

Assortment of poems for use in schools

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CHILDHOOD TRAUMA:

Kapok Pillow

Dad was one of the 'Rats of Tobruk'
 & at home during my early
childhood
 we often had our own private
theatre of war

dad going awol from work
 drinking the day away . . .
to stagger home mid-afternoon
& throw missiles around
 barking orders like the
RSM he never was

if we were lucky he might just
fall into bed
 still in his y-fronts & singlet
& far too drunk to reach his socks
 he'd gradually fill the ashtray
on his bedside table
 & if luck stayed with us –
he'd likely go off on the nod

i remember lifting a red brick
alongside the veranda
one hot summer's day after school
 & grabbing our front door key

there was a strange smell when i
let myself in
 a smell i couldn't recognise –
& i panicked

i tip-toed through the hallway slowly . . .
checked the kitchen & the laundry
looking for mum then the clothes line –
but she didn't seem to be
anywhere

i kept sniffing the air
calling softly in my little boy's voice
mum mum are you there

yet nothing came back but a smell
which i could only sense as death

after weeks of dad's drinking
& arguments
& threats
& broken crockery
& living with the fear
i inched my way along
the passage
sniffing the acrid air . . .
& when i got to the toilet
the door was flung wide open
& the white porcelain pan was
choked high above the wooden
seat with a charry mess

it gave off the smell of death
& i looked around for an axe
i thought it was my mother's
torso

my tears & wails brought him
out of the bedroom
 unsteady in his grey socks
he slurred
 ya mum's out shopping
don't worry about that mess –
i went to sleep with a cigarette
 i stuffed me pillow down
the toilet & pulled the chain
 it's gone out now . . .
ya mother'll be in soon
 go outside & get some fresh air . . .
go on

& he turned on his heels
 & staggered back to bed.

Rats of Tobruk: The name given to the predominantly Australian soldiers of the garrison who held the Libyan port of Tobruk against the Afrika Corps, during the siege of Tobruk in WW2.

RSM: Regimental Sergeant Major

TEENAGE TRAUMA:

Changing Gears

Even today over forty years rush by
at the speed of sound
each time i approach the intersection
of Henley Beach & Tapleys Hill Road

i was stationary at the traffic lights
that particular summer's morning
sitting on my BSA Gold Flash

a screech of tyres alerted me
 & then the sounds of crushing
metal & shattered glass before
the hiss & rise of steam
 & though mid-morning on a
Saturday
 there came a stillness then
that still spooks me even now

it was the front seat passenger from
the car with the broken windscreen
i saw first
 she looked close to full-term in her
flowery smock
 had both her hands cupped around
her nose
 but even then i was thinking of her
unborn child . . .
until she dropped her hands & i saw
her nose was spliced across the bridge
back to her cheeks

i'd like to say i was an urban hero
 tell you how i kicked the side-stand
out & ran to her aid
 but i was barely sixteen & the flow
of blood terrified me

all i could do was click the gear lever
one-up & let the clutch out quickly
 hell i've seen plenty of blood
since then –
 much of it my own

i'll never know if she & her unborn baby
made it through safely
 my only hope is they did . . .
& that she doesn't remember that day
anywhere near as clearly
 as i still do.

CHALLENGING PARENTAL AUTHORITY:

Don't Call Me Lad

Don't call me lad

dad

just don't call me lad

got more hair on my balls dad

than y'v got

or had

i'm eighteen years old man

& i'll sink or i'll swim

just don't call me lad

dad

my name is James

or just Jim

& now that i vote dad

my party is green

get away with those flags dad

red & blue are both mean

y' can roll up y'r sleeves dad

& slip on y'r tie

y' can rant & lay guilt trips

but i'll spit in y'r eye

*yeah i grow some plants dad
but i'm keeping it cool
four's not a plantation
i'm not such a fool*

*i just can't find a job dad
year twelve was a waste
two friends have just died dad
too much of a taste*

*yeah i get the dole dad
though it don't do much good
but don't call me lad*

dad

i'd work if i could

*now i'm mellowing out man
this home-grown is just wild
so don't call me lad*

dad

i'm no longer a child

so don't call me lad

dad

i'm no longer a child.

Don't Look So Glum

Don't look so glum mum
 don't look so glum
was that a finger
or a thumb mum
 don't look so glum

i've been out having fun mum
 yeah out havin' fun
don't poke out your tongue mum
 don't look so glum

my homework is done mum
 stop wavin' y'r gun
all assignments are done mum
 don't look so glum

you're old & i'm young mum
 your best days are done
dad's been gone f'r five years mum
 don't look so glum

yeah i've tattooed my bum mum
 & put a stud through my tongue
it's not the end of the world mum
 don't look so glum

i don't do hard drugs mum
 i go to parties for fun
so get off my case mum
 don't look so glum

sure my skirt's a bit short mum
but you can't see my bum
don't nag me again mum
i'm dressed to have fun

i practice safe sex mum
i'm not particularly dumb
i get love & respect mum
don't look so glum

it's a mad crazy world mum
& i need to have fun
year twelve is a drag mum
three months & it's done
yeah leave me alone mum
three months & it's done.

FIRST LOVE EXPERIENCE:

Even Now

It was 1961 & i was hovering
on thirteen years of age

i was less than a mile from the
starkness of my own street with
its unmade road

 ambling along Galway Avenue –
mid-afternoon

 the sun warming my back . . .
filtered light flecking the footpath
through the white cedars

 & young saplings reaching up
from the wide median strip
alive with the sounds of native birds

it was then i first saw Roslyn

she was twelve & a half wore pigtails
tied with blue ribbon

 & a check dress that sat high
above her knees

i don't know how i found the courage
to chat her up

 i think i began by commenting
on how tiny her freckles were to mine
 but maybe i'm just imagining that . . .
hell this was over fifty years ago

we were standing in dappled shade
 a stone's throw from Mrs Day's
kindergarten so maybe i'd asked
if she'd gone there too

after five minutes of small talk
 all the while both of us moving
from foot to foot
 i began to make a move . . .
& in hindsight so did she

we took off hand-in-hand retracing
her steps
 looking for somewhere private

i wanted to kiss her
 & i'd made my intentions clear

i hadn't kissed a girl before

at the time i shared a bedroom
with two younger brothers
 & when i knew i was alone . . .
i'd practice on the dressing table
mirror always careful to wipe away
any evidence

at the end of Collingrove Ave we came
across a red brick Baptist Church
 & on the side a small porch –
its white wooden doors unlocked

once inside my hands were full
of her & hers with me –
& when our wet tongues touched
 i felt my knees begin to buckle

maybe i became too big for my britches
 anyway –
i must have scared her because she
pulled away & stuttered she had to go
 yet promised she'd meet me
the following day at four o'clock

& even now each time i pass that
red brick church i keep an eye out
for her
 just as i did that following day

& even now when i do think of her
 my breath quickens.

CONFRONTING A DEATH:

Like Now

i.m. Heather l'Anson

29th December 1942 – 2nd February 2019

It's just a few minutes past
11:00am on a Friday morning
that time when people can
be seen making their way back
to work
brushing cake crumbs
from their suits & dresses
catching their reflections
in shop windows & adjusting
their clothes & smiles
buzzing on double espressos
soy lattes Irish breakfast
or perhaps the day's conquests

it's quiet in this room
but i can still hear traffic
rumbling along Semaphore Road

we are here to farewell one
of our own
we won't see Heather's image
reflected again
not unless it's in print . . .
she's taken off
deserted us
she's gone to the other side

Heather was always a mystery
woman

she'd sit at Semaphore cafes
in summer sun wearing dark glasses
reading the newspaper

a white cane & her kelpie Zita
keeping her company

but she was always taking in
more than just newsprint

no-one she knew would get past her

here he is she'd say

gee i love those red Speedos
they're just great

but there were other times i reckon
Heather would have rather seen me
without them

like those Friday afternoons when she'd
tap her cane past Lucias at the Market

she'd spot me & stop to say
gee i love those red shoes
they are bloody beautiful

then as quick as she arrived
she'd be gone

like now.

The Punter

i.m. Mark Walter Goodfellow 'Bluey' died 21st March 2013

Blue was a White Ox man
 dead at sixty
jack dancer of the nanny goat
 none of us overly
surprised
 it could equally have been
cirrhosis of the liver
 & anyway –
an autopsy may have well
proven it was neck & neck

i remember the first time i saw
Blue have a whack
 Noel & Linda tying his arm off
in the shed at Copley Street
 they didn't see me that night
in my rubber soled shoes
 insulated from that shit –
& anyway
 they were all too busy & self
absorbed
 & i slipped away into the
darkness . . .
 silently & unannounced

Blue slipped away into the darkness too
 thirty-five years later

though he'd slipped away on the
gear a few times too
 he was in his twenties then –
but he woke up & gave the shit away

i can't see the romance in it really
it turns my guts to think of
the ulcer he had in the crook of his
left arm
though he generally wore his
flanny shirts sleeve down
in those days

over his last six months
he still went up to the TAB
as often as he could
he knew the odds were
stacked against him when they
finally got his diagnosis right
he didn't seem to care though –
always on the lookout for a long-shot
he just kept on with the punt.

ICE, THE DRUG RUINING LIVES:

True Love

I met him in the education block
at the youth training centre
 he had a mop of blond hair –
dull lifeless eyes & lay slumped
in his seat like a seal

i've got nuffin ta write about
he mumbled

write about what you're in here for
i suggested

he rolled the puppy fat resting on his
shoulders & said

it's juss fer robbin a store

you're kidding me son
how old are you

i'm furteen

& how did all this go down

i wen inta a servo wif a pair
a sizzers & sed
givvus ya money

but th bloke he juss laft at me

*it made me angry so i fort
i'd try en kill im
i swung at his froat
but he moved back & i couldn't
get me arm in far enuf
cos of th bars*

*then i had to back off
i had ta go fer th door*

*the coppers got me juss down
th road*

*i reely didn't no wot i was doin
i'd been on th ice en booze
fer five days*

*i juss reely wanna get out now
so i can get back on th ice
i luv it.*