

Creative Writing Workbook: Carers' Words, Carers' Lives



A practical guide to writing and reflection

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"We need our voices to be heard. In creative writing we find our voices, our innermost feelings, our sacrifices...the effects of being a carer." **Carer, creative writing workshop**



Creative Writing Workbook: Carers' Words, Carers' Lives

A practical guide to writing and reflection

*"Part of me is trying to speak.
Part of me is trying to be heard..."* **Hazel**

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*Creative Writing Workbook:
Carers' Words, Carers' Lives*

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INTRODUCTION: Why we have created this workbook

This creative writing workbook emerges from our belief in the importance of hearing carers' voices and sharing their stories.

An unpaid carer is someone who looks after a friend, family member or neighbour who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction could not cope without their support.

For two years, Care for the Carers has been privileged to work with a writer in residence – poet Evlynn Sharp whose creative writing workshops support carers to reflect on, and share, their experiences.

More than 300 carers have taken part, and many common themes arise. Some carers express their loss of self-identity, loneliness, isolation – and their desire to be heard.

We have learnt so much from the writing project; this workbook is designed to pass on our learning. It can be used individually or to facilitate groups and workshops, so we can all share in the power of creative writing.

I give thanks to the wonderful carers who bravely share their experiences, in both film and creative writing – their stories continue to inspire and motivate me, every day.

A legacy of carers' voices is so precious, and I am delighted to introduce this workbook – created in 2019 to mark the 30th anniversary of Care for the Carers. I leave the last words to a carer who has taken part in our project:

"Honesty is so important to me, its power has healed me. Its inspiration has healed others... I choose to speak. Because I will no longer be silenced." **Finn, *How Can I Speak?***

JENNIFER TWIST

Chief Executive
Care for the Carers
January 2019



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GUIDANCE: How to use this creative writing workbook

Throughout the book, there are examples of carers' writing along with starter lines and ideas for your own writing and reflection on specific themes. You can use the exercises in or out of sequence, and return to do a writing task again as your responses will be different.

The exercises are open to everyone. Depending on your access needs, you might want additional support such as someone who will be your scribe to note down your ideas and responses. Only ever attempt an exercise if you feel safe to do so. Writing can raise issues – if anything arises you find difficult to deal with, please make sure you seek support.

GETTING STARTED

Here are the basics to get you started, then just choose for yourself what exercises in the book are best for you – there is no right or wrong approach in creative writing.

Basic technique Freewriting is an ideal way to write about anything. Write down your thoughts in response to a starter line, or topic, without pausing to think about punctuation, spelling, grammar, or what you are writing. The idea behind freewriting is when you know the theme, starter line, and length of exercise, you keep writing without stopping. Even if you think, 'I don't know what to write' – then write that down! Let your thoughts travel through the pen, onto the page, and keep your pen moving across the page so your writing flows. Keep on writing even if you seem to move off a theme or an idea.

Suggested length of exercises Using the suggested timings for your writing such as an exercise of 10 minutes can be helpful to contain emotions. It means you know you can write for a short time and end the exercise, shifting your energy and mood.

Basic material A ballpoint pen. A supply of white, unlined A4 paper. Without the limitation of lines, the blank page is best to use for creative writing exercises.

Writer's journal A notebook is helpful for self-reflection and exploration of the writing process. Choose a journal that suits your purpose – from a small spiral-bound pad to a large, eco-friendly notebook – to record your thoughts about the writing process, your ideas, questions, quotes, dreams, writing, creative expansions.

Where and when Write any time and anywhere that is comfortable for you, in or outside your home – at the kitchen table, or in a café, or even on the bus.

HOW TO RUN A GROUP

The key to running workshops is goodwill, good planning and preparation, and being mindful of the safety and wellbeing of participants.

Host Establish that relationship of goodwill between yourself and the host charity or organisation. Thank the staff for their support and contribution. Everyone can share a sense of ownership of the project. Agree a protocol

that includes roles, arrangements, outcomes, deadlines, equality and diversity policy, data protection, evaluation, copyright permission.

Basics Be sure to have the basics in place: your Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, public liability insurance, training in group facilitation and safeguarding.

Facilitation If you have no experience of running groups then attend workshops so you can watch other people at work. Develop the craft of facilitation and review your own practice. Be mindful of human behaviour: if issues arise, remember it is nothing personal.

Preparation – venue Before any course or workshop, make sure all the arrangements are in place. Do a risk assessment of the venue – check out access, privacy, heating, refreshments, seating arrangements. Check health & safety procedures plus arrangements for locking up.

Course – promotion Make sure people have been informed about the workshop or course. Find out if any participants have specific needs and ensure accessibility.

Workshops – content Structure a workshop with care and attention, decide on themes for the workshop or course, and use accessible exercises. Prepare more exercises than you will use. The role of a group facilitator needs to be outlined, and how the group will be run.

Make clear to participants what you are inviting them to do such as read out an extract of a poem relevant to the theme, then read out the text of an exercise so everyone is sure how to start writing.

Always give two starter lines so people can make a choice, or they might use both lines in the writing. If someone is uncertain about starting, outline the exercise again. Explain how, by using freewriting, people can write whatever they are thinking about, even if their response seems unrelated to the theme. Make exercises engaging and accessible.

Materials Group facilitators must bring to the workshop a plentiful supply of pens, white A4 paper plus, if required, blank A5 postcards, drawing pencils, soft pastels, art paper.

Safe space Create an atmosphere of safety and trust so participants can feel safe, respected, and well heard. Invite everyone to contribute one expectation for the group such as close listening, confidentiality, or time for each individual to share.

Some people might not be able to write, so make sure someone else can be their scribe. Be aware that not everyone may want to share their writing, and this is okay.

Start and finish After welcoming people to the group, you can use a form of check-in that is like a creative writing exercise. The group poem on page 12 is an example of spoken responses. Leave enough time at the end of a group to do a brief check-out, which might be a word or two that sums up how each person is feeling.

Timing Give enough time to participants who want to share their own writing – or someone else can read out their work. If people prefer not to share then just ask for their thoughts on the process of writing.

If people go over time in reflection, gently remind them of expectations – and ensure everyone has equal time for their sharing.

Responses Writing goes deep and can be upsetting; an exercise may spark different emotional responses from sadness to anger, bringing tears or hurt. Inform people that whatever comes up in the writing, it is all right. If conflict occurs then name this and address it. Ensure flexibility in your practice and be a strong holder of the group.

Supporting one another Some of the topics and the writing produced may be challenging for participants. Ensure the environment is supportive, where people can speak openly, listen and care for each other.

ACCESS

If you are preparing a workshop for people with specific access needs such as British Sign Language (BSL) translation then make sure you arrange for support well in advance. If you plan other tasks that relate to the writing exercises, make sure you have access to equipment and technology such as the Internet, television, CD player, musical instruments.

Access needs Always ensure that access needs are addressed prior to the group session. If necessary, the group facilitator can seek training in access. If you need an accessible version of an exercise then plan this resource ahead of time.

Accessible exercises The exercises in this workbook can be adapted for use by people with different needs such as people with visual and hearing impairments, cognitive disabilities,

or motor skills issues. If a person with visual impairment comes to a group, then the facilitator can carefully read out the extract of an exercise, make tasks visually descriptive, or download a digital version of this workbook for use with screen reading software.

If you are facilitating a group of people who may respond more to visual stimuli, the suggested poems with each exercise could be substituted for a picture-based option. For example, you could use an image or a piece of music instead of a poem to explore a theme.

People with certain forms of dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism or physical or motor disabilities might prefer to engage with an exercise through drawing pictures, painting or clay modelling. Charades, illustrations, and the board game Pictionary are alternative ways to explore the themes suggested in this workbook.

Subtitled short films on Care for the Carers' website and YouTube channel are suitable to use in creative arts workshops with groups of people or individuals who have a hearing impairment.

This workbook is available to access in audio format via Care for the Carers' website: www.cftc.org.uk

If you have access to a local hearing resource centre, someone from there may be able to participate in your session and provide BSL translation.

Care for the Carers provides information on its website about organising accessible events and workshops. It can give links to information about ensuring accessibility in the design of the materials tailored to groups with different needs.





A WOMAN WHO DEFINES HERSELF (extract) – Roxy

I am a woman who was a child with hopes
And dreams. I am the woman who is thinking.
I am a woman who overthinks,
Who goes deep into understanding
How we all work.

I am a woman who throws in key words
To stop overthinking...
I am the woman whose mind never rests,
I can't deal with this feeling.
I am a woman who has so much to say
But says so little.

I don't want to cry today.

"When I think about myself, I generally shudder. I never think about what others may be thinking about me. They may be right, but I hope they are wrong." **John,**
When I think about myself (extract)

Starter lines

When I think about myself...
I am a person who...

Theme

The theme of this exercise is exploration of the self. People sometimes say they wonder who they are as they hardly recognise themselves at times. Sometimes they become surprised by their reactions to people and situations in life. Roxy's *A woman who defines herself* suggests she is looking back and returning to the present moment. Tallulah's contemplative poem on page 10 goes deeply into her exploration of the 'I am' topic. John's quote shows what happens when he thinks about himself.

Writing and reflection exercise

Reflect for 10 minutes on the nature of who you are, past and present, when you think about yourself. This exercise is not about boundaries or labels that society might project. It is about writing from your innermost self. Choose one of the starter lines, and write without stopping for 10 minutes. Take 10 minutes more to reflect on your writing and your identity.

Inspiration

When I think about myself, in Maya Angelou:
The Complete Collected Poems.

RECESSES AND SHADOW (extract) – Tallulah

I am a woman
And part of me
Who has a face,
A physical face.

I don't look at myself.
I don't see myself.

Very often
The matching cover
Is not me.

I catch myself,
And I don't recognise me,
The outward sleeve I wear
Is not me inside.

I am a woman at odds
With the inside out.
The inside is absent,
And the outside...not me,
But it's a part of me,

Inconceivable,
Inconclusive,

I am awash inside,
Matching me up inside out,
Outside in,

A part of space...
A part of me...

Put the pieces back together,
There is no order to me,
Which is a part of me,

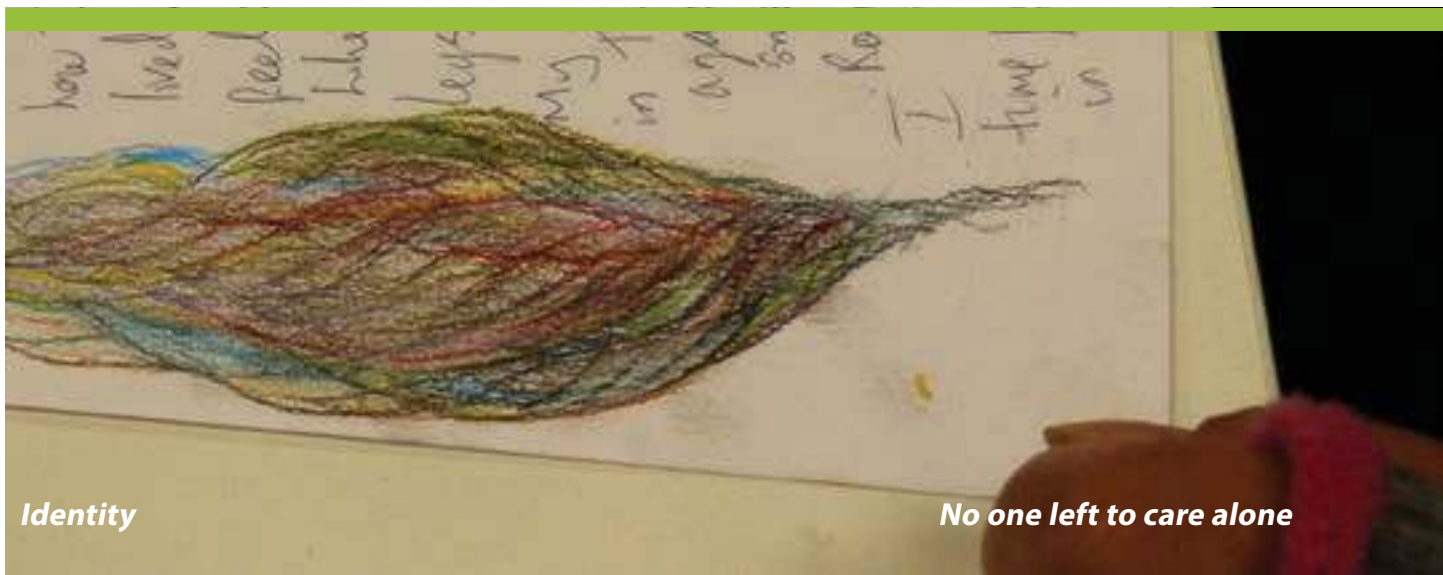
Tell me, answer myself,
What woman am I?
Who cares to put me back
Together...


It's only me,
A puzzle,
A jigsaw...

Look, there I am,
You can just catch a smidgen,
A sliver,
A darting shadow,
A slip of an eye,
Here I am.

See me, there I am,
In the corners,
Recesses,
Hiding,
In plain sight,
There I go again,

Did you see,
Did you?
Here I am
Parts of me,
I wish to see.





"It helps to be with others who have a wealth of experience and skills to share and learn from. I hope to use writing as a channel for lots of emotions in the future." **Carer's reflection, creative writing workshop**

SOME PEOPLE (extract) – Babs, Carole, Hazel, Heather, Lea, Meena, Roxy, Seerché, Tallulah with Evlynn

Some people know what it is like to be lonely –
That's what I've felt most of my life –
And some people don't.

Some people know what it's like to be depressed –
Other people's lives have affected my own.
And some people don't.

Some people know what it's like to have anxiety –
A constant fear, so you can't get on with normal life,
It just repeats. And some people don't.

Some people know what it's like to be tired –
Far too much is expected of me. Some people don't.

Some people know what it's like to be alone.
I have always felt like an outcast,
Even in my family. Some people don't.

Some people know what it's like to be repressed,
To be controlled. I can't do what I want to do...
And some people don't.

Some people know what it's like to be thoughtful –
But I often think too much...it can get worse when
It does not stop. And some people don't.

Some people know what it's like to be uneverything –
Cool, calm, collected, I have seen it –
And some people don't.

Some people know what it's like to have humour!
To be crazily funny!! Humour can just turn difficult situations
Into liveable ones...absolute diamonds...Some people...

Writing and reflection exercise

Some People shows you can find your authentic, poetic voice just by responding to a specific statement such as what some people know or don't know. Take 10 minutes and write using any of the lines in the group poem. The exercise is a reminder of different people's views in the community. You can draw source material from anywhere, and enjoy the process of making choices to inspire your writing.



THIS MAN'S LIFE – Michael

Where could I start,
About what to tell you?

I am a patient man,
With so many things to say;

I put on a mask
To help me forget;

I work, and never stop working.
It's all about time, these days.

I look for the next job,
I just get it out the way.

These days, it's all time.
Up at 3am.
Up at 5am.
Up all night.

I do the ironing at 5am.
I do the vacuuming after 7am.

I won't say any more.
So many things have happened
To this man;

This man –
Where could I start?

Starter line

Behind the mask, I am a person who...

Writing and reflection exercise

This exercise expands on the theme of identity and inner journeys. It can be quite usual to put on a protective mask around others – perhaps to hide grief, or anger, or insecurities, or to keep a distance so to try and cope with everyday life. In *This Man's Life*, Michael reflects why he puts on an outer mask – to help him forget.

Only attempt this exercise if you want to explore the notion of masks and masking feelings. Write for 10 minutes using the starter line or a line from Michael's poem. If possible, take 15 minutes more to think about any masks you might wear in the world, and note down your thoughts and insights in your writer's journal.



No one left to care alone

Masks and mirrors

THE STRANGER (extract) – Seerché

Part of me is a stranger to the reflection
I see in the mirror.
I saw a wild creature
With wide eyes and wild hair.
Was I scared?
Is that who I am?
Or is it who I want to be?
What is my nature?

Part of me hates the pain I feel
When I am close to others.
Part of me doesn't exist in certain circles
Of this world.
Part of me doesn't want to exist.

But then, also, part of me wants to be alive,
To feel the cold breeze of the morning on my face,
And the smell of the first rain after a drought.

I love the smell of rain.
I love the sky when it's filled
With pink and orange colours,
And I love a good cup of tea
On late Sunday afternoon...



Starter lines

Part of me is a stranger to myself...
In the mirror of myself, I see a person who is...
In the mirror of me, you would find a person who...

Writing and reflection exercise

Seerché's reflective poem *The Stranger* presents her mirror of reflection and the condition of herself. Imagine looking into a mirror of yourself. Use one of the starter lines, or a line of your choice, and write for 10 minutes. Later, take 20 minutes and reflect in your journal on your writing, on what it mirrors back to you, and, if you wish, on what happens when you engage with your creative process.

Inspiration

The exercise is inspired by Fazal Inayat Khan's *Mirror* poem (extract):
"When I look into your eyes, I see the reflection of my own heart. When I look beyond your eyes, I see my own existence. When only the look is left, the eye is gone..."



"I feel so destroyed inside." **Tim**

MY TRUE NAMES – ROXY

Call me happy it's Monday.
Call me frightened it's Monday.
Don't forget to call me adventurous it's Monday.
Even on Monday, don't forget to call me loving.

So today is Tuesday,
And you may call me clueless or cold.
So today I'm understanding,
And today I'm Mummy.
So it's Tuesday.
So I must be quiet.

Wednesday is here,
And I am made of ice,
And I am nanny with a huge warm heart.
On Wednesday,
Call me awkward, call me loud!

Thursday I am brave, emotional,
Negative, positive,
Strong, weak,
Ill, healthy,
Mad, sane!

Friday, I'm fun,
Friday call me wishful,
Call me helpless,
Call me shy.

Saturday is here,
And so am I,
Yes, it's me,
Little Miss Negativity.

Sunday –
Call me a warrior.

Starter lines

My true names are...
Call me by my true names...
Look deeply, every second I am...

Writing and reflection exercise

Roxy's *My true names* connects the theme of naming herself to days of the week, and it calls attention to the various names she is known by. Choose one of the starter lines, or a line of your choice, and write for 10 minutes on the theme of your true names. Afterwards, look back over your writing and take 15 minutes to reflect in your journal on the many facets of your name.

Inspiration

Thich Nhat Hanh's *Please Call Me By My True Names* inspires this reflective exercise, and it forms the title of a book containing his collected poems.

ALONE – Janice

No one left to care alone!
I'm the last one left!
How lonely that feels!
A lifetime of caring,
Well, three decades at least.
I've no one to share my thoughts,
My hopes, my dreams,
No one to hug, no one to comfort,
No one to cry with,
How will I survive
This lonely sad place?

I have lots of knowledge and wisdom
That will all go to waste,
Best keep it all safe,
Because you never know,
When you spend your life caring,
You care alone.

"We live surrounded by people, but if we are caring for someone we can feel alone. The ideal situation is to have support from somebody, there is nothing worse than feeling isolated." **David**

Writing and reflection exercise

Janice's poem *Alone* indicates a loneliness around the caring role. Lea comments on being alone when she walks 'through the door' of caring and in whatever she does. Take 10 minutes to think about times in your life when you feel alone. Then start writing with a line such as 'I felt lonely when', or 'I remember', and write for no longer than 10 minutes.

Afterwards, consider what it might be like to go beyond loneliness. Take five minutes to write about your potential beyond being alone. Afterwards, remind yourself of what you need in your life to nourish you, make a list in your writer's journal, and contemplate possibilities. Write for 10 minutes on unlocking a door of tenderness for yourself. Reflect on your feelings and thoughts, and remember to notice the courage it takes for you to be who you are.

"When we walk through the door, we are alone in whatever we are doing..." **Lea**

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF ME – David

On the other side of me
Is an encouraging soul
Who pushes me forward,
Making me progress
When I really want to hold back,
And retreat into myself.

A figment who spurs me on
And won't let me give up
When all I want to do is stop,
Sleep and dream
Of better things.

I try to resist the nagging persuasion
And withdraw into my shell
But like a hermit crab
Who has grown too big,

I find that my shell no longer fits,
And expels me,
Forcing me to pull myself up
And move forward,
Regardless of the consequences.

Writing and reflection exercise

Imagine you are re-finding another side of you that may seem lost, or uprooted. David's *On the other side of me* mentions the shell of himself, and you could explore the idea of what's hidden in a shell of yourself, or the roots of yourself. Using any line from the poem or the quote, or the line 'entering the shell', or 'entering the roots', write for 10-15 minutes giving voice to the other side of yourself.

This exercise is a reminder to observe and listen well to yourself, to trust your voice, and to have faith in your reflective writing. This close contact with yourself can help you to strengthen self-awareness.

"What is there on the other side of me? The side that is hidden from view. Do I choose to keep it hidden? Or is it just that I haven't found it yet, can't show it to the rest of the world, because I can't show it to me..." **Wendy**

Penblegwdd Hapus i fi!





No one left to care alone

Other side

THE PIECES OF A MAN – Mary (in memory of my husband)

How can I pick up
The pieces of a man?

What are these pieces –
Like broken glass or pottery?

How can I fit them back together –
To make the man whole again?

I must be superhuman, godlike,
A therapist, an artist,

To restore the man
And help him live again.

I must give him hope,
And the ability to forgive
And forget –

And live through the hurt,
A grief, a tragedy,

Which have broken this man
Into pieces.

All I can do is to try
To help him find faith
And hope again

And raise him
From the depths of despair,
To come back to life,

To see the world anew,
To recover his spirits,
And soldier on

To salvage all he can
From the experience
Of breaking into pieces,

And find a new purpose
In living.

Starter lines

How can I pick up the pieces of...
The pieces of my life would tell you...

Inspiration: writing and reflection exercise

The inspiration of this exercise is Gil Scott-Heron's *Pieces of a Man*, in his poetry collection *Now and Then*. You can do a reflective exercise on the pieces of your life or in relation to someone in your life. Choose a starter line and write for 10-15 minutes. Afterwards, think about Mary's *The Pieces of a Man* and how she uses the exercise to express her feelings about her husband's life, and her desire to help him.

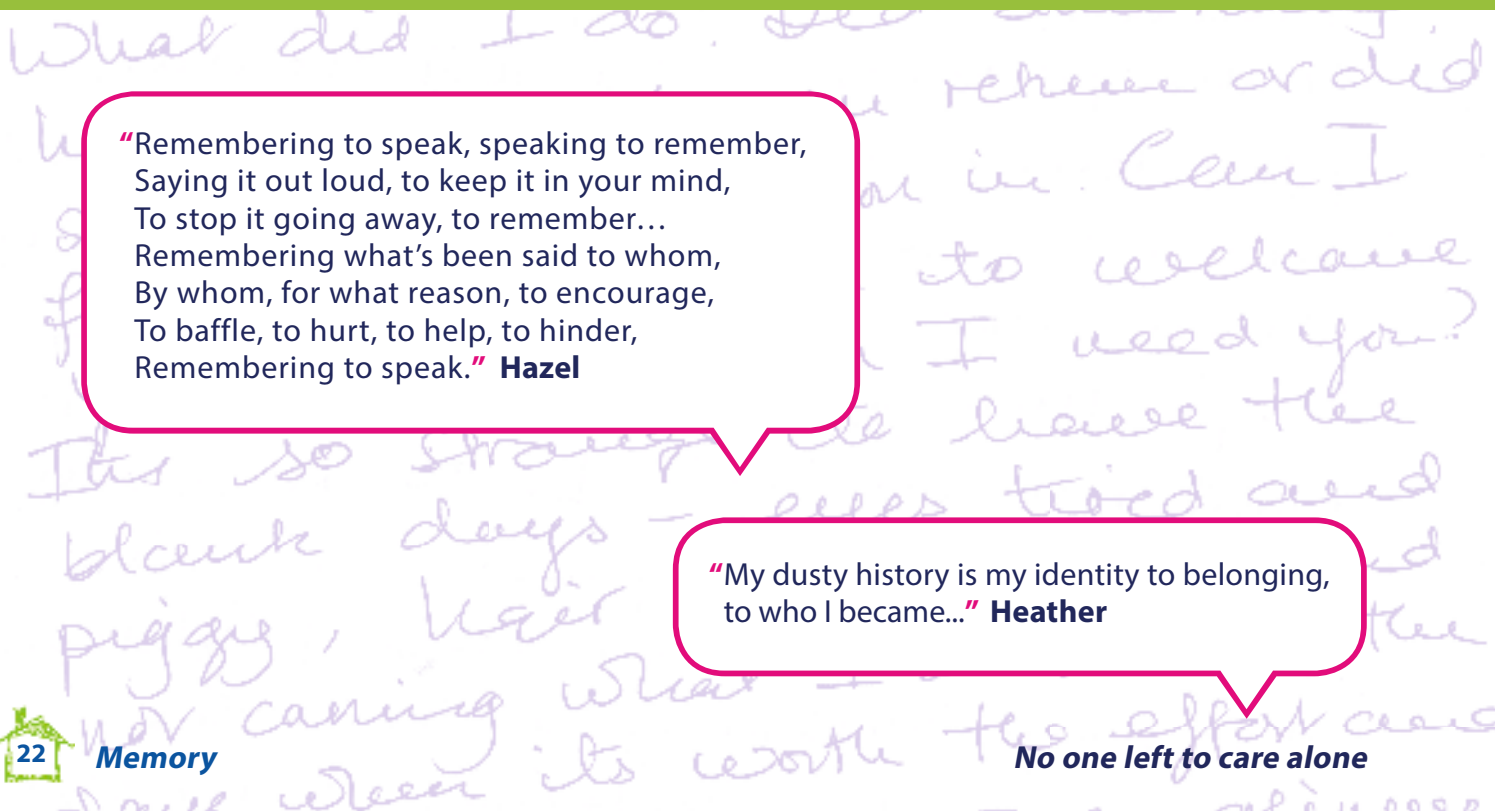
Note: The dedication of this poem has been added after its writing, in honour of Mary's husband who has now died. She has given her permission to use this poem as it reflects her hopes for her husband in the moments of caring for him.

My Story
is heartbreaking and beautiful.

My Story
is full of love
and unfortunately, loss.

My story isn't a secret, in the
end again, whos story is?





"My dusty history is my identity to belonging, to who I became..." Heather

Starter lines

I remember...

My dusty history is...

Writing exercise

Use one of the starter lines and write for 10-15 minutes. The line 'I remember' is helpful as you can use it as a back-up line for any of the other exercises. For example, you can write about times you recall feeling lonely, or afraid, or isolated, or happy. You can gather back moments of your life and hold them up to re-explore in your writer's journal, making connections to past and present as you go.

Senses: writing exercise

Another useful exercise to creatively remember aspects of your life is the senses of recollection. Write for between 15-30 minutes. From your own box of memories, complete the phrases:

The sound of...

The smell of...

The taste of...

The sight of...

The touch of...

If you want to rearrange these phrases, put them into a sequence that would make a five-line poem. You can also use one of your phrases and write a longer piece, giving more detail, using images, being more descriptive.

Inspiration

The senses of recollection exercise, inspired by Dr Peter Wilson, can be helpful to bring yourself back to particular times of your life through different sensations. The starter line phrase 'dusty history' is by Gabriela Pearse, in the book *Black Women Talk Poetry*.

"I want to speak. I want to have words. I want to speak the truth, always... The truth? I must remember." **Babs**

I FEAR – Lea

I fear that I haven't lived.
Crossroads where they shouldn't be.
Paths blocked. Others taken.
Were choices wrong? I fear they were.
I fear.

There is no time, no turning back,
Choices made wrong or no.
But were they wrong?
I fear, no. I was the one
To do what had to be done,
So no,
But. I still fear.
I fear.


Did I do well? Was it right?

No turning back. I did my best.
I am doing my best.

The guilt creeps in,
Pushing,
Heralding the fear.

But wait! Wait for me.
I still don't know
What I want to be!
And there is no time,
No turning back.
What about me?

Wait!
Wait for me.



"He got me through because
he was so strong." **Carole**

Starter lines

What I most fear is...

I faced the fear inside me when...

Self-exploration exercise

Lea's *I Fear* points to fear as something repetitive in life, and it can even seem to destroy joy and hope. Fear appears to be everywhere such as fear of change, fear of others, fear of decisions. Yet fear may be useful and contain knowledge in it of fearlessness. Take 15-30 minutes to write and explore moments of fear in your life – and times of fearlessness. Use one of the starter lines, or a line of your choice. Empower yourself in your writing and reflections by naming what you fear. Reflect on how to put your attention towards creating fearlessness within.

Inspiration

An inspiration of this exercise is Rabindranath Tagore who writes: "Where the mind is fearless, where the head is held high, where knowledge is free..."

I fear -

I fear that I haven't lived
crossroads where they shouldn't be
Paths blocked, others taken
were choices wrong? I fear they were, I fear
There is no time, no turning back,
choices made wrong or no. But were they
I fear, no. I was the one to do what had
be done, so no. But. I still fear.

CARE – Meena

This sums up me and not me, the word care.
What does it actually mean?
To care, to be cared for, who to care,
Do you care? Who cares? I care.
I care for you in so many ways,
At so many levels – your needs are growing,
By the month, by the week, by the day.
Does that bother me? No.

My life is your life, your life is mine,
We are entwined and so I care for you
As you care for me.

What I give you, you cannot give me.
What you give me, I cannot give you.
So, we are divided then,
On our own paths of care.
Jogging along together, along this MS path.

To begin with, you fought it – you,
Like a true wee bonnie Scot!
Nothing would get you down,
Nothing would defeat you.

That day came and it hit you,
Like a clap of thunder, it stunned you. I cared.
You shared, only then, you shared this
Enormous burden,
This big life change.

You cared for me in the only way you could,
Cautiously, slowly, no words, no affection –
Just in your way, that I know;

Deep down a chord had been struck,
It would remain forever –
I knew then, all those years ago.

I cared – for you – always you
And now that I know your secret,
Your heavy burden,
I could help – as a carer only could.

Care.

-This sums up me and not me, the word
care, what does it actually mean?
To care, to be cared for, who to care,
do you care? Who cares? I care.
I care for you in so many ways, at so
many levels – your needs are growing by
the month by the week, by the day.
Does that bother me?





Self-reflection exercise

Meena's writing presents different roles in her life – carer, partner. Begin a piece of reflective writing on the role or variety of roles you play in life. You may find it helpful to focus on one role and let your writing flow from there. In the writing, you might make connections with other roles, or with times when you feel vulnerable, or weary in a role. When you reflect on your writing, think about the impact a role has on your life. Make a list of the challenges or demands upon you a role requires. Take 10-15 minutes for self-reflection exercises on the theme of role and feelings. Be gentle with yourself, you are precious.

WAITING – REMEMBERED (extract) – Carole

I remember waiting to hear,
To be clear, to understand.
Whether to scream, cry,
Laugh or die.
I started to imagine the ring of the place,
Which was only the sound of the wind chimes
In the outside garden...
But the agony road of waiting

Will never leave my mind.
Next week, next month,
When the doctor returns;
I can still feel the drop, the sink, the hole.
Feeling that moment
Will never come
When someone can end the waiting.
Pull this scene to a close.

WAITING, WITHOUT – Babs

While I wait, hoping that time I was waiting for has come at last,
But I still can't, mustn't hope, because it may never happen.
No place for hope – dare not – I am still waiting.
Must wait unprepared – for what? – I don't know.
Scared, I prepare. Should I know what I am preparing for?
It never happens – so why hope – why prepare?
No need – it could go wrong; prepare for it to go wrong.
In hoping – in preparing – I will probably stop it happening.
So don't think about it – don't care – don't know whether this wait –
Will arrive – will achieve. 'Don't worry. It may never happen.'
My Dad's wise words; but in waiting, it probably won't; don't jinx,
Don't hope, don't prepare, don't think.

"When I left without saying goodbye,
I was shocked..." April



Starter lines

I wait without...

I left without...

Writing and reflection exercise

Situations of waiting and leaving provide the basis for this exercise. *Waiting – Remembered* and *Waiting Without* use the theme of waiting as a way of recollection and exploration.

Think about a time in your life when you have been waiting, and a time in your life when you decide to leave. For 10 minutes, write about that time when you remember waiting. Then take another 10 minutes to write about a time you left somewhere, suddenly. Later, take 20 minutes to reflect in your journal on your creative writing process as well as on the impact of waiting and of leaving on your life.

Inspiration

T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* inspires the task, especially lines from East Coker: "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope for hope would be hope for the wrong thing..."

LIMBO (extract) – Babs

I feel the space, the loneliness,
This is limbo, a time I don't know;
I don't know how I feel,
Should I be sad? I have my life back

But I don't know where I'm going.
Where am I in my life? My life in limbo?
What is it? Where is limbo?
Conjure up a word, I come back to life,

Lost Limbo Space

So much time, where is it?
What to do with it? Where can I go?
Go to limbo, silly.
I'm there. Where is it?

What? How can I escape?
I need my space; not freedom?
This is freedom but I'm locked in limbo,
A prisoner, still.

Where? What shall I do?
Maybe I'll do what everyone says I must.
But that's not thinking for myself...
I don't know. This space.

This other world.
Where is it?
What should I do to escape?

Escape my mind. I've been shown a door.
Where does it lead? Shall I take it?

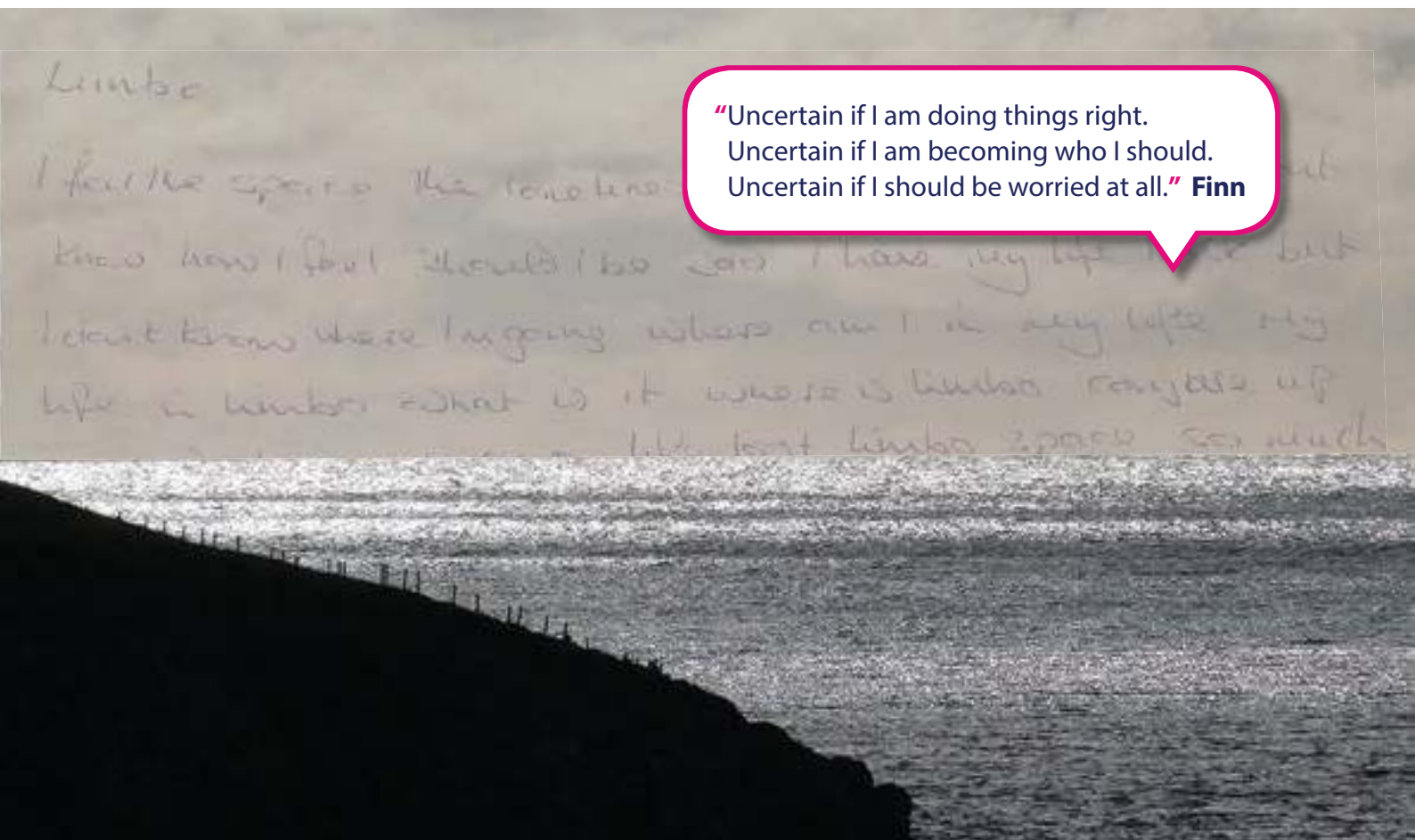
No one left to care alone

Situations

29

Self-reflection exercise

Limbo is an uncertain period of waiting, unfinished, a state of being in between moments. Babs' *Limbo* on page 29 illuminates a static time. Refer back to Carole's poem on page 28, and think about the differences between active waiting and times of limbo when things come to a standstill. Finn's quote uses uncertainty to scrutinise moments in his life. Think about a time of limbo linked with uncertainty in yourself, waiting without hope of anything. Choose a line from one of the poems and write for 10 minutes on the theme of limbo and uncertainty, then take 20 minutes for reflection on limbo when it becomes present in your life story.



"Uncertain if I am doing things right.
Uncertain if I am becoming who I should.
Uncertain if I should be worried at all." **Finn**

I'D ALSO LIKE TO SAY – Finn

I'd also like to say that yes, I am strong
But I still hurt inside.

I'd also like to say yes, I am positive
But that does not mean there isn't sadness.

I'd also like to say that I have learned this skill,
To focus on the good, the things I am grateful for,
Of which there are many.

But I'd also like to say
Don't mistake that for perfection.


I am not perfect,
And neither is my life.

But I'd also like to say that life happens.
It is what it is,
And I'm okay.

But I'd also like to say
That sometimes I am not.

Self-reflection exercise

Only ever attempt this reflective exercise if you feel able enough to consider the experience of personal hurt and pain. Think about the earliest and present times in your life when you feel hurt and painful feelings. Finn's *I'd also like to say* expresses the reality of hurting inside. Choose a line from his poem, and write for 10 minutes. Alannah's quote points out a wish for the removal of pain within. Take time to write for 10 minutes about the reality of pain in your life. Then for no longer than 15 minutes, write in your journal to consider the source of your hurt, your journey through pain. It can take much endurance to reflect on hurt and pain – so after your writing, try to find a few moments for peace and kindness towards yourself.



"...I remember wishing that I could take away the pain, and make it go away." **Alannah**

THIS FACE I HAVE (extract) – Carole

This face...read in an interview,
She said, 'I don't recognise my face any more.'
And neither do I...I know age is there
But it's so much more...something
I can't put into words.
Each line a wound
Or felt tip pen mark
That sometimes washes out
But sometimes lingers on and on...

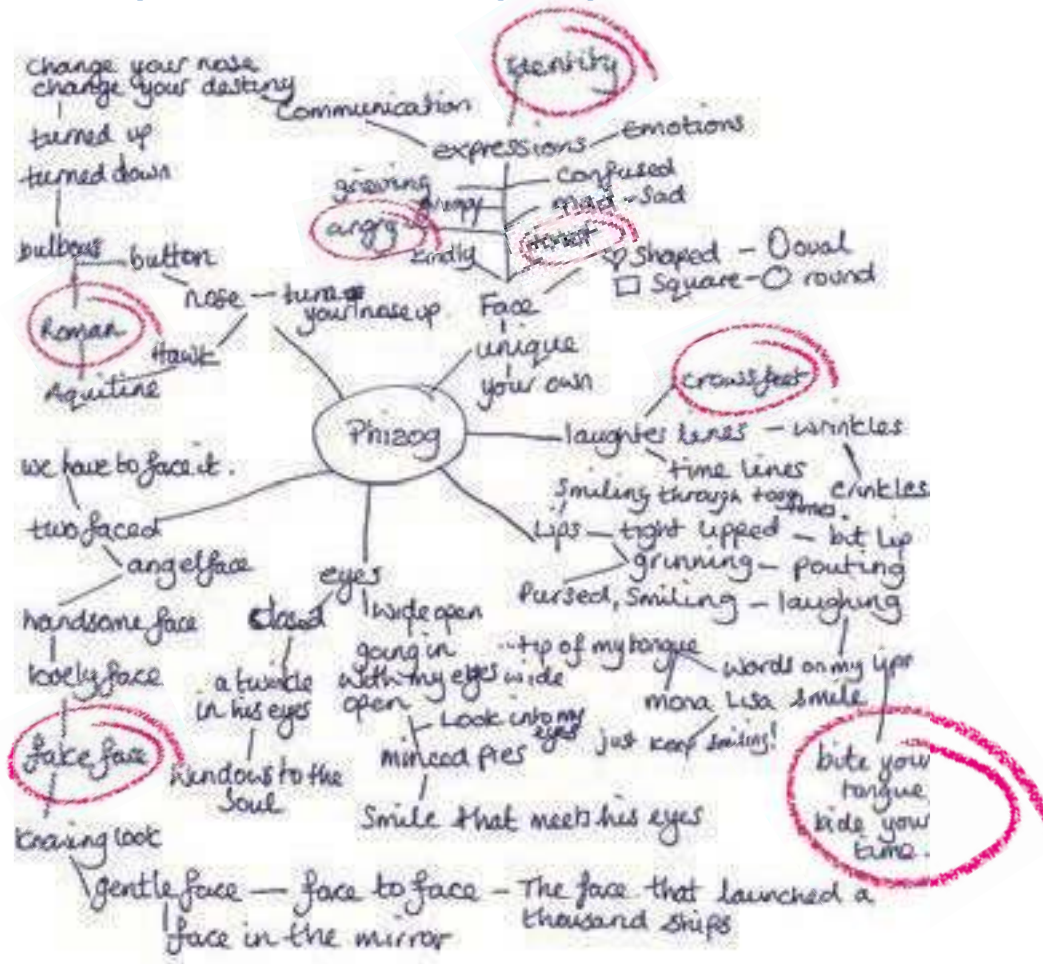
Yet not today, as punching out –
Getting-up-and-out-for-action day
But only when the energy allows;
How to keep this energy
And love it, and nurture?

To be there every day
With no response to the blows?
Finding and fighting to stop thinking
About the whys and wherefores.
Rear up in the words used,
And you're weak if it gets you.
Strong and stronger
To keep this controlled
And on my terms.
How can I keep the mood inside
And not let it go tomorrow
As it fizzles out?
Time to work it out, I think.

Making maps: words and phrases

This exercise uses mapping – clustering – and it can help to focus the attention on one word, or phrase, or line, then to branch off into other ideas. Carole uses the word 'face' in her title. Take 10 minutes and put this word into a circle, then respond to the word by writing down all around it – any thoughts you have, just write them down. Include all your words and phrases, no matter how unrelated they seem, in circles, and make branches of other circles. Lea shows an example of clustering in response to 'face'. She uses the word 'phizog', which means a person's face or facial expression; it's a word used in variant spellings including 'fizzog' and 'phizzog'. You could take a few phrases from your creative expansion, and make a poem.

Lea's words inspired by the making maps exercise...



Writing and reflection exercise

Take 20 minutes and write in your journal on the process of using clustering, making associations, and creative expansion.

Inspiration

This task links to themes of masks and mirrors, and it is inspired by Carl Sandburg's *Phizzog*: "This face you got, this here phizzog you carry around, you never picked it out for yourself at all, at all..."

I AM THE CLAY (extract) – Carole

I am the orange block of clay
Used to form a basis for the creation
Of so many things...

I can be a brick of support
To enable the start of something new
And the life of a different form.

But a drop can be the end
As the fragility is
Part of the form.

Writing exercise

Take up to five minutes to think about an aspect of nature, or a weather condition, you feel most expresses who or where you are in your life right now. Ask yourself what type of weather or part of nature best mirrors you. Take 15 minutes and use the starter line 'I am...' to write in the voice of that nature or weather condition.

LIFE IS LIKE THE SEA – Heather

In and outs, low tides
Exposing my floor,
My assets, reflection,
Slowly receding,
To uncover, unearth,
Unseen mysteries,
Small minute creatures before;
Changing, and coming in
Over all that has been,
Covering, calming, returning
To the shore, at high tide,
Ready to start again,

New tide, a new day, sometimes,
And stormy, sometimes calm;
Enjoying the beauty and light,
Solitude,
To recover for another day
And tide.

Inspiration

Carole writes she is the clay; for Heather, life is like the ocean. They use figurative language – metaphor, when something is symbolic of something else, and simile, when by comparison something is like or as something else. This exercise draws on the potential of symbolism to probe deeper within. Carole's poem *I am the clay* uses the 'clay' as a potent symbol of life. In Heather's poem, she likens life to the sea that symbolises flow and solitude.

HOW CAN I SPEAK? (extract) – Finn

How can I not speak, without denying who I am?
How can I speak and still be seen who I am?
How can I speak and risk inspecting eyes?
Why do I speak when not speaking would let me live

Unquestioned?

How can I speak in a way that does not compromise
My identity?

If I am not honest, how can I speak out?
How does one share, become close, connect and be real
If one does not speak from the heart of truth?
How can I speak and not lose myself?



Artwork courtesy of Meena

HOW? (extract) – Seerché

How can I speak, if you're just going to judge me?
How can I speak, if you're just going to interrupt me?
What use is my voice, if you don't value my words?
What use is my voice, if I don't drive through my thoughts?
How can I speak, when every idea is cut down
At the swift action of your verbal axe.

I only want to help, offer consolation, ease your pain.
But if my words mean nothing to you,
Then I have little to gain,
From this war of voices, one shouting,
One listening, and no one is winning.

Questions: writing and reflection exercise

Spend 10 minutes to make a list of questions you want to ask yourself. Then take 10 minutes of reflective writing using as a starter line one of your questions, or 'how can I speak' that Finn and Seerché use. After your writing, take 10 minutes to think about the root of the question, and about whether you already know the answer. Note down your reflections in your journal. The use of questions in writing is helpful if you feel locked in an inner conflict or want to ask something of yourself, or others, but have not yet fully formed the question. Trust in your own wisdom, intuition, and in your writing to engage with any response that comes. Trust the question, too.

Inspiration

Audre Lorde's *Meet* from her collection *The Black Unicorn*.



I OWE IT TO MYSELF TO BE LAZY (extract) – John

I could become the Wealdstone Brook.
Where does it flow from,
Where does it flow to?

I know it flows under the bridge.
It does that 52/7. It never seems to dry up, or flood.
Perhaps I could find its source, or the river it flows into.

I have known it for donkey's years,
Or at least I have known 50 yards of it forever.
That is because I am lazy and not inquisitive.
I certainly take many things as they are
And hope they don't change.

The Wealdstone Brook, or yards of it,
Appears to be quite happy as it is.
Who am I to interfere with its tranquil life?
Maybe I could become the Wealdstone Brook
And not have to worry about anything...

"I must throw off this old
confusion and choose
my own path..." **Mary**



Starter lines

I feel at home in this place...
I want to come across places where...
I will choose my own path where...

Writing and reflection exercise

The theme of this exercise is place, which can be anything from a room at home to somewhere far away, from a remembered place in early life to a busy street in the 21st century. In his poem, John depicts a brook in an area of London and connects it to his condition of laziness. Spend 15 minutes, choose a starter line, or use a line of your own, and write about a place you know that means a lot to you, or a place you imagine, elsewhere. Afterwards, spend 20 minutes writing to consider if place has anything to teach you about your life journey. Try to find a few moments when you can listen to your voice of place, and rest for a while.

Postcard: writing exercise

Another exercise will take 10 minutes of your time. Write a postcard poem so that your words fit onto the back of a card. Use the starter line 'Here is a place where...' and describe what you find in the special place of your choice. Think about the recipient of the postcard and how they would enjoy receiving news from you. Or you could address the postcard to yourself – there are endless ways to shape a creative writing exercise to your purpose.

Inspiration

Wendell Berry's *Stay Home*, in *The Peace of Wild Things*

Adrienne Rich's *Dreams Before Waking*, in *Your Native Land, Your Life (Poems)*

MY STORY IS... – Lea

My story is unwritten memories,
Laughter and sunshine,
Heartache and torrents of rain,
Unshed tears and false smiles.
Love. Reaching strength,
Love.

My story is novel,
Worthy.

I am the leading lady,
Strong, resilient,
Teaching others,
Quietly guiding,
Lovingly leading.

My story is a myriad of stories,
Commitment and love,
Stoic love.

The mother, the daughter, sister,
The friend and lover,
A hundred other characters,

I am the leading lady.

Starter lines

My story is...
What I want to tell you is...

Story: writing and reflection exercises

Creative writing linked with short films of carers' stories interconnects people's experiences and reflections in ways that are insightful and profound. Lea's *My Story Is...* weaves in aspects of her life that feature in a short film of her reflections. Choose one of the starter lines above and write for 10 minutes without stopping. Later in response to that line, in your writer's journal, take 30 minutes to reflect on your story. Then imagine someone is going to interview you and make a film about you. What questions would you want to be asked by them? Write up to 12 questions that you want someone to ask, to help them know the truth of your life, and then write your responses. Take 15 minutes to reflect on what it feels like to be well heard by another.

Inspiration

Lea's poetry and short film inspire the writing exercise. Her words carry the truth of who she is, and she courageously expresses her views. Extracts from the film: "I don't feel my life's been my own for the longest time..." "My sister is amazing – she is my rock..." "Care for the Carers shone out..."

Watch online www.cftc.org.uk/blog/leas-story





"I had a mentor, and for my birthday she bought me a bracelet with a heart; it's sentimental to me. When mum started to become unwell, I'd wear it to college to keep me going. It's a good luck charm, reassurance." **Charlotte**

"I got interested in silversmithing as a hobby – and in family trees. It turned out that years ago our family had a crest, which was a mermaid. I decided to make a mermaid out of silver as our silver wedding came up; I made it for Mary, as something special for us both." **Ian**



"My daughter bought me a journal to write in about my life, loss, grief, about what makes me who I am. And now I'd like to



write about my son, this amazing man who is inspirational." **Janice**

"I come back to family. I come from a good family, loyalty's strong, they're all good people. My dad looked after me when I was a kid. When we first moved here, there was a basket hanging from the tree in the garden so dad used to put bread out... I find it therapeutic, going out and feeding the birds and watching everything come and feeding away." **Jason**

"Binoculars – they're ancient but give me a good close-up when birdwatching, I can quickly get them focused. And the book *British Birds* – if I see a bird I don't recognise in the garden, I can look it up as long as I remember what it was..." **John**

Starter lines

The object most precious to me is...
Precious to me is...

Objects: reflection exercise

Take 15 minutes in the morning and consider a special object from your childhood or from your later life that is significant and meaningful for you. It might be anything from a photograph to a coat, an ancient book to a bus ticket. What is precious about the object? Throughout the day, think about the meaning that your special object holds for you. In the evening, use your writer's journal to reflect on your memories and feeling about the object. An object can represent security – you may be able to give

yourself a chance to sense something of its comforting or soothing quality within yourself.

Link Charlotte, Ian, Janice, John and Jason all feature in short films talking about objects that are important to them.

Watch online www.cftc.org.uk/blogs/carers-stories

Inspiration

Adrienne Rich's *Diving into the Wreck*: "The words are purposes. The words are maps."

WORDS FROM A FILM – Josh

I do the washing up
I prepare the meals
I clear up afterwards
I do cleaning
I fetch shopping
I collect prescriptions
Look after money
Keep track of spending...

"There's not really any clearly defined beginning or end..." **Josh**

"It's a very lonely life..." **Denise**

"The only thing you can give is your time..." **Hazel**

"I worry about the future." **Linda**

Oral histories

The oral history short film projects by Care for the Carers collect people's stories to make sure they are documented now and for times to come. Volunteer carers – Chris, Denise, Donna, Lea, Meena – helped to devise questions and conduct interviews enabling carers to tell their story in their own way.

This important oral history resource brings carers' voices to life and shows the impact of

their complex caring roles on their time and emotions. Carers in the short films include Denise, Hazel and Linda whose words give a sense of their journey.

In a longer film from an earlier part of the project, young carer Josh joins with three other carers – Cynthia, David, Meena – to outline the tasks and demands of their everyday lives.



Daily routine



No one left to care alone

Daily routine: writing exercise

Write for 10 minutes about exactly what you do in a typical day. Note down the various tasks you must do, times of day – include everything about your daily routine. You could do a list or describe how things look, sound, smell, feel. What happens in your day, what conversations do you remember? Afterwards, take 15 minutes to write in your journal and imagine your life as if it is a scene in a film.

Take 20 minutes for yourself, and think about how writing and reflection can empower you to witness your life deeply.

Try something different, especially in a group – this exercise could be adapted for access purposes and for different age groups.

Express your thoughts by drawing or painting them – or do an interactive version like Pictionary where you have to guess, or act, or clay model them. A music group might play with sounds linked to everyday life, and come up with a composition that conveys people's thoughts on caring.

Link

Josh, Cynthia, David and Meena – in a film of their daily lives as carers.
youtu.be/OU_GCu1rkLw

Watch online

All films from the project can be viewed on our website here:
www.cftc.org.uk/blog/carers-words-carers-lives



No one left to care alone



Daily routine

WHAT DO I WANT IN MY LIFE NOW? – Janice

A different sort of life from this?
I'm a carer first, it's OK sometimes,
I know I'm needed so much.

My darling son, you are my life, I adore you,
Love you for all you are,

I'm being selfish wanting something else,
I have so much I want to do,
So many places I want to go,

So many things I don't want to miss out on
Any more. Where is that magic wand?

I really want that now? Like a fairy tale
It can grant a wish or two,
What would I wish for?

A perfect life, whatever is that?
Didn't someone tell you, there is no such thing.

I would wish away your disabilities in a flash,
But would it still be you?

I would wish I wasn't a carer, but would I still be me?
I would wish for peace in my own family,
But would I still feel joy?
I would wish to be a different person,
But would I be happy?

It's wiser to just be content as we are,
Deal with all the pain, embrace the heartache,
Be all you can be.

This is your life, a kind of destiny,
For richer, or poorer,
It was meant to be.

"I wish I had the courage to
speak up about the things
I don't like..." **April**

Starter lines

What I want is...

I want the courage to...

Writing and reflection exercise

Janice's *What do I want in my life now?* and April's quote show the influence of events in their lives, and their self-knowledge. Write for 10 minutes on what you want in your life. Then write for 10 minutes on what you need courage for in your life. Use the starter lines if you wish, or lines of your choice. Afterwards, take 15 minutes to write in your journal and expand on your wants and needs. Write about your sense of purpose from what you know of yourself. Use your writer's journal to explore what you want to do in your life. Listen to your inner voice and know that your writing is a source of freedom and discovery.



Repetition: writing and reflection exercise

Choose a powerful word that represents you. Hazel's word of herself is 'trier', then 'trying', which she repeats in her writing. Using your word as the starter, write for 10 minutes – and keep repeating the word in your writing. Repetition is a useful device to emphasize theme, or setting, or other details, and you can repeat a word, or phrases, or whole lines for effect. It can also be an absorbing way to write about your life journey and let your thoughts and feelings flow on. After the exercise, take 15 minutes to reflect in your journal on your creative writing process and the use of repetition. What happens when you repeat a single word, or phrase, or line? How does your writing sound when you read it back? Do you enjoy the use of repetition?



TRY (extract) – Hazel

A trier. She's always been 'a trier'.
What does that mean?
Does it mean she tries?
Does it mean she fails?
Is it even a proper word?

Mum's word for a daughter.
Not pretty but a trier.
Not bright but a trier.
Not clever but a trier.
Tries hard, not right.
Tries, tries, tries, but...

Happy to help, happy to try,
When does it fit in with life now?
How does it fit in with my life now?
Tried to be all to everyone but
Nothing to anyone.

This way, that way, round and round,
Up and down, in and out, night and day.
Telephone rings, again and again.
Trying not to answer it,
Trying not to hear the loud sharp ring...

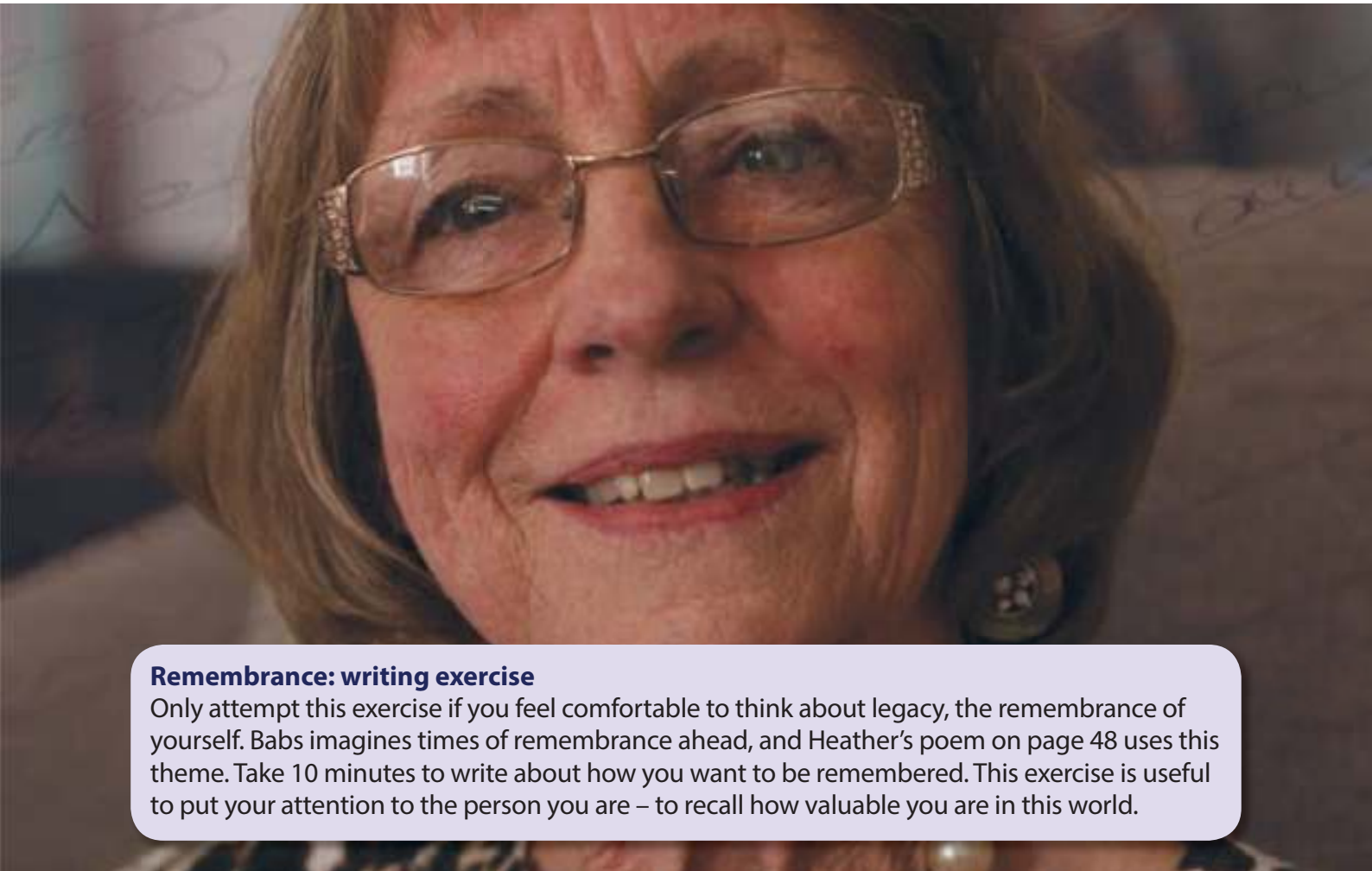
Trying to hold on, trying to let go,
Trying to help...lost it now,
Don't know where my mind was going,
What was I thinking?
No, sorry, it's gone...

I WANT TO BE REMEMBERED AS... – Babs

A Mum who always smiled, who loved.
A supportive person who loved.
An adventurer who loved.
Yes, adventure. A thoughtful person –
But who always thought too late!
But who loved.

Inspiration

John O'Donohue, *Divine Beauty*:
"The shortest distance in the world is
the one between you and yourself."



Remembrance: writing exercise

Only attempt this exercise if you feel comfortable to think about legacy, the remembrance of yourself. Babs imagines times of remembrance ahead, and Heather's poem on page 48 uses this theme. Take 10 minutes to write about how you want to be remembered. This exercise is useful to put your attention to the person you are – to recall how valuable you are in this world.

I WANT TO BE REMEMBERED AS... – Heather

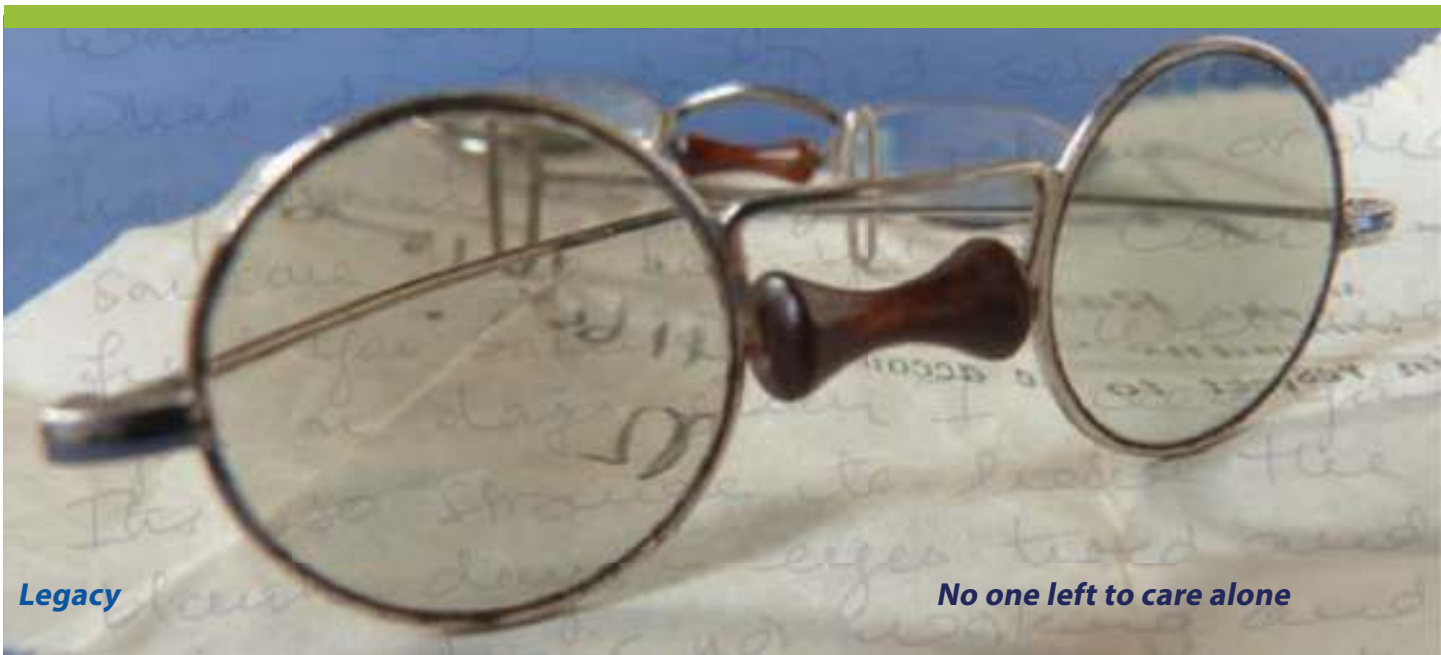
Funny,
Fun,
Doing my own thing,
Not restrained
Because of society;
Articulate,
Saying the right words,
Doing what is accepted
As a Grandma, Mother,
Sibling.
The advantage of age,
As you've been there;
Pleased
Those close to you –
Family –
Know you can be you,
And remembered
With affection,
Humour.

Inspiration

The poet Rumi: "This is how it's going to be..."

Writing and reflection exercise

You contain within yourself an endless language of human potential, a voice that deserves to be heard. Take 15 minutes to write using the line 'This is how it's going to be as I begin to...'; and then spend 10 minutes of reflective writing in your journal. Your creative spirit is a gift, your voice is precious – and you matter.



CARE FOR THE CARERS – Our goals for the future

Care for the Carers exists to represent unpaid carers in East Sussex, enable their voices to be heard and provide services in response to what they need and want. Our goal is to ensure that no one is left to care alone.

We've been supporting carers since 1989 and have ambitious plans for the future, including to:

- *reach and support more carers
- *create more specialist support groups – for dementia carers, working carers and those affected by cancer
- *deliver more Carer Awareness training
- *extend our counselling service to young carers

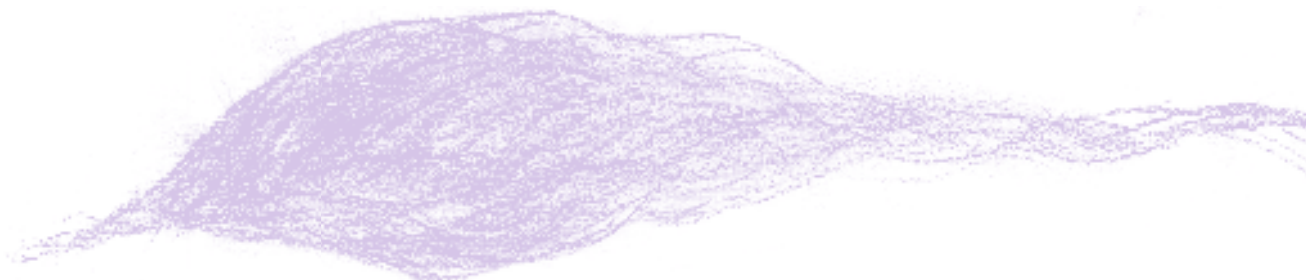
We welcome your support now more than ever as the number of carers, and carers' needs, continue to grow.

There are many ways you can support Care for the Carers whether it be by fundraising, volunteering your time, or leaving a gift in your Will. Please get in touch to find out more – we'd love to hear from you.

"May you be given the knowledge that you are loved and wanted,
That you are worth the world to someone,
And you are the reason for our existence." **David**

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Care for the Carers Press

*Creative Writing Workbook:
Carers' Words, Carers' Lives*

"Our voices need to be heard because they
have been hidden for too long..." **Carole**