

**C  
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M U N A L  
S P I R I T**

**POETRY FROM  
ESKDALE HOUSE**



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# **Communal Spirit**

Poetry from Eskdale House

## **Acknowledgements**

Paul McGee and all the staff and residents at Eskdale House; Talbot Association; Cassiltoun Trust; Laura Edwards; Scottish Book Trust; Learning and Teaching Scotland; Liam Hurley, James Gow, Natalie McFadyen and the whole Impact Arts team.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Scottish Book Trust or Learning and Teaching Scotland

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## **Introduction**

I first met the contributors to this poetry collection in summer 2010, while working on a consultation project with Eskdale House residents. At that stage, I was leading creative writing workshops to develop ideas for the regeneration of Buchanan Lodge, where the residents will be re-housed in 2012.

It soon became clear that the voices, stories and experiences shared deserved their own platform, one provided in the booklet you now hold in your hands.

My role has been to enable these individual voices, bringing form to the poems in consultation with the contributors: Alan Gannon, Daniel Hurles, Dennis Condon and Kenneth MacMillan.

It has been a privilege to support the expression of these remarkable men.

**Liam Hurley**

Writer In Residence, Impact Arts

March 2011

## Squirrel Story

I would like a red and  
grey squirrel

And go for a long walk  
in the ol' woods

To see if they get into fights  
to see if the red will win.

Grey squirrels  
like biscuits, cream and plain  
3 or 4 times a day  
hand fed

They will give a sharp bite  
at close range.

Happy to say it takes  
3 or 4 packets a week

My wee hungry pal would take  
ginger nuts and plain  
morning noon and night  
from your hand

And I love to feed him.

– *Kenny*



## **Fits**

I've been taking my fits again.  
Been in and out of hospital  
about eight or nine  
times

But never for  
more than a  
night.

– *Danny*

## **medicine - locker - keyring**

I've got my medicine  
can't say it  
doesnae help me.

I take it myself  
got it in a wee locker  
by my bed.

I carry the key about with me,  
along with my room key.  
It's got some size of a key ring.

If you dropped it  
you'd know about it.

– *Danny*

## Pigeons

I used to fly  
Pigeons in Partick

From there to Maryhill  
Whiteinch  
And Drumpchapel

Funny wee birds  
I kept them in my cellar

You had to  
Feed them right  
Treat them right  
And take responsibility.

– *Dennis*

## **Five Alarms**

Five alarms in one day!

You could be  
in your vest  
or sat on the loo...

All because of puffing in the room  
or burnt toast.

– *Kenny*

## **Growing Up 1**

Durham Street ...

No cobbles.

Long, wide and flat.

We had races up and down.

When the mill siren went,  
you knew the stampede was coming.  
You'd dash up a close

or grab hold of a lamppost.

– *Kenny*

## **The Canteen**

For breakfast:

Sausage and bacon  
to heel your  
shoes with.

– *Dennis*

## Growing Up 2

I lived in Partick  
near the shopping centre.  
Just behind  
the shops.

The school  
was just opposite  
my front door.

You couldn't dodge it.

– *Dennis*

## **two hands**

Watch out for your trousers  
dropping  
as you walk across the room.

Holding them up  
with one hand  
while the other hand  
holds a tray

Which might  
need two hands!

Which will fall -  
The trousers  
or your tray?

And let's not even mention  
playing pool.

*- Kenny*



## Growing Up 3

You'd seldom keep  
your feet to yourself...

Always kicking  
at something!

Like a can  
pulled out from  
the midden

Sometimes  
the seal was still on it

But it would be empty.  
Punctured at the bottom.

– *Kenny*

## **The Black Side**

I've always looked at the Black Side.  
Even before being in here.

I enjoy being depressed.  
You create a cocoon of  
darkness about you.

Wallow in Purgatory  
and self pity.

It's an escapism.  
The same with drink:  
I could escape into a bottle.

You think it's bringing you out  
into the light

But it pulls you further in.

*– Alan*

## **Life Lessons**

Grow up wisely  
Be yourself  
Don't copy everyone  
Drink  
Smoke  
But keep away from  
women

– *Collective*

## **Funny Touch**

There are times  
when I wake up in the morning  
and I feel I have just had a funny touch

Yes of course that could be just the start of  
my uncontrollable fits.

It may be known as a funny touch  
but to me it's not,  
as I do get a fright when it's on the go

So why laugh?  
Not me  
I do get scared at the thought

But it soon passes.

– *Danny*

# Alan Vs Johnny

## Part 1: Addiction – (Escape From) Reality

My life has been ruled  
By addiction

To booze.

Booze has taken me to where  
I wanted me to be  
In my head.

Booze allowed me  
To be a normal person:  
In my head

Drink was  
My life  
My world

Without booze I  
Was a shy wee guy

With it I was KING

It was my escape from life.  
Drink has KILLED me.

R.I.P.

**Part 2: Who Am I ( Don't Know Who I Am )**

Without drink I'm NOTHING.  
With it, I'm THE MAN.

John Barleycorn  
Has stabbed me in the back

Once  
My best friend  
He is now  
My enemy

Damn you Johnny.

I like you.

**Part 3: To Anyone**

WHY AM I HERE?  
WHAT HAVE I DONE?  
YOU ARE NO BETTER THAN ME

I USED TO BE ME,  
WHO ARE YOU?

WHO AM I, I DON'T KNOW.

DAMN YOU!

**Part 4: Johnny Speaks**

GOT YA WEE MAN!

THOUGHT I WAS YUR MATE (HA HA!)

NUTHING IS FUR NUTHING

PLAY WITH THE DEVIL  
YA GET THE DEVIL  
KNOW WHIT A MEAN.

WHY DRINK?

WHY NOT.

*– Alan*



## The Seasons

Danny: I like springtime  
When the warmth comes in.  
But it's a mixture:

You get the rains too  
All different sorts

You're not settling for  
One thing all day.

Alan: I'm a winter man  
I've always liked it:  
The warmth of it.

Coal fires.  
Sitting in.

Wind and snow  
Howlin' outside.

– *Danny and Alan*

## **Since I Saw You Last**

I've seen the hard times in my life.

I've wished I could get back to normal.

I've seen the abyss:  
I'm living in it.

I've felt  
like shit

– *Danny and Alan*

## **Jackpot**

Would winning the lottery  
Make me happy?

I don't know  
Maybe not

But I'd like to find out.

– *Alan*

## **Get used to it!**

In winter  
It's cold  
You've got to get used to it.

I'd rather feel the cold  
Than get all wrapped up  
Like a cotton wool ball.

Don't get me wrong  
I'm not saying  
That I would go out  
In just my skin!

– *Danny*

# **Take it or Leave it**

## **Part 1: Maggots**

I worked in the Slaughterhouse  
down on Stockwell Place.  
I think it's away now.

I got the job after working  
in the Bell Street Housing Depot.

At first I was an assistant:  
Cleaning the scales

And gathering all the fat  
in big oil drums.

You put this stuff in it  
to keep it clean  
so you wouldn't get maggots.

The forklift motor would come  
and takes the drums away  
huge things,  
about six in a month.

**Part 2: All Sorts**

After a while  
I was promoted  
to a Hide and Skin Merchant.

Skinning the cows:  
Old ones  
Dead ones  
We wouldn't kill them

But they were past it  
Ready for the box.

We skinned them, took the fat off.  
Weighed them  
Stamped them  
Salted them

Sent them off down to the tanning  
To be made into  
shoes and jackets  
And all sorts.

You'd walk past a shop window  
and think  
I know where that came from.

– *Danny*

## Wages

In school  
the only thing I wasn't good at  
was arithmetic

But when I was working,  
when I got my wages  
I'd still be counting it

Even if I had to  
count it twice.

– *Danny*

## Spelling

Spelling wasn't  
my strong point either.

To begin with  
I wouldn't know  
what some words were, like  
psychotic or  
idiotic.

You pick it up over time.  
Though I've never been a big reader.

– *Danny*



## **My Family**

My mother and father  
had six of a family:  
five boys and one girl

'Five tatties and one tomaty'  
my dad used to say.

There was one set of twins  
my brothers  
Joseph and John.

They looked nothing like each other:  
More like Tom and Jerry  
or Laurel and Hardy!

But one always knew  
what the other was thinking.  
If you asked one a question,  
the other would answer.

One thing I cannae mind

I think one of the twins died.

– *Danny*

## Communal Living

I'm not one for communal living,  
I've always been a loner.

I can't stand not having privacy.  
You could be on the toilet for 2 minutes  
and someone's banging down the door:

"You gonnae be all day?!"

You can't do your own thing.  
You eat when you're told,  
sleep when you're told.

I'd rather be by myself,  
live in a cave somewhere.

Become a hermit.

– *Alan*

## Childhood Streetmap

I was born and bred in Townhead.  
where the Royal Infirmary is  
on Barony Street.

At the top of the street was  
The Trossachs.  
At the bottom of the street was  
Teachers.

And just along from that was  
the offy.  
That was handy for my dad,  
he liked a drink.

Across the road from the offy was  
a public toilet,  
with stairs going down.  
Guess what was above it?  
... The police box!

– *Danny*

## **Tongue Man**

He would eat  
any crisps  
under the sun

Always had  
a packet or two  
trouble is

He couldn't open them himself  
always had to ask for help

Him and his big tongue...  
the length of it!

– *Kenny*

## **Prison 1**

I've been in and out all of my life.

Sometimes in just for a few months.  
Then out for a few.

Mostly for things like  
shoplifting.

– *Danny*

## **Prison 2**

What I learned most from prison:

Don't get caught.

But now, I have the chance to reflect  
on the bad decisions I made.

– *Danny*

## **Common Law**

I met the mother of my children  
when I was just 15.

She was my wife in common law  
as we never got married.

We lived together from a young age.  
Our first place was squatted:

Where we lived,  
in Townhead,  
there were a lot of destitute buildings.

I'd go up the drainpipe and in the window...

It was illegal actually.

– *Danny*

## **Marriage**

We were about to get married  
When I got the jail.

At that point  
She moved back in with her mother.

And when I came out that time  
Is when she fell pregnant.

But we never moved back in together.

We ended up having two children  
But the wee boy died at 6 months.

A cot death.

She moved down south  
And married another man.

*– Danny*

## **Iceland**

I want to write about  
going to Iceland.  
I've been there lots

It takes about 3 minutes  
sometimes 2 and a half.

I mean the shops.

The staff know me in there  
I talk to them all.

I get my food:

Biscuits  
Pot noodles  
Crisps

And Lager.

*– Dennis*



## **Love / Hate**

I Love:

Nature

And think that this world is an amazing place

I Hate:

Myself mostly.

Authority.

Go-Dooders.

And getting up each morning

Having to face another day.

– *Alan*

## **Cat - Scat**

When I was with my parents  
My mother did want a cat

She said children,  
What do you think about that?

Well Mum,  
You will like that animal

For a little pat.

– *Danny*

**Brutally honest,  
darkly  
humorous and  
disarmingly  
innocent...**

**A collection of  
poems written by  
residents of  
Eskdale House,  
a home for men  
who have been  
homeless.**



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