who died today
breathed his city one last time
and then is carried shoulder high
through crowds
who cry his name

I dreamed that Ubu died today

Written on the death of Adrian Henri in Dec 2000

Reject

Joe ran his hands over his stomach. He pressed gently but there was no response. He pressed harder.

"Joe are you ready." Pat called

"Err, yes I'll be with you in a second." He looked at himself in the mirror and a thin almost naked figure, dressed in red shorts and green socks gazed back. "I'm nearly dressed, just hold on. I'll be down."

He threaded himself into his pants and shirt.

Moments later he was walking down the stairs fully dressed.

"You look like you just threw those on, your shirt is hanging out. What is going on? Don't you want to come?"

Joe tried a smile.

"What is wrong with your face?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh well it doesn't matter. Look get yourself sorted out. Will and Joan will be here to pick us up in a minute."

Joe stood in the hall and tried to fix his clothes but, before he had finished the doorbell rang. He stood gazing at the source of the noise while Joan pushed past him in the narrow hallway. He was still listening to the final fading sound of the doorbell when Joan grabbed his arm.

"Are you OK, Hun?" she said loudly, then whispered. "I warned you, behave, just follow the script and you will be ok."

Joe gazed at her intently. "The script? What script?"

Joan's face froze in a pained smile.

"Oh no not now don't reject on me, Just concentrate remember who you are. Look just don't worry. Ok just play along. Alright?"

"Alright."

Joe replied as if he were trying out the phrase for the first time.

"Hi is everything alright?" Will asked as he walked down the hall.

"Oh fine." Said Joan quickly, "Erm, Joe was just saying how he felt a little under the weather. It's a cold or something I think."

Joan smiled at Joe. "Sorry to hear that, I really am. Are you sure you are up to going to the Sturgess place?"

Joe's mouth lolled open. For a moment Joan and Will stood waiting for him to say something. Instead of words a stream of green saliva pored down his chin.

Joe stood still but his mouth moved as he tried to speak, but the result was not words but another flood of saliva.

Joan pulled a handful of tissues from a box on the hall table. "Sorry." She said "Joe's not quite himself."

Allan Ginsberg's typewriter

I bought
Allan Ginsberg's portable
Olivetti typewriter
from a pawnshop in Liverpool
where he had left it
on an Autumn day in 1965
(I had to pay a bit extra for it
because it had his initials,
along with others,
scraped into the paint on the base)

he had used it
to get a ticket to somewhere
where people wanted to listen
but never come back.

it's a funny thing
old fashioned and stiff keyed
needing Allan Ginsberg fingers to caress
the naked bone of the key top
and always typing in his voice

first I wrote a poem to my mom
but it turned in to a familiar poem
about someplace I had never been
then I tried again
it wrote a song to Father Death
and every time I tried to write
it wrote as he had done
until Howl was written
twenty times

I soon realised that it would only work for him
so I scraped my initials onto the base
and pawned it
I made sure I never went back
so unless anyone bought it
it is probably still there
looking out onto the world
through the pawnshop window
looking old now

with the money I paid the deposit
on a new typewriter
and a pair of scissors

This has been published a number of times in anthologies but its first magazine publication was in Poetry Scotland 30. Its first outing was on the PK Poetry List in December 2001.

The Ferryman

the ferryman rows against the tide
as he takes us on to the others side
across the river that's deep and wide
the ferryman takes us over

one day he set off in wind and rain
his boat and he were not seen again
though all were drowned he still remains
the ferryman takes us over

he waits at the shore till his boat is full
then on the oars his great arms pull
across the river deep and dull
the ferryman takes us over

he battles on through storm and rain
his mighty arms ignore the pain
as he pulls the oars again and again
the ferryman takes us over

he rows by night and he rows by day
he rows each day of our lives away
and when we'll meet he will not say
the ferryman takes us over

with him we take our final ride
he takes us on to the other side
across the river deep and wide
the ferryman takes us over

Written in 2001, The Ferryman is a song that has become a sing-along favourite at performances, which is odd because it is about death, but it does have a nice tune. I usually get an impromptu choir together and make a great noise.

END OF SUMMER

Jake stood in front of his stall and looked along the promenade for customers. Occasional couples sat on the sea wall, while others walked, winter wrapped and huddled against the North wind. He could see the wooden pier stretching out its weathered hand to the white tipped waves racing in to spend themselves on the shingle beach. At one time people would come just to walk out on the pier, but now the entrance was boarded up and warning signs indicated that it was unsafe and ready to be demolished. It was the end of the summer. Jake knew all of the signs. The bustling, jostling crowds had gone back to their ordinary lives. And the bright summer days were becoming fewer.

Although his family had operated a whelk stall on the promenade for three generations, in Jake's time things had begun to change. Food regulations had forced him to change over to fancy goods. Then three years ago he had risked all his savings on machinery which enabled him to produce hot dogs and hamburgers. That had been a good move until a fast food restaurant had opened across the road. After this blow he had thought about giving up the stall and getting a 'real' job, but somehow he felt he would be letting down the family tradition. He was convinced things would get better.

Along the promenade other vendors stalls were closed and padlocked. They were all gone except for him. He sighed and half closed the wooden shutters. The rain was coming; he could sense it in the wind. When it arrived it would spell the end of business for the day.

He looked across the road and frowned. It was not the competition that bothered him but outside the restaurant was a giant clown, with arms akimbo, rocking back and forth laughing. It was intended to welcome visitors to the new restaurant but to Jake, after the worst summer season he had ever known, he saw the clown laughing at him and his efforts to make a living.

He went back into his stall and warmed himself by his paraffin heater as he leaned across the counter and surveyed the form at the afternoon horse racing. It was only a game he played, after all his one big claim to fame was his almost total lack of ability in picking a winner. His money would stay in the small cash box to be shared out over the bleak months until next summer.

The morning passed and he was not disturbed by customers. Rrain came in a downpour and went, and although the wind still blew it had lost its power. In early afternoon the promenade took on a cheerful face and people returned. Some walked along carrying Mackintoshes over their arm, while others tempted fate with light summer clothes. It looked to Jake like the day would not be a complete waste. "Perhaps the afternoon trade will be better." He said to himself as he gazed at the distant figures meandering along toward him.

One pair, a man and a young girl caught his eye. As they approached Jake could see the man was about forty but as he walked with his shoulders stooped from a distance he had appeared older. He had a furtive troubled look and Jake thought the man looked a lot like a Weasel, but a rich Weasel. His appearance and clothes cried affluence. Jake had never seen him before but he recognised the type. The pinstripe suit and the Fawn Crombi overcoat marked him as a professional person here on business, perhaps helping to sell or buy property, one of the hotels usually. The girl was about eight years old her long red hair bounced as she skipped along at his side. She was dressed tidily but in contrast to the Weasel her clothes looked inexpensive and had fitted better a few months ago.

As they drew near Jake could hear the girls incessant chatter. Then she caught sight of Jake's stall and began to get excited and point at it.

"Mister, mister." The girl was saying, "Will you buy me a doughnut? My mum won't mind, she'll give you the money when we find her." Jake watched the scene, his face a mask.

"No, no." The weasel said nervously. He knew Jake was watching and tried to avoid eye contact. "Come on." He said conspiratorially, keeping his voice low. "I'm sure she's just along the beach. As they walked past, the girl gazed up at the many items on sale on Jake's stall.

"Please mister." She said. "No, come on." The Weasel said.

Jake waited until they were nearly past the stall then went to open the side door. He intended to step out directly in the path of the Weasel in order to confront him. Instead he found the door was jammed. Hastily he scrambled out over his counter and dropped to the floor outside. As his foot hit the ground his ankle twisted under him and down he went with a

screech of pain. The Weasel and the girl were past the kiosk and were walking quickly away. He got back to his feet but his ankle sore to walk on, limping he set off after them. The man had hold of the girls arm, and although she was going with him she was looking round and by the look on her face obviously beginning to panic.

As Jake followed after them his ankle improved and he caught up. He put his hand on the mans shoulder and gripped tight hold of his coat.

"Just a minute. I don't know what going on," Jake said, "But I don't like what I see." The man turned round with a fright but seeing Jake, his mood changed.

"You don't see anything," the Weasel said, "Except you are assaulting me. So you let go now and we'll forget this happened."

"No, I don't think I can do that." Jake said. Before he had finished the Weasel began to pull away, trying to free himself. Jake took a firm hold and pulled him.

"Don't even think about it." Jake said. The Weasel looked into his eyes and saw he was not going to back down.

"Nothing has happened." The Weasel said as the colour drained from his face. "Its a misunderstanding, I can see how you might think the worst. I haven't done anything and I wasn't going to do anything, believe me." Jake laughed. "Believe you! No, I don't think so. This isn't right, she is nothing to do with you so what is going on?"

"You have it all wrong." The Weasel said regaining some composure, "I'm her uncle, you have no right to assault me, tell him Joanne, tell him I'm your uncle."

The girl stood silently looking up at the two men, her chin trembling as tears rolled down her cheek.

"I only wanted a doughnut." She said, "Please don't hurt him he promised to find my mummy."

"Don't worry love." Jake said kindly, "Just tell me is this man your uncle?"

"He's my uncle Stan." The girl said "He said to call him uncle Stan."

"Yes," said Jake, "How long have you known him?"

"Just met him down there." She pointed back along the promenade towards the pier. "He said he could help me find my mummy." She cried.

"Alright love." Jake said, "We'll find your mummy in a minute, I'll phone the police and they will take you home and I think they will want to talk to uncle Stan here."

"This just isn't necessary. You have made a big mistake. Look I told her I would help her find her mum. She looked lost, I was trying to help." The man pleaded. "Not the police, please, they'll think the worst like you. I was only trying to help her. Look nothing happened. It's a mistake." He began to pull away from Jake who, with his free hand, took hold of the mans left wrist,

"They know how to take care of the likes of you." Jake said. As he spoke the man lunged forward putting all of his weight behind his shoulder which struck Jake firmly in the chest. Jake stood firm,

"Oh, don't be silly." He said, and the man wilted in his grasp. It was obvious to Jake he had no stomach for a fight.

"Now you bugger, unless you have a better idea, I'm going to get the police." Jake was standing in front of the man who reached out and grabbed hold of him.

"Think about it." The man pleaded. "Think about the girl. What will she have to go through? For what? After all nothing happened, nothing."

Jake looked at the girl, she smiled a nervous smile.

"I'm sorry love. But there are some bad people in the world and this man was one of them. I'm going to get the police to take you home."

"Wait." The man shouted as Jake shifted his grip and pulled out his mobile phone. "Please I'll do anything. The girl's alright. I wasn't going to hurt her. Please don't do this. Look I'll give you anything I can." Jake stopped. Seeing Jake pay attention he said

"Look let me show you something." He took Jakes silence as approval and reached into his pocket and pulled out a bulging envelope. "There is cash here, over four thousand pounds I was taking to the bank, I can get you more."

Jake laughed and began to thumb a number into his phone

"No wait, that's not all." The man shrieked.

.....
Later in the early evening Jake sat counting his takings.

"A good days work." He thought. He flicked the bundle of notes, "This and the money I will get for his jewellery and his Rolex should stand us in good stead for the winter. It was a stroke of lucky him having all the cash and jewellery on him." Even better was the small packet of industrial grade diamonds he had in a small safe in his car.

"No need to resort to blackmail like those others." He pulled a note from the bundle. "Here, in the morning we will go and buy the dress we saw the other day." The girl looked at him with wide disbelieving eyes. "Oh thank you daddy." she said. Leaning forward to take the offered note then brushing away the red hair that had fallen across her face.

"Daddy, if you hadn't caught up with us what would have happened?" Jake looked at his daughter and saw the look on her face.

"You would have been alright, because Daddy will always be there for you. I won't let you down." He said.

End of Summer has been published in a few anthologies . First written in 2000 this version with slight revision for an anthology to be published in 2009. It went straight to book and was never published in a magazine.

the definition of art

white mesh honeycomb
transforms light as you move
changes shape
draws you in
makes you think
you are seeing
into other dimensions
it is all in the eye of course
but something happens here
the shadows live
like creatures in your mind
challenging you to make
new pictures
to move
to see it differently
confined only by your own
creation

the artist worked with
wire and shaped the skeleton
wound it with ribbon
to give it substance
bound it with plaster and paint
you could take a hammer
and reduce it to its parts
but like this
it is something else
something more than its parts
and connected to you
it is recreated
an infinite number of times
changes as you change
perhaps that is the definition of art

or perhaps it is our attempt
to interpret the frightening
unknown universe
and all that science
has left mankind
of the knowledge
we once called magic

This poem started as a commission for a brochure which was used to support an exhibition at the Tate. The exhibition was later called Frightening Universe after this poem.

A Place for the Night

We found the cellar on the second night as we were picking our way slowly over a debris field and I almost fell through the splintered trap door.

"Watch out! For Gods sake! Be careful." Tom yelled as my foot slipped through into a void and I tumbled sideways. Before I crashed into the bricks and broken wood he grabbed me and pulled me back.

"This is stupid." He said. "One of us will get hurt."

"Right well why are we here?" I asked angrily. "Who was it who said we would stay put when everyone else was leaving? Who was it who decided to head back into the zone instead of going to the medical centre?"

"You know what we heard about the med centres and there must be a chance we will find a place in here somewhere."

I didn't want to tell him that we would not get much further before dark and that there were so many pockets of fire and that by clawing our way over the debris field we could fall through into one at any time. I didn't want to tell him because it was so bloody obvious and anyway it hardly mattered anymore. For the hundredth time today I resisted the urge to scream long and hard at the top of my voice. Instead I took a look at our two children, Lisa who was seven and Jack just three years older, who were all out on their feet, and wondered if we would ever find anywhere safe for a night.

"I think this is it." I said, "I don't think I can go any further. We are all dead on our feet.. The children can't go on. We will just have to make some sort of shelter here." Tom just nodded in reply.

We began to gather some of the debris which could make some sort of shelter for us. But when Tom tried to move the panel my foot had gone through, he discovered the opening with the wooden stairway leading down into a black hole. Our torch showed that they led down into a cellar and although it was damp and musty, and Lisa insisted she could hear something moving round down in the dark, we decided that this was to be the place we would spend the night. Tom went down first and set up some of the candles from our survival pack, then shouted for us. I followed with the children.

The space that opened up as we climbed down the stairway was dry and at least had a roof and was enclosed. The cellar had been a large storage area and workshop with wooden crates and cardboard boxes stacked against one wall and shelves full of tools and work benches against the other. There was a slight smell of sawn wood and some crates in various stages of manufacture. There had been a collapse and the roof at the far end had caved in, but in spite of this the rest of the roof was secure and appeared safe.

We rummaged round and found some useful items. There were cardboard boxes and we took out the packing, bundled together some old paper and bits of a broken box and carefully lit a fire near the foot of the stair. Other cardboard boxes were broken up and flattened to make beds and we placed a packing case and a wooden crate for a table with four small boxes for seats. I took out the last of the food from my pack. Tom took the last few pieces of our bread and examined them. Then he took a pocket knife and scraped off the mould which was starting to appear. I made a couple of dry sandwiches from the bread and the bits of cheese that were left and was starting to wrap the odd bits of cheese when Tom came over and whispered to me.

"Use it all, we won't need any more after tonight."

We sat round the table to eat the sandwiches.

"Is that all there is mum?" Jack asked when he saw his sandwich.

"Yes." I replied. "That's all for now but here you are you can have mine too. I'm not hungry." I cut my piece of sandwich in half and gave a piece to each of the children. .

"Here,," said Tom, "you can have mine too. But when you have had that you need to sleep."

They eat in airy silence, sitting quietly, chewing slowly, their eyes wide with tiredness and fear.. My two bubbly giggling children were just a memory now. Over the past few days they had become quieter as we had trudged from one Army Decon unit to the next, each time only to be turned away to follow other trudging people to the next one.

"We will see if we can find something else for the morning but for now you need to sleep."

He hesitated for a moment then reached into his trouser pocket and took out the pill box a soldier had given him at the checkpoint earlier today before he had turned us back.

"If we all take three of these we will get a good sleep and I am sure we will find some help tomorrow." He put the box on the table and turned away, then as an after thought he reached across and kissed the children and smiled. "I'm just going to look round outside. Take the tablets and get a good sleep" He said and climbed up the steps to the entrance.

I looked at the pill box then slowly took it and opened it. As I emptied the tablets onto my hand I felt like laughing. Once again here I was having to take responsibility for the family. I sorted out the tablets, gave three each to the children and gave them the last of the water to help them swallow

Lisa and Jack lay down on the makeshift beds and I put their coats over them like blankets. I sat on the floor between them and for a few minutes I stroked their heads and hummed. They were so tired that they just lay very quiet and still and then in moments they were asleep. Gradually all sounds of breathing stopped.

I followed Tom up the steps to the opening. It was dark now. He was sitting on a ledge at the top of the stairs looking out across the wasteland. He turned when he heard me his face streaming with tears. And each tear track cut through the grime and reflected the light from the cellar like rods of lightning.

"Is it...? Are they...? He asked.. I nodded

"How could it have happened?" He asked, "Someone must have known. They must."

I stayed silent, too tired to speak, too sad to blame anyone, too torn with grief to care why it had been *my* job to hand out the pills. I sat on the ledge and held out my hand, Tom reached over to take it, but instead I opened it and he saw the three tablets I had brought for him. He took them from me and for a moment looked like he was going to hug me, or kiss me or say something that mattered instead, "I don't understand any of this." was all he said. Then he pushed the tablets into his mouth and struggled to swallow them. He coughed and started to gag. "Water" was all he managed to say. I ran down to see if there was any water left for him, grabbed the bottle but it was empty and when I got back he was lying still propped against a low wall with his feet dangling into the cellar and a tortured strangled look on his face..

I sat for a while next to him at the edge of the opening, looking round at the flattened and burning buildings, the mounds of rubble that had been the markers for people's lives. I wondered why it had come to this, but as always there were only more questions and no answers.

After sitting for a while, I dragged him down into the cellar and lay him next to the children and I lay down on the floor between Lisa and Jack. The sores that had been growing on my arms and face were hurting now and I was starting to feel sick. I took out the pill box and looked at David in the dying glow. "You didn't count them, you bastard. You couldn't even get that right for me." As the fire died I lay between my children and hoped sleep would come soon.

I wrote this in 2003 but lost track of it. It began turning up online in 2008 with the author unidentified and so to lay claim to it I submitted it to Writers Forum who published it finally with my name on it.

secret city blues

when I came here I saw twelve men
carve their way through the carbon night
while outside the moon played on the walls
a landscape fashioned after mountains
a memory of caves that kept men safe
hands held fingers twisted like rope
two butchers fought with knives unstrapped
like an argument after Sunday lunch
and in some backdrop lot of unseen movies
wasted men drink from bottles in brown bags

street corner gangs eye trash-can sorters
looking through you like you do them
an old women recycling filth carrying bags
pushing a pram full of cans and bottles
secret doorways into other peoples lives
open as she passes and close just as fast
as she leaves her presence in a smell
hanging like a memory in the air
muttering as she does the unheard words
from a conversation in her past

the dogs in hunting packs
haunt the alleyways pick over trash
burrow in the organic mass
of rotting food behind the restaurants
ignore the screech of breaks
and sirens from the road
the shouts and screams and tears
the brutal laughter from the bars
the moaning sound of copulation

the whore with her panties down
and the man who falls to the ground
dead drunk both pissing in the darkness
as steam rises from the gutters and grills
I splash between the pools of light
street lights and flashing traffic lights
cars taxis and busses scraping along
clogging the air with tar gas
painting buildings grey to black
among the smiling signs
and easy backstreet buggary
that is New York

here I walk with ghosts
Chandler Runyan and Ginsberg
and listen to Lou Reed
Dylan and ten million others
as I mouth the words of the Secret City Blues

Written in 2007 and published in Orion this poem brought me my sixth Pushcart nomination.

from end to beginning

from backwards to front
it all makes sense
in a none sort of way
we're all bits of a puzzle
without a solution
perhaps or because
it's quite hard to say

there was a man
who went backwards
when he should have gone
forwards
who turned the wrong way
whenever he could
said it was just
the way that he did things
said that was all
if he couldn't he would

there was a man who turned
sideways
another who hopped
and one who's
a dancer
then there is he
who gets it all right
in his own sort of way
without ever a no
a yes or maybe

there's a man
writing numbers
from trains that go past
and another
counts birds
as he jumps on the spot
but he can't tell you why
he's incredibly different
writing poetry that can
but mostly can not

A poem that means something to me, written in 2007. Unpublished till now.

explaining the lack of punctuation

words sit like captives
shackled by stops and comas
the paraphernalia of punctuation
that lends meaning to the ink

but words were not born
to sit on musty pages
or to be locked in libraries
to be picked over and dissected

they are wild born to ride the air
to be spoken and heard
to touch
to move
to be
just for a moment

to leave their mark
in a tear
a laugh
as a smile upon your lips
and like me
to be made complete by you

As close to explaining or a manifesto as I go. Unpublished.

rust

on the corner of the document
there is a metal staple
over the years
it has imprinted itself
two brown lines
of rust stain
sit either side of it
train tracks of rust
three lines like
prison bars
111
a diagonal page number
or the room number at
the Chelsea

the solicitor
coughs
tells me to turn the page
he reads on
the staple and its stain
are hidden by the fold
at least now there
may be a chance of
listening
but in the centre of the page
there is the
squashed final
remains of a small fly
its wings
forever spread
as it tries to fly
just one last time

This is one of the 56 poems I wrote at the start of 2008 as a series of autobiographical poems each representing something from each year. The whole series is available online free from the Poetry Kit website www.poetrykit.org

changed in subtle ways

the land changed in subtle ways
as unfolding green stalks
bristle the hillside and reflect
in the bookshop window
the book titles craze
in rainwater lenses

on the road outside
the Orange Tree Café
the cars and busses
bustle through the junction
taking turns at traffic lights
sending waves of
stranded rainwater
across the pavement

the land changed in subtle ways
as the ghosts of hills
undulate across
Tesco's car park
and grass squeezes through
a pavement crack
remembering a meadow

Written in 2008 this was published in New Poetry.

Lost in Manhattan

the clouds creep from ground level
climbing the glass tower until they fall off
into the sky without a splash

on the other side of the road
they reflect in other towers
and towers reflecting towers reflecting towers
reflecting clouds
until you don't know which is real

glass bridges and polished concrete walls
people who have lost direction
in the glass chasms
gaze at reflections that are mirrored
in their eyes like glass
eyes that search the air above them
at every broken sound

the world is at the horizon
far above their heads
like Lazarus they are silent
but unable to contain the words
they cover the walls with a silent testimony

that's how it is when you are lost
in a place called Manhattan
and wondering
what is real

This is the most recent poem to be accepted and it is to be published in Poetry Magazine early in 2009

Duet

A poem by Jim Bennett and Lesley Burt

you told me about
your visit to New Orleans
the way you escaped the heat
in a courtyard
shaded by dusty magnolias
it must have been good
the way you spoke about it
buds THAT BALLOON INTO blooms
the size of dinner plates
you made me see it
like I was there

the iced coffee
the sound of jazz from the street
the smells you described
like aromas of Cajun from the kitchen

you even told me how
a sparrow collected crumbs
from a half-eaten Po' Boy
left on a wrought-iron table.
I told you about the Dylan song
called Po' Boy
and how the title
made more sense now

I heard on TV about the storm
the floods and the destruction
when I remembered what you said
your voice sprang up
like the sound of a jazz guitar
playing in the street
a music I could hear
I took my guitar and played
a duet

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This is the title poem from my next project which will be a series of collaborations. I am grateful to Lesley for all her help.

as cool as the sound of jazz

it's late, gig over, I should be on my way home
I suppose I can convince myself that I am
but the roads are mysterious and the night air
is as cool as the sound of jazz
drifting from a basement club in Basin Street
the car takes me down roads to see where they go
some place I know but different
shadows like a sheet
change familiar shapes into strangers
ghosts of friends
here the sound is the rhythm of tyres
clipping on the edge of concrete road slabs
another time it will be the slap slap slap of windshield wiper
and another the distant sound Dave Brubeck
on the CD player
volume turned down low
and maybe some words will come and I can speak them like a song
to the slap slap slap slap slap slap of the tyres
or maybe not
but it must be time to find some familiar place
time to find my way home
out of the seductive never ending streets
away from the music
away from the cool air
away from the comfort of night
back to the room where the sound is imprisoned by walls
swallowed by carpets and curtains
back to the place where tomorrow
demands to be organised
back to the place where darkness is trapped
and night holds its secrets behind a closed door
where dreams wait
but just for now the road is empty
yellow street lamp lit
traffic lights all on green
the car window open brings in the scent of early autumn
and for now just for now
life is as cool as the sound of jazz

This was written in 2004 and is one of my personal favourites. I close most of my readings with it. It was published on line in Loch Raven Review and in two anthologies.