



minding  
the  
weans





# Introduction

The concept behind this collection of poems is intriguing. Sheila Templeton, Poet in Residence at the Harbour Arts Centre, Irvine worked over a one year period to encourage parents, grandparents and carers of small children to write poetry about their exuberant 2/3 year olds - whilst the said same children were running about all around everyone, painting, making music, dancing...

Conventional "Creative Writing Workshop" approaches would not have worked so Sheila joined in the general noise and fun whilst listening carefully as the parents and grandparents talked - and then finding that the beginning of a poem was emerging. All sorts of poems were written: a two year olds' first attempts at language; a mother's misery, feeling she had abandoned her child at nursery; a dad's delight, in Gaelic, at his two year old being too busy to come in for his tea!; a mum writing poignantly to the grandmother who would not see her grand-daughter grow up... and many more.

These poems are funny, tender, warm, inspiring, remarkable.

Everyone involved is to be commended. The quality of this book is testament to an excellent piece of work across the generations. I recommend **Mindin the Weans** to you and I am sure you will take as much pleasure from it as I have.

**Carol Kirk**  
Corporate Director (Educational Services)

# Background

This book is wonderful, not just because the poems are beautiful and inspiring - but because of the way they have come into being.

While parents and young people were busy in a group activity such as art, music, drama, storytelling... all led by a professional practitioner... I was available as their Poet in Residence to work with the adults one-to-one, helping them write poems about their children.

To get people's trust and to get them writing, I had to form relationships with them, quickly and effectively. My tack was to join in the general arts sessions, be they making a paper mask, marching around to music, while asking... Have you ever thought of writing a poem about...?

A whole new facilitator technique emerged, i.e. listening carefully as the parents talked, scribbling everything down, then showing them what they'd written - and discovering with delight that we had the beginning of a poem. I hope they learned from the experience. I know I did. It opened up a whole new way of helping people to express themselves on paper.

Now the poems have been collated into a collection, exquisitely and delicately illustrated by Alison Thomas. For myself, its been a joy working with the group. Seeing their joys and sadnesses, their pleasure in their children and grand-children has been both touching and uplifting

So here's to all those who have contributed beautiful poems to this collection. It has been a privilege working with you and I thank you.

**Sheila Templeton**  
Poet in Residence  
Harbour Arts Centre





## A Little Part of Me

I have a little scan  
but it will fade.

I have a little purple lizard  
but it will fade.

*Why don't you choose something  
the nurse said;*

*But maybe not those.*

*Something you can keep,  
just in case*

I did not see you at arrival.

I have a little photograph,  
but it will fade.

I have a little hat,  
but it will yellow.

I have a little scar,  
but it will not heal.

I have a little memory  
of your beating heart.

But you will kill me  
if you stay.

I have a little memory  
of a long, long day  
and a small, bare room.

I have a little memory  
of the loneliness of two.

But I have a little memory  
that I loved you.

And I hold you in  
my heart and head

when a little scan  
won't do.

**Jacqueline Laidlaw**



## Fashionably Late

I take your dress from its hanger,  
iron it carefully beneath a cloth  
flattening in clouds of steam,  
teasing to peaks of tulle.  
Watch that low, waiting light  
in your eyes. Smile for us.

I brush your hair, smooth it, weave it  
into flaxen ropes, fix it with ribbons.  
Cup your face in my hands,  
tell you you are lovely.

We delay leaving, set a leisurely pace,  
wait for the last batch of chattering guests  
to let the door swing behind them

Pause.

Adjust your butterfly handbag.  
Time for your entrance.  
Maximum impact, Ah, here she is!  
You smile modestly and hold out  
a small doll.

And I remember four red limbs  
unfolding in air as you were  
pulled from me, saved from drowning  
in me. Your first cry, so strong  
as lungs found breath. I am here,  
you said. You were beautiful.  
And a little late.

**Alison L. Craig**

# Things I have to tell you about your father

First, how afraid you made him.  
Stripped him away to bone and breath  
with the time you made him wait,  
slipping from the monitor to blank screen  
and silence while you braced against me.  
How he thought everything had gone

and then, so quickly, so quietly,  
you came. He didn't know what to do  
until he brought the car to take you home.  
The baby seat came with instructions  
in broad black. He looked so proud,  
so confident as he fitted you in, secure, dwarfed.

But he was so afraid, my sweet,  
of tiny you, whose heart beat double time.  
You who rested a head the size of an orange  
in his man's palm, your sleeping face full of trust.

**Alison L. Craig**

# Una Vida Ha Llegado

Una vida ha llegado  
a compartir mis experiencias.  
Un Nuevo camino, un nuevo destino.

He de guiarlo en sus pasos  
en estos caminos complejos.  
Estaremos juntos, illegaremos lejos.

**(Translated)**

# A New Life Has Arrived

A new life has arrived,  
Experiences to be shared.  
A new road, a new destiny.

I have to guide his steps  
In these rugged roads.  
We'll be together, we will get far.

**Omar Otanez**

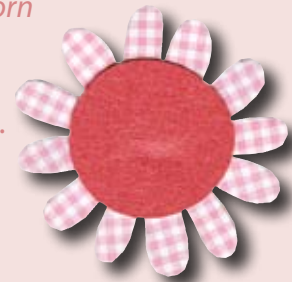


## Friday's Child

*But the child that is born  
on the Sabbath Day...*

The wait was so long.  
I should have cried  
but didn't.  
Lying beside you  
so small and new,  
I hear my voice say  
outside of me;  
*he has a beautiful face,  
such a beautiful face.*  
You are loving and giving,  
but I do not hold you  
until you are full of grace.  
*What? You haven't held him? She says  
Well, we'll do that now.  
Help me change him.*  
And, for an age  
I fear her absence, but feel you,  
holding your tiny body in my hands.  
I'm scared I might drop you  
as you lie on my outstretched palm.  
Now I feel the pearls of your spine  
weigh hard against my hand,  
as once I glimpsed their  
shimmering light  
weeks ago in the gloomy scan.  
Now you are here,  
flushed, swollen yet thin.  
My heart cries for your first  
unaided breath.  
And I hear the familiar refrain:  
*just one more day.*

**Jacqui Laidlaw**



# Nothing As Important

The shock of pregnancy,  
feeling my body now only a host.  
We should feel happy, elated,  
but I'm anxious, worrying about the unknown,  
of this baby forming inside me.  
The miracle of life.

The shock of childbirth.  
My faith in the natural process is naïve,  
now I realise a caesaerean awaits.  
From relative calm to urgent, rushing  
I feel remote, can only hear voices.  
And suddenly he is here,  
perfect and beautiful.

The shock of motherhood  
realising I know nothing!  
Everything is new, including him.  
And gradually I gain confidence in my ability  
to nurture and care for him.  
And I realise whatever else I do  
it is not as important as this.

**Fiona Baird**

# Only Seventeen

I didn't think I could have a baby...  
that happens to others.  
That was the ignorance of me.  
I was only seventeen.  
No one noticed my bump.  
I knew it was there,  
But I didn't feel any different  
I was young and fit.  
I could still run and jump.  
I was told my due date  
and sure enough,  
that was the date you came.  
I thought it was a silly pain,  
still couldn't get it in my head  
that I'd really have you.  
When you arrived, they brought you,  
all wrapped up. I thought:  
You came from me. You have eyebrows  
and eye lashes even. You're real.  
I couldn't get over that -  
your eyebrows and eyelashes.

**Danise Blair**



## Local Weather

Vigga vigga.  
Cole n veh.

Mummy.  
Cole n veh!

Are you shivering?  
Are you cold?

Yeh,  
N veh.

And wet?

Yeh,  
N veh.

**Linda Ballantyne**

# Handprints

Handprints in bright blue paint  
decorate our garden.

They make me smile.  
Looking at them makes me feel  
even when you're out  
you are still with me  
another wee while.

I imagine those handprints  
when you are 16.

They show

a strong hand  
grasping opportunities.

A healthy hand  
full of energy and desire for life.

A gentle hand  
reaching out to others.

An intelligent hand  
embracing knowledge.

My greatest hope  
a hand that wants to hold mine.

**Barbara McCormick**



# Troubadour

She's a troubadour,  
she's a rascal,

she's our one-off, unique,  
compact and volatile.

She waved me off to paint and draw,  
"Stay in the lines, Dad", wee face all illuminated,  
by the Mayo Sun.

I smiled all the way as I climbed the brae to the peat reek.

She's a dynamo,  
she's a tonic,

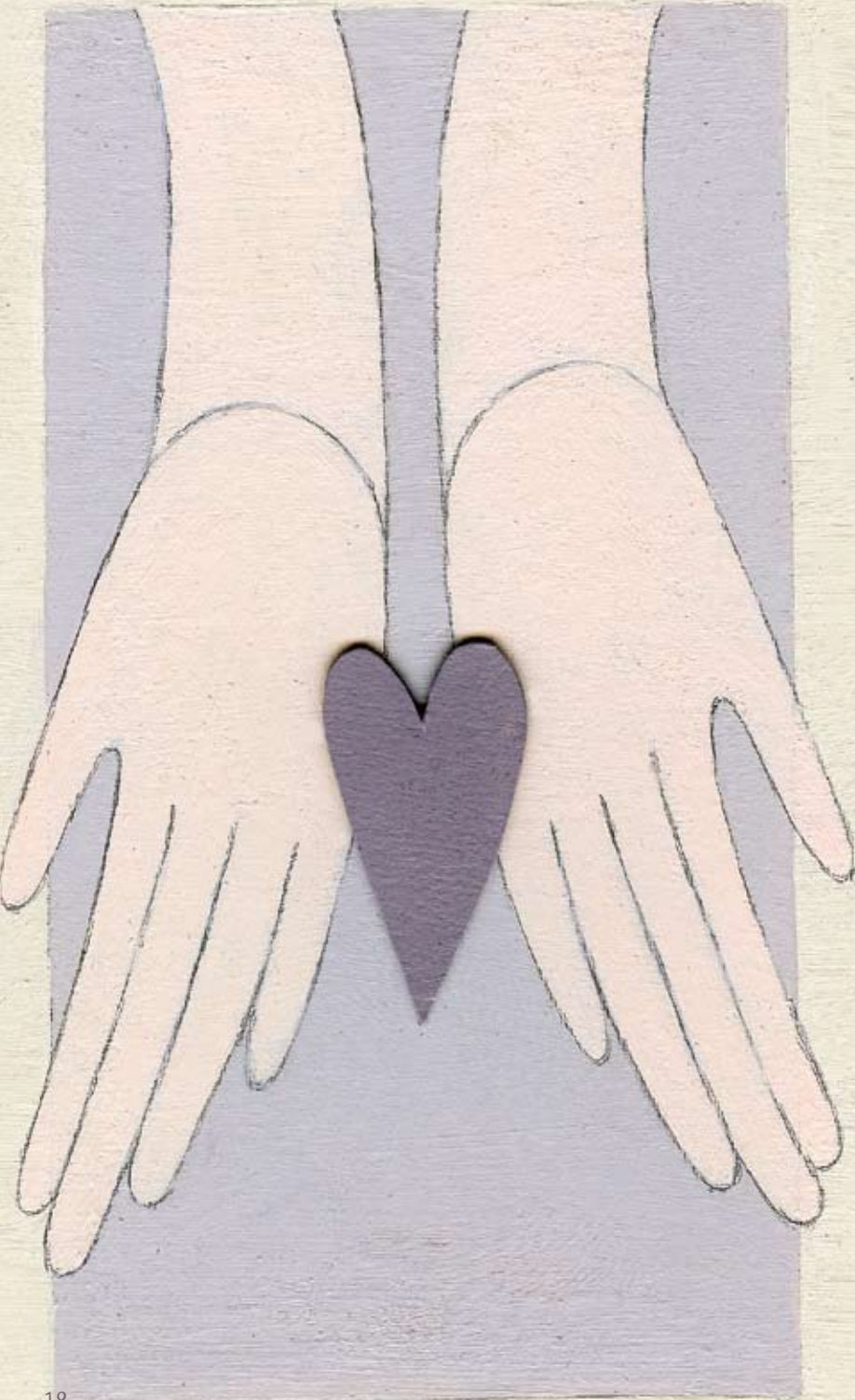
She wears me out - she keeps me young.

At the ceilidh, a full house, "am bidh thu a' seinn a' ghraidh?"  
"Ah don't want tae seinn" fit stompin' the stage

She's a poet in two languages,  
she's a dancer,  
she's a chancer in all languages.

Everywhere she goes she leaves a colourful trail.

**Eóghann MacColl**



## Lily's Gift

You wave to the workbitten man  
and his hardened face breaks up  
in a beaming smile.

You say hello to a group of women  
whom I would tread carefully around,  
but for you they stop, coo and wave back.

The traveller with the fiercest dog  
that you simply have to meet.  
You reach across and gently  
Stroke its big dog face.

The addict on the underground  
everyone's eyes are trying to ignore.  
But when he holds out his arms to you  
you go straight to him and sit,  
snuggling against his chest.

You demonstrate to me  
that the world  
without our learnt prejudice  
is a far better place to be.

**Barbara McCormick**



## Wee Stockie-Pie

What wud uh dae  
if ah didnae hae you?  
You mak me laugh  
at the things you do.

You're aa there  
and there aboots.  
You're a cliver wee thing,  
o that Ah've nae doot.

Hae'in your company  
is aye a pleasure.  
You're ma wee stockie-pie,  
aye ma wee treasure.

**Barbara McCormick**

# The Way You Eat an Apple

First, the way you hold it,  
your two small hands cupping  
its blushing weight. So unhurried,  
just touching your nose and top lip,  
discovering its scent there,  
its texture against your puckered lips  
before taking a bite.

Then, the way you manage  
to make that apple look so good.  
As if it has come from a place  
we have forgotten.

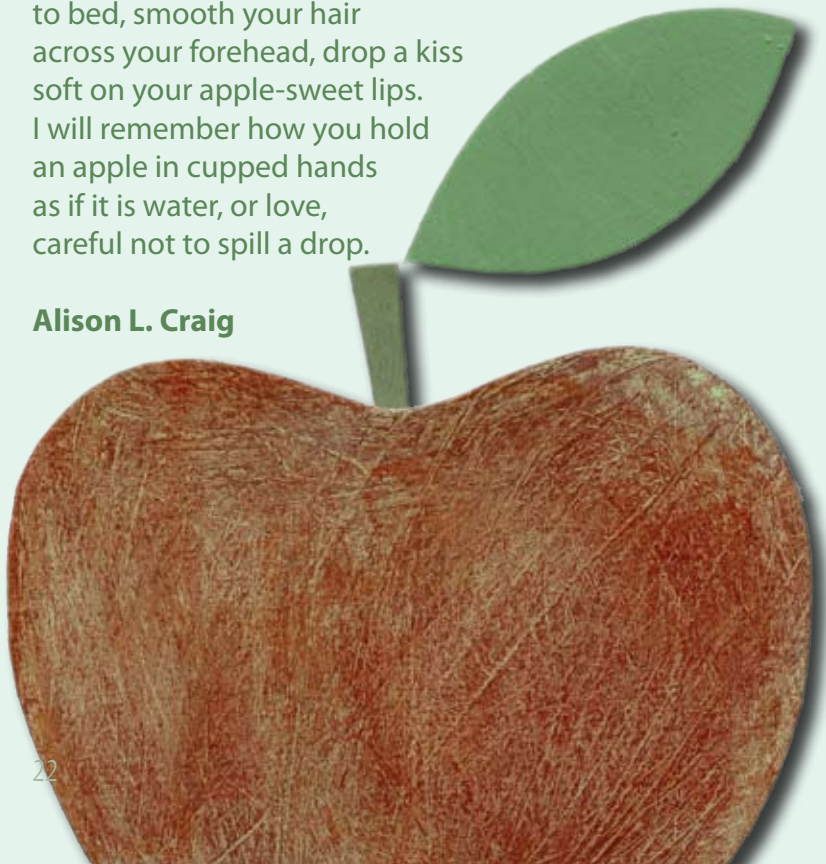
I watch you eat, eyes shining,  
your mouth small and red.

Red as Eden, perhaps.

I will remember, later,  
when I carry your hot weight  
to bed, smooth your hair  
across your forehead, drop a kiss  
soft on your apple-sweet lips.

I will remember how you hold  
an apple in cupped hands  
as if it is water, or love,  
careful not to spill a drop.

**Alison L. Craig**



# Abandonment

On Monday, Amy's face crumpled  
outside the class room door.  
Amber and Holly come to look at her,  
silent, staring.  
I move to block their view.

Then smiley Eve arrives.  
Eve! Eve! they shout. Hurry up!  
Bouncing puppies, they whisk  
her away into class, oblivious  
to the sobbing one, my daughter.

Amy stares at her feet.  
She'll be fine, says the teacher.

Will she?

I give my daughter a kiss and walk  
away with the salt from her tears,  
hide round the corner, exhale loudly.

She's three years old.

**Linda Ballantyne**

# A Gift from God

She's a gift from God in every way,  
our granddaughter our precious wee Sarah.  
She's transformed our lives, the best thing  
that's happened to our family for years and years.  
An only child, an only granddaughter, a miracle  
of life in every way. She melts my heart,  
gives love and life, a pure true wee treasure.  
Times have changed since I brought up my own.  
But the joy a child brings never ever changes.

**Isabel Cook**

# Birth Work

When I first saw you, I was  
elated, relieved, proud, ecstatic.

I saw new life, heard your cry,  
smelled your new skin. Holding you  
was intense. I'd never felt this before.

When I first saw you, I wished for you three gifts.  
Good judgement, health and compassion.

I could find you in a pitch dark room  
full of other babies, because I know  
the sound of your breathing.

How do I balance the see-saw  
of delight in watching you grow  
and learn and love, with my worries

and guilt and knowing that one day  
you will leave me? How else could you grow?

**Laura Lockwood**

# Mum

You wouldn't believe  
how much she's changed  
when she was born,  
you said,  
she'll rule the roost!  
Mum,  
how did you know?

You were right  
of course  
she's the boss,  
always manages  
to get her own way.

Every day brings  
some new surprise.  
And we laugh  
at the things she does,  
the faces she makes  
and the stuff she says.

At the wonderful stage  
where she seems  
to change every day.  
We constantly wonder  
what will be next.

You said Dad and you  
couldn't have had  
a better wean to watch.  
And I'd say that's still true.



This terrible horrible year  
it's been Emma  
who's helped us all through.

You'd be incredibly proud  
and maybe just a little surprised  
how he takes her on a Wednesday  
all by himself.

Out and about they go,  
Soft-Play, visiting and on the bus.  
He even changes her nappy  
without any fuss.

Still a picky eater  
and her hair is taking its time.  
So many things to tell.  
If only you were here  
to see them for yourself.

People say you're always with us.  
And although I think that's true,  
it's not the same as being able  
to talk about her with you.

But she points at your picture  
and tells us its Gran,  
then helps me change your flowers  
and I promise  
I'll tell her all about you  
as often as I can.

**Sharon Gaw**

# Two Shining Stars

## Holly

My tomboy curious girl. My Thomas the Tank Engine, calls Grandpa... Slow Coach, has to know the reason behind every scientific activity, outgoing, energetic girl. Her daddy has made her a boat out of margarine tubs, with a wind-up elastic band engine, so she can explore the laws of physics in her bath. She's my hands-on, wellies on, wrapped up and out in all weathers girl. She's my dancing girl. Loves her ballet and gymnastics. Loves fun and sharing and other people. Takes her time, sometimes, waits until she knows you, before she trusts you with her heart. She's my first born, my special girl born on the 20th December 2004, heralding the Solstice the return of light, a true star, an Olympic star, taking part in the Opening Ceremony London Olympics 2012. There'll be cameras clicking, bands marching, ticker tape. But for me, though all this is wonderful, marvellous, the true gift is my beautiful daughter. Everything else only icing on the cake.

## Lilia

My winter lily, my fearless, independent, two-going-on-twelve second daughter. Come on! Get out ma way! She says to a boy on the slide. He's twice her size. Can't he see she's ready NOW? Life holds out willing arms to her and she races forward, laughing. Of course she can do the same as Holly! Giggles when Mum's anxiety brims over. She knows she can do it. And you know what? She can! Takes everything in her stride. Talks to everyone. Why ever not? She's never afraid to go for what she wants. And everybody gets double cuddles, too. This girl was made for smiles and joy. Watch her, book in hand, reversing onto my lap like a wee motor car, absolutely safe in the knowledge she'll have a story read. Confidence is her middle name. And she's a Daddy's girl, like her sister. She even manages to be assertive shouting for My Taggie! See her grin as she holds her security blanket close. This girl, this lovely second child, has security shining through her being, my special, daring, courageous, lion-hearted daughter.

**Susan McNamara**



# Good Vibrations

(The Beach Boys "Good Vibrations" 1966)

Grudge, sludge, shitty nappy.  
Brain fragmented, cotton-wool-scrappy.  
Need to lift the situation,  
tune in to my radio station.  
Turn the dial, lost in a haze,  
crackle through this audio maze.  
Classic F.M. Give it a miss.  
The Funk and Soul Show - I love this!  
The horns blast clear and undistorted.  
Static shifts, getting sorted.  
I start to smile, my bottom wiggles.  
The children now are fresh with giggles.  
Close the curtain, dip the light,  
this disco's gonna rock tonight.  
Amy B, my girl, she's four,  
tumblin wild across the floor.  
Here comes Alex, little bro,  
smile so wide, the dimples show.  
And Arthur, music-lover-man,  
his loose limbed movement, course he can.  
We grip eight-hands and jump around  
to the fast beat funky music sound.  
And lose ourselves the Ballantyne way  
on a grey November Saturday.

**Linda Ballantyne**

# A Mother's Prayer

Dear Lord, please give me strength  
to face another day.  
Help me to be the kind of mum  
you'd have me be, I pray.

I need more patience and your help  
to know just what to do,  
to teach her to obey me  
and train her up for you.

I need to know just when to hug  
and when to just ignore.  
Show me Lord, just what to do,  
your wisdom, I implore.

Thank you that her daddy's there  
to take over when I'm beat.  
Thank you that they play so well  
while I rest upon a seat.

Thank you Lord for this great gift,  
for blessing us with her.  
Thank you for the joy she brings  
and forgive us when we err.

Help her Lord to feel secure,  
to know that she is loved.  
Give her peace within her heart  
and bless her from above.

**Samantha Wallace**

## A Flower Grows in Two Cultures

He calls me Teta, this little boy.

Oh what a pleasure, what joy,  
to know him, my grandson Ben,  
to know that he understands me,  
the soft syllables on my tongue,  
my Arabic from Lebanon.

I love that he is Scottish,  
a flower of two cultures, rooted  
in the hot earth of Lebanon  
and this cool Northern rain-washed soil.

I laugh as his father and grandfather squabble  
over the sport he will play.  
One takes the golf club from his small hand,  
replaces it with a rugby ball.

I do not care what sport he plays.  
I care only that he does not live in a war zone,  
and that he grows up in this peaceful,  
beautiful country,  
where his grace and courtesy and  
swift comprehension can grow, be safe.

Oh what a pleasure it is  
to know you, my grandson.

**Laurice Fox**

# These Are My Kids

Oliver will try anything. Winning or losing never phases him.  
He's done cross-country running, discus throw, football.  
Name a sport. He's had a go. Same in Chess.  
He never cares if he wins or loses.  
Kipling's poem could have been written for him.  
"Success or Failure: Treat these two imposters just-the same,  
that means Oliver is always a winner, a star.  
And besides, he's a top musician. Music plays him,  
he's a lucky boy.

Georgia takes responsibility, a level-headed conscientious,  
definitely eldest child. Never needs to be told how to behave.  
In all situations, knows what to do and does it with grace.  
Another musical child, a finely tuned girl, like her beloved violin.  
A little mother.

Tabitha is happily uncomplicated. A great all-rounder,  
an independent likes her own-company girl,  
loves-everything-life-brings-her girl, school music, opportunities.  
She's a bringer of joy.

Jasper is our lovely rascal, our two-year-old wild card. He doesn't relish  
sitting still. Why would anyone sit still with the world to explore?  
Cosy is anathema, needs a good stirring up. That golden-red head  
is perpetually looking, noisy, curious, never content, always reaching  
for the stars.

These are my kids. They are my life.

**Susan Woods**

# My Name

Call Me Christopher, Adam, James, Thomas

Your name is Hector.  
It is a fighting name.  
You fought your way here.  
You deserved a strong name.  
Hector gave you a chance.  
Hector kept you safe.  
Made you brave.  
Kept you strong.  
Saw you through  
to the third day  
when at last  
they told us  
you'd pulled through.  
Hector holding fast.

**Jacqui Laidlaw**

# The Fair Haired Boy



He is the fair haired boy  
like the song... Óganaich an Órfhuil Bhuidhe.

But he dances bold  
between the clothes on the line.  
He turns the soil at the back door.

Come in boy!  
I'm busy, Daddy, I'm working.

Solas Oisian MacColla  
son of Eóghann  
Eóghann son of Seumas  
Seumas son of Coinnich  
Connich of Ballachulish in Argyll.



Come in boy!  
I'm busy, Daddy, I'm working.

His eyes are blue, limbs thin,  
like a heron on the river's edge.  
His legs so long, like the powerful hare  
running across the green field in Ayrshire.

Come in boy!  
Two minutes, Daddy, two minutes,  
I'm working

(This is a translation from the gaelic  
version of the poem.)

**Eóghan MacColl**



# Matthew

His favourite word in NO.  
Doesnae matter what I ask him.  
Do you want to go the the toilet?  
NO  
Do you want a haircut?  
NO

But for all that, he's shy,  
no a joiner-in  
he's an observer.

Still, when I asked him  
would you like a pancake?

Uh huh he said.  
No that much of an observer.

**John Ryan**

# The Perfect Child

Only one perfect child.  
Every mother knows  
they have it.

Everything you do or say  
so special,  
to me, anyway.

So proud when you achieve  
something new.

Realising how good you are  
at whatever you do.

Bursting to share  
with everyone I know.

Trying hard to remember  
you're special, of course.  
But only to me.

**Sharon Gaw**

# A Mum

I got the job,  
no experience necessary.

Starting soon,  
better try to get ready.

So much to do  
don't know where to start!

Discovering all too soon,  
nothing in the world prepared you.

No-one can ever describe it.  
Hardest job there is.

But nothing, ever  
quite like it!

Every day seems to  
bring some new worry.

Will you be picked,  
chosen, invited?

A smile when you wake  
and when you go to bed,  
makes it all worthwhile.

**Sharon Gaw**

# Traisure

An egg fried tae a hert o meltin gowd,  
breid fae yir grannie's oven torn, nae sliced,  
eaten fae haunds cupped tae catch the butter.  
A conch tae haud tae yir ear an the sea's  
salt-swell suddenly inside ye, pittin ideas  
in yir heid. Takin aff yir buits efter  
sun up tae sun doon trampin the hills wi  
naethin but sky an horizon, lungs an legs  
an yir ain daft thochts. A freen as douce  
an sicker as a sma wave on a simmer beach.  
The way a lintie sings in a winter-starved whin  
when it kens the gift o spring.  
The burstin fu feelin o Yule E'en,  
a poke o chips eaten oan an empty street  
oan Boxin Day. Bein inside sittin in the circle  
o a lamp's licht, a fire bleezin an a guid buik  
an the rain batterin doon outside,  
The stretch o a siller dawn efter lang dark.

A new-born's first lung fu o fresh air  
when she's carried oot the hoaspital.

The turn o your split-new cheek tae the wind,  
me empty-bellied an fu herted ahint ye  
an yir faither, ah'll niver forget.

**Alison L. Craig**



## Talking to the Sea Gods

That's what I did, when things got tough. No kiddin.  
I swear to God, when we waited and waited for IVF news,  
I walked the beach for hours, talked to the sea gods,  
told them my dream. Our dream. That we'd have kids,  
our own kids. How else can dreams come true?

And look at us now.

I get to be a full time dad to the twins. Jean's been to Uni,  
working now in a job she loves. And what about Rebecca?  
National Junior Netball team. Does it get better than that?

Oh sure, you've to work at your dream. But it's no hard,  
It's no such hard work, even in 10-12 hours shifts,  
when you know  
why you're doing it, when you're building the dream.

Love? Of course. I always knew I loved her, but I waited  
to make certain sure she was ready. Waited for that magic.  
Then took Jean, the twins aged 6 months,  
Rebecca and the dog  
to Skye, to get married.

Skye's misty-magical for sure, but we brought our own.  
It's a question of pure faith, believing in your dreams.

We made sure of that.

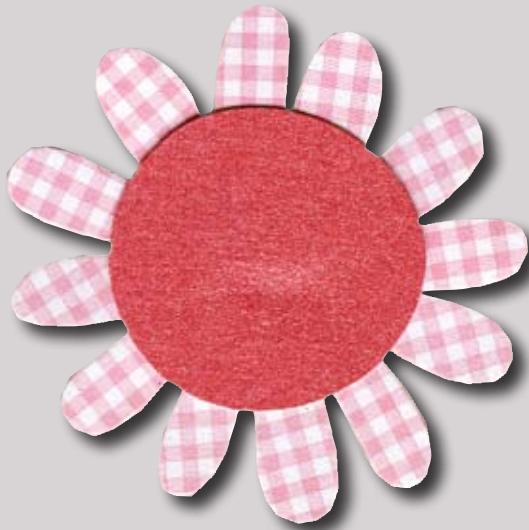
**James Hardy**

# Mindin the Weans

Ah niver thocht it would be like this. Honest ma first thocht was "Thank God ah'm going to work" it was! But see now? Wouldna miss it for onything. See the day, it's no even oor day to have Grace, but we thocht she'd enjoy it that much, we asked if we could bring her. Nae fees, like. Jist pleasure in seeing her een widen at whatever we dae here. Like she was when we took her tae the zoo. That's a monkey! Scott, that's a tiger! She'd only seen them on telly afore then, so watchin her face as she spotted the real thing was... well, ah niver dreamed ah'd feel like this. Carol's just marvellous at maakin sure iverything's in order. Daein childminding, ye've even tae get permission signed tae gae them a wee spoon o Calpol. Lauren needed some the ither day she's only fifteen months, but comin on that fast. We took them tae Rouken Glen last week and she sat on a blanket, just reaching oot tae the world. She picked up a conker, a russet leaf, threw them up in the air! First time she'd seen them, or touched them. When we got back tae the hoose, Carol had paints ready, so they made pictures o their hands like trees, all autumn colours. It was beautiful. We've been tae Deep Sea World, the Safari Park, swimming, soft play, nature walks, as weel as here at the HAC. Ivery experience a revelation. Grace and me, we even won Best Daddy Dancer daen the cha-cha slide! Listen tae me! Ah could be their dad ah niver kent there could be such joy in weans, or sae much joy for us in watchin them.

**Scott & Carol McPherson**





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