# 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

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# 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.

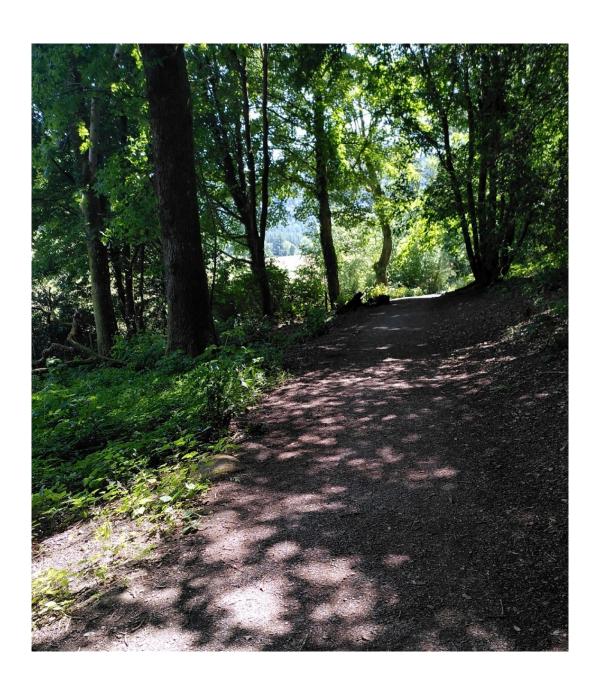
Such glimpses come so rarely, as the countryside mourns the loss of wild animals once common in field and wood, and we are the poorer.

# 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)

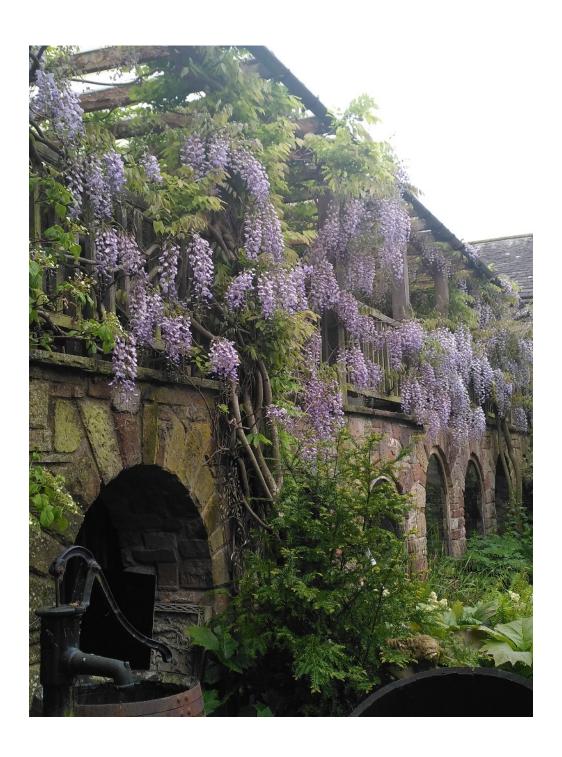
Ancient walls and garden trellis perfect position for this splendid climber, so quick to cover cracks in walls and balconies embellish.

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.

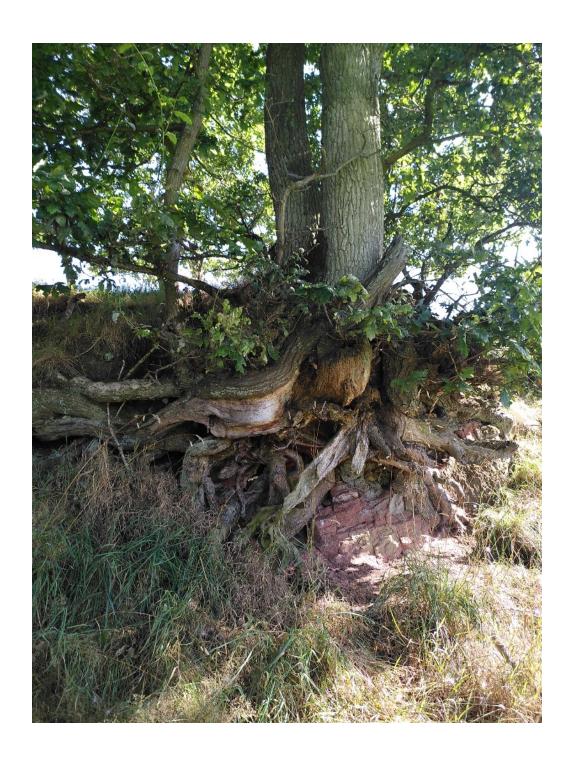
# ROOTED TO THE SPOT

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 horizoned 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

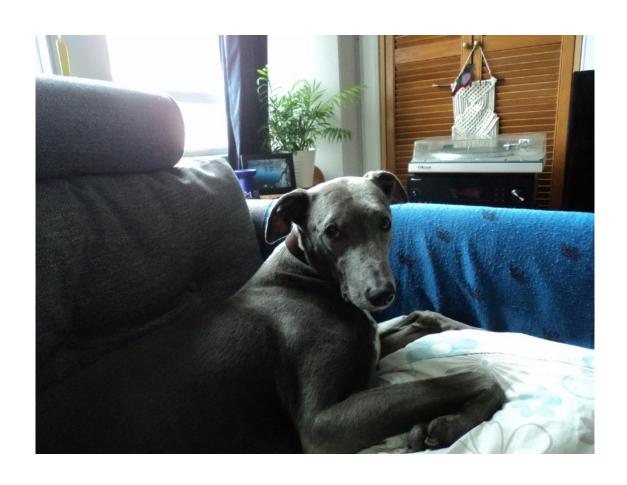
Four legs instead of two, sure he's good as you, oh, and takes a seat too. That's Boo!

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?