

6th ANNUAL LORD WHISKY ANIMAL SANCTUARY INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION –

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THE WINNING POEMS (page 10 ff)

All entries were anonymous when judged. CONGRATULATIONS to all the listed poets. And thank you to all entrants – the judges agree that the quality of poetry submitted was very high indeed. Entries came from England, Wales, Scotland, Sri Lanka, the USA, Italy, Spain, Ireland and more.

THE PRIZE WINNERS

Open competition

FIRST	Or A Triumph	Georgina Titmus
SECOND	Fox	Jenna Plewes
THIRD	Calligraphy	Alex Josephy

Rescue competition

FIRST	A Miracle Dog Called Bimba	Susi Clare
SECOND	Paw prints	Kirsty Harper
THIRD	Shep	Fern Adams

FULL RESULTS 2023 – OPEN COMPETITION

FIRST	Or A Triumph	Georgina Titmus
SECOND	Fox	Jenna Plewes
THIRD	Calligraphy	Alex Josephy
HIGHLY COMMENDED in alphabetical order of title		
	A winter walk	Philippa Hatton-Lepine
	Get me a hat	Michael W Thomas
	Post it notes	Terry Jones
	Stowaway Hedgehog	Olivia Walwyn
	The Old Men in the Library	Adam Elms
	Ukrainian Soldier cradles a Russian Blue	Glen Wilson
	Wild Geese	J D Sparkes
COMMENDED in alphabetical order of title		
	April Lambing	Anita John

	Giant water bug	Jane Bonnyman
	Irrational	Joyce Walker
	Leap of faith	Anita John
	Pre-prandial	Michael W Thomas
	Saved critters sonnet	John Gallas
	The Poet's Garden	Barry Tempest
Special Mentions	Ammonite	Clifford Liles
	Butterflies near Quimper	David Thompson
	Encounters with a polar hawkmoth	Souraya Morriso
	Honey water	Ana Reizens
	Magpie's Nest	Ion Corcos
	Ripples	Sarah Tait
	Stopping the bleeding	Lucy Crispin
	The Cats of Rome	Isabella Mead
	The Rehabilitation Centre	Barry Tempest
	Worms	Charlotte Murray

FULL RESULTS 2023 – RESCUE category:

FIRST	A Miracle Dog Called Bimba	Susi Clare
SECOND	Paw prints	Kirsty Harper
THIRD	Shep	Fern Adams
VERY HIGHLY COMMENDED	in no special order	
	Cher Ami	Danielle Green
	Tommy	Irene Wright
	A Little Time	Sarah Glover
	Ukrainian soldier cradles a Russian blue	Glen Wilson
	The Rescue	Christine Tainsh
HIGHLY COMMENDED	in no special order	
	For Ellen	Rachel R Baum
	Finding Pip	Liz Hayward
	Winged	Charlotte Oliver
	Healing the healer	Jackie Fisher
	Unwanted	June Fox
	Loki	Julia Wallis
	My Cinnamon	Joolz Gray
	Fred	Liz Hayward
	Burial song for brown cat number fifteen	Nathan Koblintz
	New dog on the block	Susi Clare

LORD WHISKY OPEN POETRY COMPETITION 2023

JUDGE'S COMMENTS by Tina Cole

First, I want to thank everyone who entered the competition to support this wonderful charity and to all you writers creating poems and being brave enough to send them out into the world. As a fellow poet I know the highs and lows of entering competitions, waiting and not hearing or worse, rejection. However, the best thing about being a judge is the opportunity to read others writing, to discover fresh and moving poems, poems that grab your attention immediately. The kind that make you want to share them with someone and say, *hey read this*.

Judging is a learning process; one discovers as much about the self when reading so many different poems as the poems themselves. What is it that really inspires and why, are questions I was constantly tasking myself. The worst bit of judging is having to select winners and as I read and read and came down to a final 30 or so, I wanted to stop as they were all fantastic in such different ways. Sometimes you must simply go with your instinct, the poems which keep calling to you. Certainly, the winning poems were ones that fitted this frame. However, it is important to remember that any judgement is subjective, what speaks to me may not speak to others. My choices may seem random and may not fit your expectation of what a successful poem is. Please remember that if your poem didn't win this time, it's not because it isn't a special piece of work, so please do not be discouraged.

The submissions were varied in subject matter, of course, animal and nature themes, global warming, human relationships but I was also pleased to see variety in form, with villanelles, sonnets, sestinas and a ghazal. Poets who had considered how the poem looks on the page and matched that to their subject. Poets who had considered short as well as lengthy submissions. Also, there were certain factors of technique that grabbed my attention, a marriage of content and form, the musicality of the language, (rhythm, assonance), the energy and tone, how clearly the poets voice came through. Also, I was looking for poems with an emotional message, a heart. Poems that spoke in beautiful lyrical language, that carried through their subject from beginning to end seamlessly. Poems with strong, (non-obvious) titles. Poems in plain language carried by the metaphor, or conceit. Poems beyond the narrative that had been nurtured into existence and carefully constructed, thought about, loved.

As a solo judge this process has been a challenge. I have read through all the submissions many, many, times, and the final group many more times, I have left days in between, to give space for them to percolate and in many cases have changed my mind and changed it again. Thank you all once again, what a joyful challenge it has been journeying through these poems to find winners!

Here are my comments on the poems I selected.

The Winning Poems:

First: Or a Triumph

This poem grabbed my attention from the first readings. Its plain language carries such a clear voice and portrays an intimate, albeit amusing observation of a woman/ grandmother pictured on the back of a motorbike. Shades of, *When I am an Old Woman I shall Wear Purple*, (Jenny Joseph), came to mind. The poem made me smile. Its' simplicity vividly evoked a character in so few words. The repetition of laughing through the poem and some carefully placed metaphors like, *her joy is pure colour/ gauntlets like clumsy fur-lined oven gloves* effectively engaged me in the love/ admiration of this woman. The simple couplet form works well for the straightforward human voice. The slightly risqué hints here and there add spice to the poem; *behind this guy (not my grandfather)*, and the use of short sentencing, almost like statements, powerfully underpin the narrative. It is a poem about joy, and it was joyful to read.

Second: Fox

There was no doubt in my mind that this was also real contender from first readings. It is a beautiful, lyrical piece with such tender reflections on a dead fox. I loved the easy continuity of the writing, how effectively the imagery carries the reader down the page. Especially; *soft as bog cotton/ the smother of sedge and bramble/ limbs fluid as rain*. I was struck by the contrasting comparison of the fox to the mother, also dead with; *spikes of pain flattened to an empty line*, which is a wonderful image. It was not too long and resisted the temptation to spell out any sentimental tragedy. A very well constructed poem which draws the natural world into our world, the imagery not only derived from nature (fox, sedge, bramble) but from the living world and from its offset was singing itself in my head.

Third: Calligraphy

I loved the unusual subject matter of this poem, (the signature of John Harle, Sea Captain, as seen in Rainham Hall), and the way the poet had again thought about form and gapping to underpin the effectiveness of the writing. This was a poem that merited its multiple readings. It made me stop and think and consider/ re-consider the content. Built on a striking idea the poet quickly established the voice of the captain and has telling details throughout, the idea of signing a name and what that portends, the ghosts of the past... *stepping easily/ across the border where this garden ends/ the churchyard stones begin*. A poem balanced between time. I especially enjoyed the ending. *I'm here in these Branches/ these Swoops and Lozenges/ the bold strokes*. It is this marriage of the subject, language and form that really sold this poem to me.

Highly Commended Poems (arranged by title)

❖ a winter walk

This poem impressed me with its opening imagery; *the rain is indecisive/ I can smell the turn to snow*. I very much appreciated the gapping to replace punctuation and at times the musicality of its lines. It is what the title tells – a winter walk and the reflections of the protagonist during that walk. I particularly like the fourth stanza with its observations on the doors of dark, derelict houses. The engaging narrative touches on the everyday, the narrative of the walk being carried through to its endings; *jaundiced lamplight / tired dinners*. Thank you, I enjoyed meandering along with this poem.

❖ Get Me a Hat!

A crazy, wild narrative about a T Rex seeking a wedding hat that really made me laugh out loud. It has a wonderful rhythm, and its simple AA/ BB couplet rhyme scheme never disappoints. This poet has a confident command of rhyme. The idiosyncratic story is told with verve, fun and great skill. There are some really strong word choices here that spark the lines, the long list of hat types including; *trilbies and toques in gold, sable and red / the unsuitable tiffers*. The poem rises to a climax as the wedding hat is eventually found and described in such hilarious detail; *a brim like the wings of a sky-sailing bat*. A poem to read and read again and never be disappointed at its amusement. Deliciously energetic and quirky!

❖ Post It Notes

This two stanza, seven line poem has such a clever conceit riffing on the everyday idea of the use of post it notes for the elderly and forgetful, which modulates into reflections on death and the inevitable breaking up of a life/ home. Honesty and tenderness is present here, in a very human and believable poem. The relationship between the woman and her daughters effectively told, the post it notes bridging the gap between forgetfulness and mental / physical degeneration – *in this interlude where puzzlement/ does not leave me tearful – before builders come and chip at the plaster*. A poignant narrative well told. I particularly liked the last line and the use of the world edifice with its multiple meanings.

❖ Stowaway Hedgehog

A delightful character sketch on a hedgehog seeking inside shelter. There is some beautiful language here; *purple cloud-bruise walls / glimpse the last of her uncoiling/ in the rain slicked wet/ like a heart finding its rhythm again*. The narrative unfolds with such a steady progression and gentle pace, the voice soft and the poem has many fine details that really draw the reader into this moment in time. A very convincing poem, it made me believe that the poet was well acquainted with hedgehogs!

❖ The Old Men in the Library

This was another poem that drew me into its narrative very quickly. The three main stanzas and one couplet illuminate how the poet is observing old men in a public library. The repetition of *nodding* at the end of each of the stanzas is a clever device. It creates a soporific rhythmic quality and chimes with the idea of nodding/ ticking/ time. Again, some lovely language; *snow-capped dawdlers/ they bathe in time yet time slowly tilts her face away/ a chain of oily mops and tattered raincoats*. I loved this poem for its celebration of the elderly through the power of poetry and for its management of a deceptively casual tone.

❖ Ukrainian Soldier Cradles a Russian Blue

I was drawn to this poem for its clever title. It combines current affairs, (the horror of the war in Ukraine), with a more human / optimistic face. Its narrative is one that can easily be identified with, (the rescue of cat in a war-torn country). This poem's first lines are strong and compelling as the narrator pulls the reader directly into the scene; *'this used to be a school, creating a tense atmosphere*. I enjoyed its couplet form and its direct language, particularly; *she shivers herself out of the rubble and the town was spiderwebbed entire/ catching thoughts and flies*. It is a well-structured and economical poem where the subject signposts the hope of more compassionate times. It reads, simultaneously, as a powerful political commentary and a simple act of kindness.

❖ Wild Geese

Another beautiful lyrical poem with many wonderful images from the offset; *communal urgency lifts them away from lake and land, pale feet trailing*. This poem is a close observation of geese and the *poignancy of the moment* when they fly to different shores. It is both bold and vulnerable, the imagery striking, I read it and read again enjoying the rich language. The final couplet is particularly good, a resolution of loss, return, and new horizons. In a way this is almost a meditation on the nature of life and death.

Commended:

▪ April Lambing

An evocative poem with a strong voice element. I liked the comparison of the harsh voice, (Farmer?) and the tender address to the newborn lamb coaxing it back into life, particularly; *willing sweet, intoxicating air into its lungs*. This humbling perspective creates a sense of curiosity and connectedness to animal life.

▪ Giant Water Bug

Another descriptive poem effectively drawing us into the world of the water bug. Again, some lovely imagery; *forelegs are billhooks with needle tips / you guzzle life as a day job*. A well-constructed poem which was easy to read and very enjoyable.

- Irrational
A relationship poem that uses the three-line stanzas very effectively to explore a narrative of family dynamics. The subject matter is easily relatable combining personal commentary with a developing emotional depth. Its conclusion is gratifying without being facile.
- Leap of Faith
A lyrical poem about swifts with beautiful imagery. I very much liked the opening image; *synchronised streamers of the sky ... weave their aerial dance*. And a good title too that leads the reader into the poem without telling too much.
- Pre-Prandial
Ostensibly a poem about a cat and her eating behaviours but carries a much stronger message, especially in the later stanzas; *another day's mystic journey / beyond the flailing wipe of words*. The whole poem is very well paced and contains some wonderful images that reach beyond the initial subject matter, particularly; *a man...who fumbles...any sense of who he is.. and stands amid the rickety footfall/ a face of eye whites and bones pressing*.
- Saved Critters Sonnet
As the title suggests this is a sonnet, in an ABBA form. It has some really unusual and vibrant sensory images and a very engaging first line. The use of onomatopoeia effectively heightens the voice of the poem. I particularly enjoyed the final couplet; *we live until we don't. We whirred away /towards the rising sun. Another day*.
- The Poets Garden
Another sonnet with an interesting conceit, using the idea of a poet compared to an overgrown garden. It elaborates on the chaos of land left untended, paralleling the poet's imagination also running amok. The final couplet finds a resolution in the reality that it is as it is but there is much to be gleaned from its profusion.

And a Special Mention to:

- Ammonite
- Butterflies near Quimper
- Encounter with a poplar Hawk Moth
- Honey Water
- Magpies Nest
- Ripples
- stopping the bleeding
- The Cats of Rome
- The Rehabilitation Centre
- Worms

JUDGE'S COMMENTS on the 'RESCUE' poems

Thank you for entering the 2023 poetry competition. I feel that all the entries have been written from the heart and many make you feel as though you almost know the poet. The ones I have chosen as the 3 winners, and the 5 very highly commended poems all have special meaning to me and the rest that follow are all highly commended and much enjoyed. It was very difficult to choose the winners as they all showed what man's best friend, dog, cat or bird, means to us and the love and comfort they give us. If only more people appreciated their animals, there would be no need for a sanctuary. Thanks go to our proper judge, Tina Cole, the judge of the open competition and Derek Sellen for time spent organising the competition. Thank you for supporting Lord Whisky, whose work grows at an alarming rate.

Margaret G Todd (founder of the Lord Whisky Sanctuary)

First Place: Number 6 A Miracle Dog Called Bimba

This poem reminds me of a German Shepherd I rescued in Dulwich, South East London many years ago. I was called in by the council as no-one could get near her. I arranged for the local rescue group to feed her in a certain spot twice a day for a couple of weeks, but she waited for them to leave until she approached the food. I then arranged for a dog trap to be delivered and food was put in before it was set a few days later. After I finished work at the sanctuary I travelled to London and set the trap at 7.30. I nearly gave up but at 3.30am she appeared and slowly went in, I have never known a dog to be so terrified but she soon got over whatever had happened to her and made a loving and loyal companion to a lovely couple, never leaving their side. It was almost as if she was saying thank you every day.

Second place: Number 92 Paw Prints

This reminds me of a cat we took in recently. He was taken to a vet with a broken jaw by a member of the public and as he had no owner, we took him into our veterinary clinic until he recovered. The first few weeks he seemed to hold it against us with growls and claws. The sanctuary was full so we decided to keep him at the vets with accommodation outside with access to a shed. He has now turned into a lovely cat who seems to remember stroked and cuddles before his previous owner abandoned him.

Third place: Number 113 Shep

What a lovely poem and that one day another dog will follow in Shep's paws, being a tribute to Shep and all the happy memories he has left. Shep reminds me of my own dog Jodey, so scared she didn't bark for nearly two years and when she did she scared herself! Now with just a nod of the head she knows what is expected of her and she is so close to me.

Very highly commended: Number 31 Cher Ami (dear friend)

Well done Cher Ami, but why did you, a lovely intelligent bird, have to lose your life for the stupidity of man?

Very highly commended: Number 144 Tommy

A sentiment applicable to all our greyhounds and lurchers we home that made such enjoyable companions.

Very highly commended: Number 5 A Little Time

Like a lot of dogs and cats that come into the sanctuary, if given time they turn themselves around and become the most loving companions.

Very highly commended: Number 145 Ukrainian solider cradles a Russian blue

It is heart-breaking to think that innocent animals who probably had a loving home should go through the trauma of war, carried out by so-called humans who have nothing better to do. We hope that whoever rescued her are both doing well.

Very highly commended: Number 137 The Rescue

This year we have looked at the gate to see someone standing there with a box in their arms and on investigating, find they have been driving along the road and spotted the box in a layby. Inside has been discovered puppies and kittens and once, six adult cats. It is sad but better perhaps than a little dog with a popped eye found by a motorist roaming along the main road in the dark. He was brought to the sanctuary and is making good progress after having his eye removed.

Scroll down to read the prize-winning poems

Or a Triumph

My grandmother. On the back of a BSA.
Or a Triumph.

Bright-haired, she's laughing.
In black-and-white but her joy is pure

colour. A charisma
of colour. On the back of one of those old

bikes. Behind this guy (not my grandfather)
who's wearing motorcycle gauntlets,

like clumsy, fur-lined
oven gloves. She's pillion, on a BSA.

Or a Triumph.
One of those old bikes, classic old bikes.

And she's laughing, laughing, having
fun.

My gran—

Georgina Titmus

Fox

I don't need to touch you
stretched out there in the shade
your body soft as bog cotton
sinking into the smother of sedge and bramble
you lie as if you sleep
limbs fluid as rain
unmarked by disease or age

I know you are dead
that's how my mother lay, uncoiled at last,
a finger to her lips
the spikes of pain flattened to an empty line
age and disease wiped clean.

Jenna Plewes

Calligraphy

*Visitors to Rainham Hall loved tracing the signature
of John Harle, sea captain*

Writing this with a white goose quill
you're waiting at the gate into my land.

Blots sprout under the nib
stain the heel of your palm confuse
the signature you're trying to perfect.

You know I'm out here stepping easily
across the border where this garden ends
the churchyard stones begin.

I extend an invitation. Think of it as a seed
that drifts in through the window
where I used to stand watching the wharf.

You feel me take the pen scratch ink
across the page. *I'm here in these Branches
these Swoops and Lozenges*

*the bold Strokes of my sensible north country Hand
and here between one Name
and the other I hesitate.*

Alex Josephy

They won't remember her now,
the locals who chased her away when
she trespassed in gardens with light feet,
heavy heart, slipping herself through
prosecuting railings to nose meagre crumbs
shaken from tablecloths; who threw
stones when she stole footwear
carelessly left outside, chewed
the leather to edible pulp.

They won't remember calling on the mayor
to intervene, to save their shoes, the tin
of Chappie he sent with empty words
shod with empty smiles.

They won't remember the pitiful ball
of fur in shades of strained grey, scraggy tail
wrapped round to her nose, curled
under a hedge next to funeral piles
of tiny birds' bones neatly cached for later.

They won't remember dismissing her
as too ugly to count.

They won't remember me arriving every day
with chicken and mince, or later, with my dogs.
Won't remember the vet with his blow-pipe
and dart to get her into my car.
Won't ever know how she licked my forehead
when I squatted, hands behind my back, how
she slowly let herself show her true nature,
how she fitted herself to Scamp,
always following his cue,
always my shadow.

Susi Clare

Paw prints

I left my paw prints in the garden today,

One that I visited every day,

I never gave up hope of something to eat,

Nor of a new home to provide my keep,

I left my paw prints in the garden today,

The path I created as I walked every day,

A gentle reminder of never giving up hope,

Of your dreams and your right,

Of somewhere to sleep at night,

I never gave up hope of a Forever Home,

As I sat on the patio at night alone,

And when it was time for something to eat,

I walked my path again,

I had a special place to eat,

And before I ate and after being fed,

I'd give my thanks first with a rub of my head,

When the cat flap was open I sidled inside,

And sat in the corner and tried to hide,

And then the memories came flooding back,

I remembered what it was like to be a house cat,

I left my paw prints in the garden today,

As I was put into a box,

And travelled a new way,
I visited the dentist,
And had breakfast and dinner to eat,
I relaxed and allowed them to provide my keep,

I'm on a new journey,
To a Forever Home,
To a place and person I can call my own.

And now I will have a voice,
My Forever Home will give me a choice,
I can roam in the garden if I choose,
But the door will be open,
After I've enjoyed the views.

Kirsty Harper

Shep

We spoke different languages,
At least in the beginning.
You knew harsh words, hard fists,
Could read a bottle like a pro,
Knew at what measurement to hide.
To me people were a puzzlement,
I couldn't find a predictability.
Hadn't yet learned how to respond.

Together we rebuilt our own Babel.
Created one language that suited us well.
Staccato taps of paws and feet,
Became the sound of happiness.
Dancing out rhythms on the kitchen floor,
That matched not a song but our mood.
A squeak of a toy, an encouragement to get moving.
Coats, human and canine, drying in front of the fire,
Our conversation about a day well spent.
The silent companionship of a dog and their person.

When you left, our language did too.
No letters of muddy paws,
Or verbs of walking joy.
And yet our language was not extinct.
For you had left dictionary entries everywhere.
Messages of delight enclosed in favourite places.
A cloth rabbit under the sofa, spoke of care.
You taught me the dialect of friendship,
And left it for when the time was right for me to pass it on,
Ready for the paws that would one day follow yours.

Fern Adams