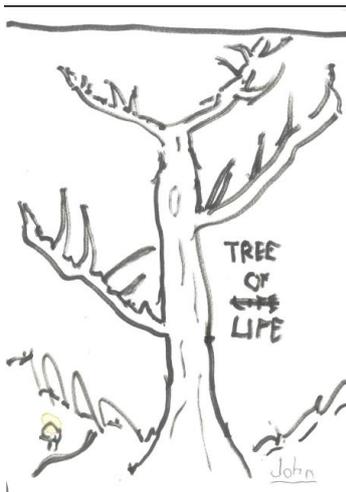


# I'm Still Me

*Poetry by people with Aphasia*



By Members of **dyscover**

# Introduction

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**‘I’m Still Me’** - A poetry project for people with aphasia

Aphasia, most often acquired through stroke, is a communication problem affecting the ability to find words and understand language both spoken and written. So in many ways a poetry project for people with aphasia sounds absurd.

However, poetry is a powerful medium for expression, and having worked in the past with highly acclaimed poet Wendy French, we knew that she was the person to call upon. Creative writing, reading and poetry are areas of great passion to many of our members but specialist support is needed to rediscover this enjoyment after aphasia. We are grateful to the Leathersellers’ Company for a grant which has part funded this activity.

A project entitled **‘I’m Still Me’** was developed. Wendy French, supported by Dyscover staff and volunteers, delivered poetry sessions with each of our weekly conversation groups early in 2014. Seven sessions, took place involving 49 Dyscover members and five relatives.

With the help of Wendy French’s creative ability and the specialist support of Dyscover Speech and Language therapists and volunteers, these sessions resulted in the production of 12 poems.

This poetry was exhibited and recited on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014 at an exhibition held at the venue where our two New Malden groups meet. The exhibition, entitled **‘I’m Still Me’**, was a combination of art and poetry produced by our members to mark Aphasia Awareness Month, as well as to highlight our presence within the local community. The event was well attended and officially opened by The Deputy Mayor of the Royal Borough of Kingston.

We have combined all of the poetry from this project into this e-Book as the work is such quality it should be shared!

Please enjoy our e-Book of poetry.



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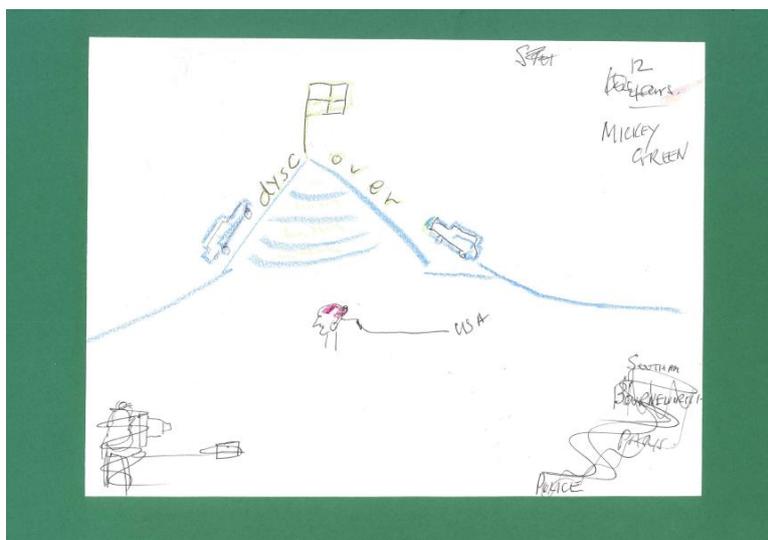
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# I Am Still Me

## Life after Aphasia



James:

I used to love playing golf. I had to give it up but now I've started playing again. I am still me. I've grown closer to Margaret even though our lives have changed. Margaret is a brick.

I used to be a top guy.

Group: *oh yes, you still are the top guy.*

Trish:

I drive to Dorset over a hill and feel happy to see the sky ahead.

In hospital I learnt to be patient and that's been good.

I have gained friendship from here.

I've learnt to overcome challenges and I now have a job making automatic light switches for fridges and car boots.

I've learnt to do everything even draw and sew using my left hand.

I am still me with new skills.

Claire:

I've learnt to love Life with a capital L. I know by going where I have to go. I can still sing, *Summertime* is one of my favourite songs. *When the living is easy*, living isn't easy now but I go to Goa for months at a time and sing.

Mary:

I had a serious facial infection before my stroke. I lost some of the sight in my eye. Then I had my stroke but I can still help Peter in the house. I potter and sleep and go to church.



Hugh:

I used to love growing roses and worked for BP. I've given 40 years to the Lifeboats and was given a silver cup. I am still me because I care about the Lifeboats and all the work that people do to help this charity survive. Lifeboats are there to help people in distress.

Bill:

I can't drive now. I think I could but my wife says No! I go on the bus to Reigate or Dorking and have a drink in a pub and catch the bus home. I am still me because I can enjoy a pint of beer! I used to be a barber. I came 4<sup>th</sup> in a national competition. I was good. I can't cut hair now but I appreciate a good cut on someone's head.

Ken:

I used to try and play golf I don't even try now! When I was younger I used to take photographs. I now take photographs sometimes. That's a skill I still have. I worked hard and became a manager. I have re-learnt skills and can think, *I did that when I see something that I have done*. I have learnt to be very patient.

By The Thursday Group - Walton on the Hill

# Being Alone



Sometimes we like to be alone and sometimes not.

These are our thoughts on being alone:

Never, I like people in the room not more than three or the room confuses me.

I like to be alone when it's my choice and I can play the piano,  
I like to be alone when it's just me with my wife, that's being alone in company.

I don't like to be alone, I like ladies present. I was a sailor.

Sometimes I like to be alone when I'm ironing and listening to the radio.

I would like to live by myself with my daughters not too far away.

Times alone are precious when you live in a care home.

Sometimes it is good to be on your own but not all of the time.

I like to be on my own when I'm painting and cooking.

I like to be alone when I'm studying and trying to focus.

I sometimes like to be alone and sometimes I need company.

I like to be alone when I'm fishing and it's just me and the brown trout.

I like dawn on my own and when I'm reading Jane Eyre.

I quite like being on my own and I don't mind being with people as long as they're not angry.

I would like to learn to be alone. I once feared being alone.

Meditation is good when you are alone. It can connect you to the good things about living today.



By The Tuesday AM group – New Malden AM

# Journeys

Today when my journey began I left at home  
My husband at the sink washing up  
My black cat Mylo  
Expensive Wellington boots and I was angry as it rained  
Half a bowl of cornflakes  
Some porridge and new blue stripy pyjamas  
A very comfortable bed  
A sad looking Cocker Spaniel



Today when my journey began I left at home  
My husband to make the bed  
My father glued to the winter Olympics  
My pyjamas on the floor for someone else to pick up  
Lamb chops defrosting  
My lovely wife, Ann  
Jobs to do, food shopping to be done, my list at home  
A happy husband and a grandchild a few hours old  
Two Springer Spaniels barking  
Next door's cat asleep on our bed  
Six Irish Setters who I love but who I won't let sleep on my bed  
These are all the things we left at home and will be going back to

When I left home I brought with me  
Lunch that I sometimes forget  
My keys and I left men working  
My watch that tells me the time  
My mobile phone, I can't go anywhere without it  
My rings, my bracelet and my coloured nails  
My brown suede handbag  
My laptop as I need to do some work  
Letters to post, relieved that I'd written them



My wedding ring and glasses  
My car keys and I parked in the pub  
My gold stop watch that was a present from my son  
My bag and a lovely lady, a smile and happiness  
A photograph of my new grandchild, three hours old  
My spring green cardigan, a Christmas present –  
It made us all think of daffodils  
Shoes to change into as I didn't want to stay in heavy boots all day  
My watch, it's big, the bigger the better...



On the journey here I felt no stress because  
It's half-term so no school run, no arguing in the car  
But I felt stress because there were no ducks, no swans on the pond  
And I wondered where they'd gone  
I felt no stress because as I passed the Golf course  
Golfers were hitting a ball  
I felt stress because of the rain and I'd left my boots at home  
I felt frustrated because we were stuck in traffic on the bus

On the journey here I felt no stress because I was very happy  
To come again and see my friends again  
And I was glad to come again in spite of another stroke and broken arm  
I was listening to an excellent programme on the radio  
On the journey here I was glad of my husband who drives  
I had a good clear run over the A25, the road was partially flooded  
I felt some stress as a tree had blown down but  
A duck waddled across the road, nature does go on  
And I felt tired of the rain  
But on my yellow bus there was only one other passenger  
The bus picks me up at 9.45

On my journey here I felt guilty as I brought my car  
And I live 400 yards down the road but I need to  
go shopping



On my journey here I listened to the Beach Boys and I sang along  
My wife Joan told me to be quiet probably because of the traffic jam  
And she was angry with my singing

On my journey here I noticed a huge puddle opposite the bandstand  
On Epsom Downs.

On my journey here I too had a wife who hates me singing  
But it raises my spirits

On my journey here I felt no stress because I was coming to visit my  
friends, all of you.

By The Tuesday Group - Walton on the Hill

Contributions from **Pat, Brian, David, Grace, Len, Bob, Rita, Laurie,  
Sylvia, Andrea, Tom, Bridget, Cassie, Evelyn, Alice, Marilyn,  
Maureen and Diane**



# Me After Aphasia



I am homesick for my father who died three years ago.

I am homesick for Glasgow and cycling in France.

I am homesick for talking. I was a wordsmith and now the exact words I want won't come.

I am homesick for Time. I just don't have enough of it.

I am so often late and I miss being able to get anywhere on time.

I am homesick for confidence with technology.

I am homesick for the carefree world I once lived in when I was younger.

Too many responsibilities now.

I am just homesick for confidence with everything.

I am homesick for all my equipment, my power tools that I once loved to use.

I am homesick for the gardening and all the things I could do two years ago.

I am homesick for South Wales where the home fires are still burning.

By The Tuesday PM group – New Malden



## In Those Steps



I have walked in those steps many times.

Now my steps are new.

When I came here this morning I left at home a tidy kitchen,  
no crumbs and a cat stretched out across the floor.

When I came here this morning I left at home plants to be watered,  
they seemed happy to wait until I arrived home.

The system seems to be working.

When I came here this morning I left at home happiness.

My husband is working at home today.

My kitchen was spotless and the washing is in the machine  
waiting to be hung out and dried. I left a small but pretty garden.

I have walked in those steps many times.

Now my steps are new.

I will walk new steps each day and give presents,  
pictures I have made. To Trish I give a sacred silk cow from Goa.

I will walk new steps each day and take my walking stick to  
new places. I will wear my name badge so people know who I am.

I will take my smile to new places and the gifts I am learning to make  
by sewing again. This time with my left hand.

I have walked in those steps many times.  
Now my steps are new.

By The Thursday Group - Walton on the Hill  
Contributions from - **Trish, Hugh and Claire**



## On Waking



I wake to sleep and take my waking slow  
I wake alone and take my waking here.  
My wife died ten years ago  
I learn by going where I have to go.

I wake to sleep and take my waking slow  
My daughter takes me with her when she goes  
On holiday to Caribbean lands and I can swim  
I learn by going where I have to go.

I wake to sleep and take my waking slow  
I love mussels, jellied eels and prawns  
Most foods and drinks and warm sea  
I learn by going where I have to go.

I wake to sleep and take my waking slow  
I wake relieved I've made it through the night  
I am aware of hours travelling the hours  
I learn by going where I have to go.



By Tuesday Group Member - **Laurie Hales**  
Walton on the Hill member -

*I wake to sleep and take my waking slow  
I learn by going where I have to go*  
lines from the poet Theodore Roethke

## Open The Door



Go and open the door there might be  
somewhere new to live.

Go and open the door there might be more of my family who I don't  
know standing on the doorstep.

Go and open the door there might be summer and  
warm water to swim in.

Go and open the door there might be a drink of confidence like a  
magic potion waiting for me. I will drink and it will fill me with  
confidence.

Go and open the door there will be all my tools tidied up and waiting  
to be used.

Go and open the door there might be a list of targets for me for  
2014.

Go and open the door there might be a beautiful spring day with  
daffodils.

Go and open the door there might be my hiking boots and the  
challenge of a mountain to climb.

At least if we open the door we will be feeling brave with no regrets.

By The Tuesday PM Group - New Malden



## Places that were important to us before we had aphasia

Deena. I remember Jamaica, the North Coast, *Ocho Rios Bay beach*. *The sea is a beautiful turquoise blue*. All the boats have white sails.

Jill. For me Richmond Park is special, the wide open spaces.

Mark was in Thailand for eleven years. He remembers the fish and the stunning islands.

David talked about the Falkland Islands. He said that in winter it has its own problems. Only about a thousand people live there and it's relaxing and inspiring. Clean and three exotic sea weeds. A lot of sheep but with a new feed introduced in David's time the sheep increased their weight by 20%. We're glad that David didn't!

Give Susie Mexico any day and all that shopping! Wonderful beaches, lovely people and T-shirts and sun glasses galore to buy.

Keith's been on lots of cruises but the one he loved was Norway to Russia. He had to visit some palace in Russia and the talk went on for so long he could have fallen asleep. Perhaps he did fall asleep. It was August but it rained and rained and rained. Sound familiar?





Felicity loves her own garden in April when the lilac blossom is out. She remembers putting her daughter in the pram under the blossom. She used to look up at the shadows and dappled sky.

Barbs loved South Africa. Her ex-husband had to go there to meet other directors. She went on the train from Johannesburg to Cape Town on the Garden Route. Different terrain and countryside. So different and so beautiful. Colourful people and lots of sharks in the sea.

For Jill, Reigate Hill is special. It takes her three quarters of an hour to walk there and there are fantastic views but you have to watch out for the Highland

Cattle as they can be dangerous.

For Wendy Elan Valley is special. She used to walk there with her father.

The Elan Valley is heaven she said.

By The Wednesday Group - Walton on the Hill



# Sadnesses



Sadness is the fact that there are always wars.

Sadness is living a life after a stroke.

Sadness is always having hallucinatory dreams about being in hospital.

Sadness is not being able to draw, not being able to get things in perspective.

The frustration that comes with this.

Sadness is other people's sadness.

Sadness is the frustration of not being able to walk freely.

Sadness is trying to learn French when the words won't go in or come out.

Sadness is this right arm which just won't work.

Sadness is Tim.

Sadness is the weather.

Sadness is not being able to help my daughters.

Sadness is owning this hand and this foot. They are both so painful.

Sadness is people when they are intolerant of one another.

Sadness is when I can't get things right.

Sadness is this pain in my back.

Sadness is being stuck in traffic and unable to do anything about it.

But in spite of this sadness we have joy too. There are things to be happy about.

One of our happy thoughts is the friendship from Dyscover.

# Happinesses



Happiness is listening to music. It takes me to another world.

Happiness is reading poetry, the words of John Donne.

*At The Round Earth.*

Happiness is painting in my room. The act of painting absorbs me.

Happiness is the art of book binding. I am learning how to do it.

Happiness is learning about the world, anything at all.

Happiness is when I'm watching Tottenham Hotspurs play and they win.

Happiness is sitting in the theatre waiting for the ballet to begin.

Happiness is watching snooker and trying to forget it's 17 years since I had my stroke.

Happiness is listening to all music except Heavy Metal.

Happiness is seeing my children and grandchildren and knowing that life goes on.

Happiness is eating Spanish food with a glass of wine thrown in. Paella, yum!

Happiness is visits from my daughter. Happiness is hearing children laugh.

Happiness is having my hands manicured and nails painted.

Feeling good about myself.

Happiness is painting and making birthday cards for people and happiness is interior design, refurbishing a house.

By The Tuesday AM Group – New Malden

# Sometimes



Sometimes it seems the sun has forgotten how to shine even in August and then he brushes his cheek with his good hand to show me he knows I'm tired and the roses bloom again because he understands. This brings tenderness back.

Sometimes friends don't understand and when I'm trying to be positive and hear, 'Will he always be a vegetable?'

I get so angry and want to cry, 'Positive, positive positive'

to the world and hope the world will listen.

This would bring tenderness back.

Sometimes when we're out people think he's drunk and I'm upset: spent hours filling out Power of Attorney forms for this. He won't let me cut his food up. All this part of mourning.

Life can never be the same but different. We move on and up and about to prove each day can be special. Can bring tenderness back.

We are now carers, translators, remote control advisers  
but we are wives and partners who have a life to lead.  
Sometimes we need to remember we have to  
Understand when others don't.  
Frustrations belong to all of us.  
We watch their mouths to form their words and form our own.  
Sometimes our faces tell it all.

By some of our Dyscover Carers  
**Jean, Kathryn, Val, Sally and Dawn**

# Voices from Dyscover

## Our Lives

### Being Born

**I can't remember** being born, travelling down the tubes to air  
but I would have been covered in blood and mucus.  
I would have missed the feeling of swimming in my mother's womb  
and the sudden bright lights would have dazzled me and the voices  
would have been so loud.  
I would never have thought I'd find myself in a land of voices.  
I would have been very frightened when the cord was cut  
and I was set free.  
Would the future be a safe environment?  
Swimming on my own.

A dark grey rectangular box containing a white cloud icon on the left and the word "REMEMBER" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font on the right.

**I can remember** starting school wearing my red cap  
and grey uniform.  
I had a straw boater and felt so proud.  
I walked with my mum on the first day and then I was on my own.  
Miles to school and miles back.  
I remember my red knuckles, red from the teacher's ruler.  
I should have learnt my tables.  
I was a good boy and my teacher was kind to me.  
In my short trousers I was conker king!

**I can remember** awful school dinners, cheese flan with little cheese, mince meat and fish and chips on Friday.

We hoped it would be Friday every day.

Rice pudding with a blob of jam and tapioca that stuck in my throat as words do now.

Spam fritters and spotted Dick, blue plastic plates.

All those ghastly custard tarts with skin on the custard.

We had silver metal vats with pink custard.

Ugh! The third of the pint of milk which was always warm.

Often the top was broken and there was a smell of sour milk.

**I can remember** my fourteenth birthday.

I had a new bike and felt so happy.

Holidays were always sunny when I was little.

We swam in the sea. We went to Wales in a caravan. There was one loo for a whole site!

In the scouts I remember the left handed handshake.

We always had to have 20 pence, a white handkerchief and to be prepared.

I used to play cricket. I was the batsman and there was always sunshine. 151 runs was my best innings.

**I can remember** leaving home, being so excited. Hurray I thought.

I can remember being nervous but happy to go.

I remember reading History and Law and I remember starting in the police force. So proud of my uniform.

I was an engineer and loved to make things.

I used to drive an ice cream van, I can still hear the tune in my head. 99p for a flake. They cost £2.50 now.

I trained to be a teacher. I read Theology and Art. I can remember going to York and I went to Oxford.

We all had such hopes for the future.

**I can remember** my wedding day.

It rained and all the guests wore Wellingtons.

I had a white wedding she looked beautiful.

When I got married it was bitterly cold.

I'll have been married one year in March.

The two lawyers married wives in registry offices. One in Epsom and it rained.

The sun doesn't always shine on your wedding day, but it may shine on your marriage.



## Me after Aphasia

One day I may remember what it feels like not to have aphasia.

For me the most frustrating thing is not being able to get the words out.

They're stuck in my head.

The world is confusing and muddled and it never used to be like this.

I've lost being able to say what I wanted to say. At one time I always had plenty to say!

The loss of use of my right hand is so annoying. I can't do all the things I'd like to do.

I was fine until I had an accident on the ski slopes which resulted in a stroke.

For me the loss of the ability to work is so hard. My right hand just will not work.

I live in a confusion, a muddle in my head.

## Our hopes for each new day are these:



I go on my exercise bike three times a week, I've raised money on a sponsored ride.

My daughter in law is pregnant and I'm look forward to a new grandchild.

I have friends who go to the Rotary Club and I enjoy meeting up.

I enjoy hearing children and watching Everton win.

I play chess once a week and enjoy winning.

I love going on-line and playing with my laptop.

I have a wife and son and love being with them and of course, exercise class at the gym twice a week.

We've all developed strategies to cope.

We can't remember being born. We can remember lots of things.

One day we may understand the world again but for now we can feel the sun and its warmth and be glad.

By The Monday Group - Walton on the Hill



## Why I Am Still Me

I am still me says Barbs because I love purple, Deena adores clothes and looking good, Mark has kept his dry sense of humour, David has kept his voice and Susie her lovely bubbly personality, Keith spends his days thinking of others, Barry loves his family more and more, Neil has kept his bright eyes and beautiful smile, Martin has kept his love for Motor Cross, hard cycling and Martin has his wife and children to make him sing. Although his wife does get rather fed up with his singing but he has a strong voice and it's very moving to hear him sing, particularly, *Should old acquaintance be forgot...*

By The Wednesday Group - Walton on the Hill

## Things We Love Now



Martin still loves the sea and looking across the oceans. It reminds him of when he was on his honeymoon. He's very interested in coastal conservation.

Barbs loves collecting shells, razor shells and conch shells to hear the sea.

Deena loves standing on the wet sand and seeing the waves come in and recede.

Barbs likes Richmond Park as it reminds her of being a child and climbing trees.

Martin likes going into London. He went to Temple Bar last week.

Mention London and the eyes of Barbs and Deena light up, Oxford Street and shopping! Selfridges and John Lewis.

What bliss!

By The Wednesday Group - Walton on the Hill

Contributions from **Martin, Barbs and Deena**

