

M.E. AND ME



**A selection of poems
by
GERALDINE LAKER**

Foreword

I was happily married to Geraldine (or Geri, as she became widely known), for nearly 40 years. She never enjoyed perfect health, but until the late '80s she was able to lead a full and very busy life as a loving wife, mother of twin boys and a member of several local organisations. However, not long after a bout of shingles Geri began to have less and less energy, other problems followed and eventually M.E. was diagnosed.

Despite becoming almost completely bedridden Geri would never ask, "Why me?". Instead she broadened her horizons beyond her 'pink prison' by making numerous pen friends, even writing encouraging letters to one or two prisoners on death row in the USA.

Behind her constantly positive attitude was the strong Christian faith she had from a very young age and this shines through in many of the poems she began writing as an outlet for her creativity. She managed to write a great number of poems until it became too much for her in 2008.

Geri passed away in 2014, and I think she would like the idea of some of her poems being shared to give a greater understanding of M.E. and to show solidarity with the many severe M.E. sufferers fighting their own battles everywhere.

I hope this selection of her works will achieve this aim.

David Laker
March 2022

WHO ARE THE 25% M.E. GROUP?

The 25% M.E. Group is a unique nationwide community based voluntary group. We have two paid members of staff and a number of volunteers - most of whom have severe M.E. We provide a range of services to people affected by severe M.E. (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) and their carers.

Because of the intensity of the symptoms and disabilities experienced by severe M.E. sufferers, we seek to alleviate the isolation having this illness can cause. We encourage: communication between members; participation in the Group on a number of levels via our special interests groups, members' contact list; private Facebook Group, members' Forum etc.

ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) is a serious, long-term neurological condition which affects around 200,000 in the UK. Approximately a quarter of those with the illness are severely affected, many becoming housebound and/or bed-bound for many years.

THE SEVERELY AFFECTED

Patients within this category are often house and/or bed-bound due to the effects of the condition. Both their physical and mental limitations are acute. They will often require the use of a wheelchair both within and without the house, because of difficulties with standing and walking.

They can often experience problems sitting up (even fully supported), using their limbs to carry out everyday tasks, such as washing, toileting and turning themselves in bed. Effects on concentration can be catastrophic, leaving patients unable to hold a conversation, read, or listen to music – or only able to do so for a very short period. They may experience extreme pain and muscle weakness (not due to misuse or under-use) and transient paralysis.

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Group Website: www.25megroup.org

Charity No: SC034265

CHRONIC

I was young when it all began,
I didn't know the score.
I thought it might last
Just a few months,
A year or two
But certainly not more.

Now a decade has passed.
Maybe even longer,
So many wasted years
Of opportunities missed,
Ambitions unfulfilled -
And my body grows no stronger.

I recall a time when I was free
To come and go as I pleased,
To walk along a sandy beach,
Enjoy the shade of trees,
Make footprints in the virgin snow.
Ah yes, I remember these.

AFTER (11.09.01) THOUGHTS

Such is the human spirit
As they phoned home
To say their goodbyes
The harrowing answerphone
Messages that linger on
Long after their body dies.

The candles that they lit
Flames that dance and flicker
A warming soft glow
In the cold light of day
And their spirits live on
More than they would know.

Faces shine out from
Endless 'missing' posters
Friendly, beautiful, so alive
Waiting for the news
That is never coming
Only memories now survive.

AUTUMN IN KENT

The air hangs heavy
With mist in the morning
'Til the weakened sun
Burns it clean away,
While the heady perfume
Of hops that are drying
Slowly increases
And lingers long after
The pale sun sets for the day.
In fruit-filled orchards
Pickers work, merrily plucking
The sweet ripe fruits –
Rosy apples that shine
With their soft dewy bloom –
Or stripping the vines
For fine Kentish wines.
The days grow shorter;
Dusk comes, the chill returns.
Woodsmoke blue and curling,
In the hearth a log fire burning.

BIRTHDAY

Yesterday
Another birthday
Came and went
But the pain's still present

I read
The cards
Opened
The gifts
Blew out the candles
And wished

I grew
A year older
Yet not any
Fitter
While
This illness
Lingers
For years and years

Birthdays
Clocks and gnomons
Measure time
They neither enhance
Nor detract from
The quality of life
But leave you
To choose
And make of it
What you will

EMPTY

Empty –
England's green
And pleasant land,
Not even dogs
Are exercised,
They are banned.
No milking
In the cattle sheds
Or lowing in the byres;
Just the echo
Of shots
And building of
Funeral pyres.

FLOWERS OF FRIENDSHIP

A little seed
Planted by God,
Tended with care,
Nurtured with love.
Daily it grows stronger,
Then slowly blooms;
A beautiful fragile flower
For, firmly planted,
It never dies, but
Enriches our lives
Joyously bringing blessings,
Touching our hearts,
Filling our souls
Until we sing aloud!

I USED TO SOAR

Free
With joy I sing
Like a bird
Flying high
Surfing the breeze
Soaring
Basking in sunshine
Drinking in dawns
Or fiery sunsets
Oblivious to the fragility
Of my own liberty.

Captive
Now suddenly
Pain becomes bars
That hold me hostage
Within a pink prison
Caged
While exuberance ebbs
Rapidly running away
Days merge into weeks
As seasons pass, and
M.E. consumes my life.

ODE TO THE PERSEIDS (Or 'Shooting Stars, Where Art Thou?')

It was in my summer garden
With just a little breeze;
I could hear the leaves a-rustling
As they clung there to the trees.

The air was heavy with perfume,
My flowers gave off sweet scent,
As I lay upon my swinging bed
Where many an hour I spent.

And, looking up at the night sky,
How I longed to shout out loud:
"Oh, there's one of the Perseids!"
But they were obscured by cloud.

I think it's really very strange
When I lie out every year,
That of all the lovely evenings
This special one's never clear.

News reports really rub it in
With talk of an 'aerial display',
But I'll still go out each August
Till I see them, or am old and grey!

EGG TIMER

My life's in an egg timer
Slowly running through space.
Like Alum Bay sand,
Coloured, in sections
Divided
Compartmentalised
Never mixing
Or blending
Just running on.
Stage by stage
Each colour memories
Some cherished
Others best forgotten.
Making a whole being
Completing the picture
That is me.

When I run out
The One who saved me
Will turn me over
And I will begin again
This time with new sand
And an eternal life.

ETAPLES

White crosses stand
Row upon row,
Marking the spot.
Orderly lines
Neatly buried
After the untidiness
Of violent death.
Killed in action,
Those brave men who
Died fighting for
The future of others
Amidst the noise
Of gunfire and
Others dying,
Muck, mud and bullets flying.
Their broken bodies
Laid to rest
In a foreign place
Now of peace and tranquillity,
Their short fragile lives
Abruptly ended.
Name, rank, number,
And some whom
We will never know.
To us they are all
Brave heroes,
But to some -
They were the foe.

FOR MY GRANDAD

My dear sweet Grandad
Died when I was very young.
I could not grieve for him then
But I do now.
I only remember his presence,
Old sepia photographs
Show the frail kind face
Of a man with round glasses.
I listen to stories
Of how he used to be,
His life, kindnesses, and
Spring, his dog.
I feel cheated because
I have no shared memories,
That I was not allowed to
Really know
Someone who loved me
A lot
And was so very
Special.

IN MEMORIAM

Just when I needed you
You came - appeared
Quite out of the blue
As if by magic.
I could not have imagined
A more athletic
Or handsome
Little tabby boy.

My heart went out to you;
It was yours,
Not stolen but freely given.
Instantly we shared
A deep trust and love.
With great tenacity
You faithfully followed
Like a little dog.

Summer came with fun and games,
How you entertained,
Leaping with great agility
At midges as the evening cooled -
A cat who loved water,
Playing with a running tap,
Wading into the paddling pool;
My little water baby.

Autumn and dancing leaves -
Were you playing in the road?
I will never know the truth, after
Such a short time together.
Whisked away with no farewell
But I miss you still, Pippin.

N MY CHILDHOOD

Each winter brought snow.
How delightful it was to
Look up into a steely grey sky
As enormous, white, feathery flakes
Spiralled and whirled to earth.
Summers were all long and hot,
Filled with family picnics and
Spent on golden sandy beaches.

An only child, but never lonely,
I devoured endless books.
Lost in a world of make-believe
And adventure, where I could
Roam windswept moors with Cathy,
Ride the marshes with Dr Syn,
Indulge in a midnight feast
With 'chums' at the Chalet School.

A magical world of images and words
Painting pictures in my mind,
Entertaining and inspiring,
A passion planted in childhood
That lives on, still growing.

IN MY HEAD

In a semi-darkened room
Where double thickness
Nets shield the light
From sensitive eyes.
A stillness prevails,
Broken only by the distant
Hum of traffic or
The gentle song of birds.
Recumbent on the bed
I lie, and seldom move.
Pain prevents,
Exhaustion encroaches upon
Every fibre of my being.
Invisible, thoughts tumble
In my mind
Urgent, muddled,
Vying for a place -
So, do not be fooled by this scene
Of apparent peace or tranquillity, for
In my head I'm - S C R E A M I N G !

INSOMNIA

Racing in his mind
Thoughts
Circulating, growing.
Questions
Tumbling in
Becoming muddled
Confused, jumbled,
Seeking answers,
Pressing for a response
NOW!

His body is weary,
The brain active -
Desperate for sleep
Feet fidget,
Twisting
And turning,
Eyes burning,
Mouth dry
As the clock strikes
TWO!

His thoughts are changing,
Rearranging
His life.
What to study?
How to find a wife?
Words flooding
Into his mind.
He finds paper,
The scribbling kind, and
WRITES.

A poem is taking form,
Scanning
And rhyming
Till his eyelids
Grow heavy,
His mind slows.
As sleep arrives
With odd little dreams
The alarm clock
RINGS!

KENT (EXCURSION OR INCURSION?)

County of beauty,
'Garden of England'
Where
Amidst the rolling
Hills and orchards
The bulldozers roam,
Carving up countryside
Eating up farmland
Spitting out tarmac
For roads -
Building concrete cathedrals
That are only
Service stations
Where bread and wine
Comes plastic coated -
Bringing more railway lines
And channel tunnels for
Trains
Ripping through rape
Massacring maize -
All to hasten the passage
Of the British
So that they can
Appreciate the beauty
Of a foreign
Countryside.

MARKED BY RACE

Blank, traumatised,
Large dark eyes stare
From expressionless faces,
Stunned into disbelief
Where silent tears
Speak volumes of
A deep emotion within.
Thin bodies on which hang
Sepia drab clothes,
Now sizes too large, when
Once they fitted.
Mechanically
Walking to escape,
But to who knows where?
Abandoning their homes,
Leaving with fear and terror,
Fleeing for their lives.
The old folk,
Wives, with their babies crying,
Separated from their husbands,
Lovers, sons, brothers.
Adventure for the children
Who haven't understood the shots
Or the tales of dying.
Neighbour betraying neighbour,
Forced out and
Coolly mown down
In the street
Where they stood.
Marked by race,
Ethnic cleansing,
Mass destruction.

Is this scene from long ago,
The road to Belsen
Or Auschwitz? No -
Spring 1999 in Kosovo.

MISSING HER

The smell of her
That lingers in a room
By a flickering candle
To lighten the gloom.
I feel her presence,
I almost see her there;
A slim shadowy figure
Gently rocking in the chair.

Absent-mindedly
I lay her place
And long to glance
Once again upon her face,
Imagining in a moment
She will walk in
With a little laugh
Or coy, shy grin.

That soft footfall
Upon the hall floor
If I could hear it
Just once more.
Oh, how I miss her,
But she has gone away -
Hours are interminable
On this first school day.

NO GOODBYES

In my thoughts
I see her still;
Remembering her
Skipping and dancing,
Laughing, singing,
So full of life,
Such *joie de vivre*,
Always a water baby.
Sheer delight
Filled her being
As she splashed or swam,
Her blond curls
Bouncing with movement.
She has gone now -
There is no headstone,
No grave where
I can go to grieve.
We did not say goodbye
For I did not see her leave.

PILLAR PORTRAIT

I gaze upon the gifted sisters;
Faces committed to canvas.
In the cracked 'Pillar Portrait'
Three sensitive young women
Stare back at me,
Captured in a moment of time.
Famous lives filled with sorrows,
Determination and a will to succeed.
I can only imagine
That I know them.
Their talented writings
Reveal fertile minds
Hidden behind those
Fragile, unseeing countenances.

Tucked between the covers
Of all the Brontë novels
The reader is magically
Transported back in time,
Decade upon decade
Effortlessly peeled away
'Til she can smell the heather,
Feel the wind in her face
Upon the rugged moors,
Experience the loneliness
And humiliation at Lowood,
Fear the drunken husband
Or struggle for independence
In a time when women were not so free.

Such is the depth of human emotion
Explored within the pages,
Carefully crafted and woven
Tales, rich in the telling.
Each volume a treasured friend,
Read and re-read over the years,
Ageless, yet evocative of its time,
Enriching me, the reader.
Who could guess the prose and the passion
Of the three sensitive young women
In the cracked Pillar Portrait
Staring back at me?

SEA SENSES

Ten years bedridden!
I miss so much
But, most of all,
I yearn for the sea.

Every fibre
Of my being longs
To feel the wind
In my face and
Gently ruffling my hair.
Taste the tang
Of salt
On my lips,
Inhale deeply
Fresh, pure air
See the wheeling
Gull and
Hear its call,
Watch the waves
Crash to shore,
White horses
Riding in
While beachcombers
Search for treasure
After a storm.

Every sense
Heightened and
Rewarded -
One day.....!

SNOW SCENES

Snow gently falling
Muffles the sound
Of trains and cars.
It blankets rooftops
Covers trees
Then, as it stops,
The clear air
Scatters glints of light on
Newly frosted snow,
Shimmering, glistening.

A pale moon rises
Almost white, surrounded by
Silver stars, sparkling
In an indigo sky.
Leafless trees
Reach to the glow
Of the yellow street light
Revealing silhouettes of cats.
They do not linger,
But scuttle back to warmth.

Huddled figures hurry past,
Feet crunching on the ground.
Pink faces tingle, fingers sting
And, on a string, they
Draw their toboggans.
Tired, they head for home,
The scent of woodsmoke
And a crackling fire.
Fun-filled stories to impart
Before falling into bed, sleepy but happy.

THE OTHER MAN'S GRASS OR.....

The other girl's hair
Is always -
Straighter, curlier,
Longer, shorter,
Lighter, darker,
Whatever fashion decrees.
But mine is
Light brown and wavy,
So really -
None of these.

If ever I complained
Mum would always say,
"You've lovely hair,
It's like your Dad's,
You'll thank him -
One day!"
But then I'd take a look
At dear old Dad
And wonder why
His hair was 'going away'?

TO THE SEA

I have always loved you
From the moment we first met.
The date? I do not recall.
I was very young then
But it was instantly there
A deep awe and respect
Coupled with fascination
For your great beauty.

Always unpredictable
Your myriad moods
Constantly change.
At times romantic
I see a fiery setting sun
Sinking into your languid calm
While you gently caress
The feet of lovers.

Sometimes a temptress,
Seducing people in
To experience your cool pleasures
Relaxing their minds and bodies -
Or a loving mother,
Who sustains life
While cherishing and nurturing
So, creating harmony.

Occasionally a murderess,
Suddenly claiming innocent lives
Dashing hopes
Frothing and surging.
Fury in every wave
Like a woman wronged
Single-mindedly pursuing revenge
Indiscriminately grasping life.

BLUE

Blue,
The ocean that
Caresses lovers' toes.
Blue,
The cornflower that
In the cottage garden grows.
Blue,
The indigo night sky that
Plays host to silvery stars.
Blue,
The Ford Escort that
Was one of our first cars.
Blue,
The striped crockery that
held long ago holiday teas.
Blue,
The bluebells that
Gently sway amid the trees.
Blue,
The ink that
Wrote my billets-doux.
Blue,
The sparkling sapphire that
Said I would marry you.
Blue,
The colour that
Welcomed our baby boys.
Blue,
A favourite colour that
Has filled my life with joys.

COBWEBS

Cobwebs
Resembling shawls
Beautifully crocheted,
Carelessly abandoned,
Flung into the hedgerow
By merry little folk
After a wild night
Of partying and jollity -
Now bejewelled by
Glistening beads of dew
Shimmering in a low
Early autumn sun,
Catching falling leaves and
The sleepy fly unawares;
Trembling as the crafty spider
Makes her way for breakfast.

DENTIST, AND HOME - THE LONG WAY

I could not believe what I spied
Along the lanes of our countryside,
The intense yellow of oilseed rape
In fields dotted across the landscape,
White frilly Queen Anne's Lace,
Tiny violets, each with a smiling 'face'.
Hedgerows hung with pink dog roses,
Pungent smells that hit our noses,
May trees that appeared dredged with snow.
As their pure blossoms began to show.
Cuckoo pint and Milkmaids swayed in the breeze,
Creamy candles on the horse-chestnut trees.
Spring rains had made fields lush
So, I did not want to rush
The sheer joy of being outside, instead
Of back home in my M.E. bed.

FRIENDSHIP

Before
I didn't know you
I hadn't heard your name
Seen your warm smile
We were strangers
Living miles apart

Then He stepped in
Introduced us
As we shared
Bodies pained
All energy drained
Lives confined
With every kind
Of sensitivity
You and me

Supporting
Captive by illness
Yet still our spirits soar
While friendship
A precious flower
Flourishes and grows

I THINK OF YOU

The sultry summer air
Hangs almost tangibly.
I feel it press against my skin
And I think of you, dear Lord,
With your love surrounding me
Always.

Noon - high overhead
A fiery sun beats down.
It casts few shadows
And I think of you, dear Lord,
Casting out darkness and evil
Always.

Billowy clouds bubble up,
The sky dark with eerie light
Distant thunder rolls, heralding a storm
And I think of you, dear Lord,
Of your great power and might
Always.

Heavy raindrops begin to fall,
Damping down the dusty ground,
Refreshing the dry earth
And I think of you, dear Lord,
Washing away my sin
Always.

Now, as the storm passes
The summer air is clearer
Fresher and sweeter.
I think of you, dear Lord
Sustaining and revitalising me
Always - thank you.

ON CALVARY

Imagine this
If you will
On a far
And distant hill
To a cross
Lifted high
They nailed my Lord
And watched him
Die.

A crown of thorns
Upon his head
While down his face
The blood ran red.
Pierced by nails
Cruel and long
But my brave Saviour
Did nothing
Wrong.

He endured pain
And indignity
He suffered it all
To set me free.
He conquered death
That I might live
The greatest gift
A Friend could give.
My Lord.
