

# A Lifetime Together



Poems for an anniversary  
by  
Keith Spence



## A LIFETIME TOGETHER

This collection of poems and photographs is dedicated to my wife Dorothy, my constant companion over 60 years of marriage.

Now in our eighties we are much more aware of the preciousness of life, and the beauty of the world we live in. However, we can't ignore the multiple problems our world faces. We try to help where we can, supporting local and online campaigns to save the environment, and promote human and animal health and happiness.

My hope is you will find something here to enjoy and reflect on.

As with previous collections of poetry I invite readers to donate if they wish to the ongoing work of Hospice at Home (Carlisle), Barras Lane, Dalston, Cumbria, CA5 7NY

*Keith Spence*  
*keithspence335@gmail.com*

## A LIFETIME TOGETHER (married for 60 years)

When we first met there was something intangible in the air, a blessing perhaps, promise of a future gift you cannot see that lies just around the corner.

Then, when eyes truly focus on a face, hands touch with electric charge, you know this is more than passing feeling, it is the beautiful experience of love.

The small castle of our self-centred world surrendering to a welcome invader, its bridge crossed for good, welcoming a new resident to share our life

Like a tree slowly building its strength we grew from the roots of love to become a family with offspring, expanding into our surroundings with fresh hope.

Through changing seasons, light and dark, we met challenges together, sure of each other despite inevitable differences that were solved with mutual laughter.

Now, in old age looking back, we can see the path taken and give thanks for all life has brought us, in a continuing loving friendship that is our rock.

## A HARE

Clouds, candy-floss blowing along  
on a blue-sky day in summer,  
driving the narrow road in the wood,  
fields jewelled with buttercups on  
every side, we saw her.

Ears aloft, nose quivering, running  
down the middle of the road,  
oblivious of our car, she stopped,  
so did we enraptured by this  
magical animal, so near.

Turning, her liquid eye on us,  
she weighed the situation,  
accelerating along the hedge  
towards a farm gate, then  
with a last look she ran.

Such glimpses come so rarely,  
as the countryside mourns  
the loss of wild animals once  
common in field and wood,  
and we are the poorer.

## THE WIND IN THE TREES

I'd like to learn to dance  
as nimbly as the trees,  
hearing rhythms hidden  
in each passing breeze.  
Watching slender branches  
reaching for the sky,  
trembling with pleasure as  
the wind goes by.

No music is heard by us  
walking in the sun,  
as woodland trees delight  
in having aerial fun.  
The flexing boughs respond  
in the wind's gentle hands,  
bending high now low  
where the tree stands.

We should copy it's moves,  
learn to sway in tune,  
with every passing wind  
making stress a boon.  
To bend but not be broken  
by the wind of change,  
to dance with an abandon  
out of nature's range.





FLICKERING CANDLES  
(St.Columba's church Milburn)

Stained glass saints look on impassive  
in glowing colours as sunlight  
touches an altar cloth edged in  
gold thread, waiting as eucharist  
celebration approaches.

Framed by the old windows tall wax  
candles sit proudly in place  
all lit with care symbolising  
the hidden presence of a holy  
mysterious divinity.

Each one flickers with unseen wind  
filtering through the ancient glass  
to drop small beads of waxlike  
tears, falling slowly with the  
sacrifice enacted.

So certain faith prays weekly for  
a miracle of inclusion bringing  
us near to the source of grace,  
the foundation for our life here,  
hope of eternal life.





## SPARROW TALK

The cheeky little fellow sits on our garage roof, he's been up there perched on the gutter's edge chirping away to an unseen audience, what is he saying?

"I am fed up of waiting around for you, hurry up and meet me. I am feeling amorous?"

"Watch out, I see a human below, he's in the garden. Must be up to no good".

Day after day they come, raiding our feeder, busy warriors battling for seed, sitting on the rose bush, waiting to pounce when a gap appears.

But we are no nearer understanding them than they are us. We live in a mutual fog of incomprehension, living side by side adapting ourselves to each other.

The same sun greets us every day, calling the sparrows from their nests to work, and we rising later to the day's tasks until the evening closes down.

I would love to know what the sparrows think of us, they spend so much time round our house and garden, are we enemies or friends I wonder?

Must fill up the feeder!

## DYLAN

The nasal snarling voice, the Woody Guthrie tone  
you could not mistake this man, his desire to hit  
you at a visceral level, to give you his message  
before he moved on.

Prophet of the 60s from small town Minnesota,  
troubadour in jeans, the poet of rebellion set  
off a new generation with the anger of the  
dustbowl pioneers.

Anti-war, anti-slavery, anti poverty, he sang for  
the dispossessed of the American dream machine  
sacrificed by the oligarchs of Wall Street,  
antheming bitter protest.

Child of the teenage culture, inheritor of Jewish  
immigrant communities, embracing black  
music, folk, blues and rock and roll,  
fusing them as his own.

Dylan, the times have changed, but not much,  
injustice is still blowing in the wind, but  
hey Mr tambourine man, play a tune  
to keep the blues away.

## STEPHANE GRAPPELLI

Scintillating arpeggios in blue,  
Django urgent by his side,  
filling Paris clubs with their  
music crafted hot and new.

Master of a violin that sang  
with Quintette de Hot Club,  
his stylish improvisations  
from musical genius sprang.

First heard you did not forget  
such warm and playful notes,  
soaring, bending, like a bird.  
Yes, listen, I can hear him yet.

ARETHA FRANKLIN  
(Amazing grace)

Reaching out to catch a star,  
urgent in her soul's need  
to press beyond the frail  
human beings we are  
to know God.

Such a fire she had to sing  
gospel and blues, that she  
flew to peoples hearts,  
as a bird on the wing  
she soared.

Her community of faith  
wrapped in such glorious  
music, they danced free  
from poverty and race  
into heaven.

WISTERIA  
(La Casa Verde)

Ancient walls and garden trellis  
perfect position for this splendid  
climber, so quick to cover cracks  
in walls and balconies embellish.

This quiet Cumbrian restaurant  
set above gardens rich in flora,  
wears it's old wisteria like a soft  
mauve dress of flowers luxuriant.

Birds flit through the branches  
keen to dine on dropped food  
from the human tables below,  
busy with the alfresco lunches.

There's a sad nostalgic quality  
about this favourite climber,  
belonging to a grander period  
when it was a garden rarity.

Now, in cosmopolitan times  
it flourishes on urban walls,  
from leafy suburbs to castles,  
as from obscurity it climbs.





SURPRISE VIEW  
(Watendlath, Borrowdale)

They come in droves, pleasure seekers,  
refugees from urban sprawl,  
seeking Wordsworth but not his vision,  
all trying to get away from it all.

Borrowdale valley, a temperate forest,  
pierced by narrow winding roads,  
clogged in summer with four-by-fours  
wishing they had gone to Rhodes.

Up a spiralling Watendlath climb  
gleaming vehicles slowly grind,  
drystone walls trap the unwary,  
unable passing space to find.

Until, at last, the goal achieved,  
our travellers stand in awe,  
Surprise View's clifftop perch,  
high above the valley floor.

The real surprise is to get there  
through a tortuous traffic jam,  
peaceful solitude the goal,  
but crowds destroy the plan!

## VIOLINS IN LOVE

(Largo from double violin concerto  
in D minor BWV 1043 by J.S.Bach)

Conversation of old friends, full of love  
and appreciation, listening to each other  
and responding by holding hands across  
gently flowing rhythms of time.

Such tenderness captured in music,  
instruments tuned by a yearning heart  
to reach beyond solo expression to find  
a harmony of celebration.

Two lovers encircling each other in  
a captivating dance, each in turn  
leading the other in the same strong  
melody of eternal union.

What is it about Bach that touches  
my deepest feelings, when strict  
structure rules his timeless music?  
I think his human empathy.

## ROOTED TO THE SPOT

Gripping earth for dear life,  
as it slips beneath my grip,  
hanging to the sloping air,  
breathing deep the sweet  
scent of mossy earth.

I'm a survivor among trees  
I've seen it all before ,  
no new shocks remain to  
stop my cycle of growth  
reaching skywards.

As this old tree manages to  
survive, it gives us hope,  
fragile as we humans are,  
that we can adapt from  
our deep roots .

We long for excitement,  
for adventures new,  
travelling further out  
when what we seek  
lies at our feet.





## THE CIRCUS IS BACK (July 2024)

Posters galore fill the streets,  
adjectives burst into view,  
persuasive ideas paraded for  
those to whom it's all new.

Prime time TV, radio as well,  
all joining the excitement,  
dying to tell the latest news,  
but with little refinement.

It's time for superlatives,  
of boasting how to fix  
the problems society has,  
by clever conjuring tricks.

Clowns come on, all smiles  
cracking jokes to hide  
threadbare policies that  
taint politicians' pride.

Yes, it's election time again,  
circus acts vying to win,  
and risky promises to fill  
the massive hole we're in.



## LANDSLIDE (General Election)

Hyperbole in politics runs deep  
with adjectives and exclamations  
a whole drama is played out  
that involves people ordinary  
enough but zealous to succeed  
where others have failed.

So this July 4th 2024 becomes  
a red letter day when Labour  
won a landslide election from  
the Conservative party who  
sank without trace in a sea  
of acrimonious ineptitude.

When the colourful language  
has been forgotten there is  
the small matter of running a  
country deep in debt with  
desperate needs and open  
wounds self-inflicted.

Politicians need humility to  
listen to the most affected  
and seek practical solutions  
for prisons, hospitals,  
schools, social care, trains,  
boats and immigrants.

A landslide of human need.

## KEEP OUT?

A windswept moorland, littered with limestone pavements, barren except for sheep and skylarks spiralling in song, and here it is, the joker in the pack, a gate keeping no-one out or in, a metal barrier to nowhere.

Who put it there, and had the brilliant idea of locking it so vandals or gypsies, or dog walkers, would keep out, protecting a long horized land from danger or illegal enjoyment by the public?

Would we had more gates like this to allow access to spaces protected by the rich to keep out the poor, in forests or highlands, or huge manicured estates locked for the privileged minority to enjoy.



DREAMS GO BY  
(Olympic year - for all those athletes  
who did not win)

The roar of the crowd,  
the adrenalin rush,  
now is the time for  
fame.

Forgotten the struggle,  
the painful times,  
now is the time for  
fame.

I am living my dream,  
being cheered on,  
now is the time for fame.

The finish line near,  
one lung-busting  
push to immortal  
fame.

But I do not make it,  
so near yet so far,  
fading my dream of  
fame.

I will be back I know,  
the dream lives on,  
next year I'll find  
fame.

## JIGSAW ANYONE?

Such a nice idea to pass the time  
and make a satisfying picture,  
a thousand pieces to combine  
of a black and white striped  
mixture.

A print of an owl flying at night  
through dark woodland trees,  
rooftops touched by moonlight,  
fields split by a hazy charcoal breeze.

What started as a happy venture  
a way to fill up idle leisure,  
turned into a hard adventure,  
hours fitting just one piece,  
no pleasure!

Now, it's monochrome delirium  
like a black and white maze,  
dissolving into pandemonium!  
So chuck it in the box to end  
its days.

## ONE OF THE FAMILY

Four legs instead of two,  
sure he's good as you,  
oh, and takes a seat too.  
That's Boo!

Like greyhounds he's fast,  
never wants to be last,  
small dogs racing past.  
That's Boo.

He loves to run up stairs,  
catching you unawares,  
nervous folk he scares.  
That's Boo.

Let him out on a beach,  
soon he's out of reach,  
high speed he'll reach.  
That's Boo.

When day is through,  
he'll curl up with you,  
he loves us all too.  
That's Boo.





## SILENT WITNESS

(Anthony Gormley sculpture,  
Waters of Leith, Edinburgh)

Like a fisherman watching water,  
feeling for the pulse of the fish  
circling his bait in the stream,  
he stands immobile, waiting.

There is no rod or line to catch  
a glistening trout or perch,  
but a deeper listening for  
currents deep below us.

He is universal, everyman,  
you will find him in a city  
standing naked on a roof, or  
on a wave washed beach.

There to watch our follies,  
see all we have destroyed  
with our wars and idiocies,  
his silence heaven sent.

Silent witness to humanity  
struggling to survive the  
changing climate, hoping  
we have a future here.



## TRUE HEROES

Out on seas in a Force 8  
scaling mountains in snow,  
the volunteer heroes fight  
worst conditions we know  
to save someone's life.

In hard hats and wet suits  
lifeboats answer a call,  
a ship adrift in high seas  
or child suffering a fall,  
it's about saving life.

Out on fells in all weather,  
Mountain Rescue is there,  
looking for casualties lost  
or injured, feeling despair,  
they will save lives.

This is not about honour  
but human compassion,  
no financial rewards but  
an overpowering elation,  
when you save a life.

## WAKE UP CALL

They have been here all summer  
our feathered guests, their voices  
chattering like water over stones,  
martins nesting under our roof  
telling us we are not alone.

Aerial acrobats soaring on high  
never tiring to search for food,  
to feed the broods they raise  
above our bathroom window,  
gracing our summer days.

Mornings they are our alarm  
clock, waking us with the sun,  
saying, 'get up it's time to go,  
you have slept long enough',  
it's getting late you know!

Their alarm is much wider  
as we face climate change,  
shrill voices asking us why  
so many species have died,  
no longer flying the sky.

When will we wake up?