

'I do not know you but we are intimate, you and I'

We present the top three entries in our second annual competition

Our second annual poetry competition has been won by Katina Offord. Katina is a Society member, psychology MSc graduate and special needs teacher living in Farnham, Surrey.

Katina tells us she has only written a few poems, and never considered publishing them. 'I wrote this poem after a motorbike rider died of multiple injuries as I tried to give first aid. I had been sceptical about PTSD (except as a result of war) until this experience, after which I saw the scene vividly several times a day as well as during dreams. These flashbacks were triggered by apparently random stimuli and were so shocking that they literally took my breath away until I wrote this poem.'

Our editor Jon Sutton and his father David, a published poet, judged the competition. David commented: "Biker" is really quite striking in its use of detail that comes across as factually true but also resonates at a symbolic level: the leather gloves filled "cup-like with your blood", the vision of the red pool like a STOP sign. Then we have the rueful wit of "You will not recover in this position", and the sad unadorned compassion of the last verse. And while the poem is not in a strict form, it shows great formal control in its use of rhythm and varying line lengths.'

We received more than 50 entries: thanks to all who entered, and to Wiley-Blackwell for sponsoring the £50 prize.

Biker

Fastening your helmet for a ride in the sunshine
You did not know that it would not be you who would unfasten it,
But a stranger, fumbling with the unfamiliar buckles in the middle of the road.

The leather gloves shaped by your hands
Make a perfect bowl to cradle your broken head
And fill cup-like with your blood.

You will not recover in this position
And your speed has left too little time to heal these wounds.

Strangely like a drowsy child, with eyes open
You fight this sleep.
But the drips have slowed, the red pool
Large enough now to be seen from the sky
Like a warning to STOP!
Too late
And yet too early for life to be leaving you.

I do not know you
But we are intimate, you and I
For you gave me a front row seat
To see your gruesome acrobatics
And I held your hand as you died.



Katina Offord

This Morning 25 April

It's just a dog some say only a dog
Not a child – no it's not that – nor a substitute for one as some murmur.
Nor a partner/lover/husband/friend
Something more, different, constant
Consistently enthused at seeing me
for reasons only known to her
Feeling like I mattered when I am here or gone
the howling from the upstairs window
despair chilling my departure
For these last 15 years she's been there consistently and now
she fades still trying to show enthusiasm
Looking intensely at me as I come and go
my living declining oracle
This morning was not a good one
walking though food and water bowls
Her duties not making it out the door (twice)
lots of clean up missing getting the grant out
Wondering if it's time
No not a child or partner/husband/lover/friend
Something constant, different, consistently
for just a while more

Paul M. Camic, Professor of Psychology & Public Health, Research Director,
Salomons Centre for Applied Psychology, Canterbury Christ Church University

If

If you can keep your head when your client
Is losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when your client doubts you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait for change and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;
If you can dream – and not make analysis your master;
If you can think – and not make theory your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by the media to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the modality you gave your life to broken,
And not stoop and build 'em up with worn out tools;
If you can make one heap of all your interventions
And risk it on one real-world trial,
And lose, and start again with your intentions
And never breathe a word of blame, nor lose your smile.
If you can force your heart and mind and sinew
To serve your client long after they seem gone,
And so hold on when there seems nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on';
If you can talk with partners and keep your virtue,
Or talk with chief execs – nor lose the common touch;
If neither patients nor close colleagues can hurt you;
If all may count on you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving hour
With fifty minutes worth of distance run -
Yours is the clinic and all that's in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a psychologist my son!
(With apologies to Rudyard Kipling)

Christina Richards
Senior Specialist Psychology Associate and Clinical Research Fellow