

A collection of poems by Josie Crawley

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A new lens

Self diagnosis - Carpel tunnel!
 Painful gloves matched right and left
 an odd coincidence, that wasn't
 Sensation in both feet, then lower limbs insidiously
 crept, into a concrete box
 that locked me out, from the collar bone down.

Leaving a frame
 without strength, electrified
 an abstract study of twitching pins and needles
 shot with exploding electric fireworks
 pricked and pulled, instructed to: walk a line, put finger to nose, relax while we hit you with a
 hammer, tell me without looking - Is it up, is it down? Is it soft, is it sharp? Push against my
 hand, now pull!
 Each challenge exhausting, disclosing
 my disobedient body was in anarchy.

A week of tests
 then waiting, waiting, waiting
 MRI was inconclusive (keep eyes closed and meditate that in a very noisy forest, with giant
 woodpeckers and people playing laser tag).
 spinal tap (don't look at the needle, or think about where its going), electric probes, blood
 tests, scans
 provided a blueprint for a healthy body
 disconnected from its control centre, a puppet without strings.
 My scared myelin might be a tumour
 but not one they wanted to touch
 Wait and see

With steroids controlling the weird
 devil pills that fuelled energy, weight, sleepless nights and personality swings
 my family became my crutch
 and my motivation
 withdrawal an extended rollercoaster

The diagnosis took months - years before it stuck
 a new lens
 through which the world looked
 more challenging, more managed,
 less spontaneous, more dependent
 the future now a gift
 rather than an expectation
 the feel of sharp stones under tender feet
 something to celebrate.

Odd to look back - this beginning signposted
what had already been - perhaps a decade or more?
flirting with vision and brain
for the most part, hidden, percolating in my DNA
changing my journey, but not my destination.

Abuse by metaphor

Figurative language
hides sharpened blades,
words honed for cruellest cuts.

Some sadist poet penned
a heart-warming phrase
for MS terror
where breath is stolen,
trapped in ribs, sculptured
in unyielding steel.

Each panicked gasp made less
with metaphoric
irony, *The Hug* -
empathy excised
with a wordsmith's scalpel.

You and I

The quiet bond of a shared glance, complicit smile
we noticed each other, nurtured a spark, wandered
touch hand through decades
clutched tight when weighty losses closed in
arms wide to let our children fly
I reach, you hold, you tuck me in
tight to your side
You and I

Well unwell

After I'd been well for a propitious stretch of time
suddenly I wasn't.
The unwell moved with unsettling speed
familiarity assured its pace
tracing where it had been before
claiming limb after limb
stealing words from my mouth
hiding the ends of thoughts then the beginnings too
lost in a fog of fatigue.

I forget how to swallow
for the months it takes to be well again
I wake every day unsure
if I remember how to breathe
until I do.

Ancient spirits, time
and clear water shape craggy peaks,
tumble rock to carve smooth shores,
soothing sharp edges of loss
to peaceful curves, glinting silver.
Perspective lost, then found
in the blue depths of the mountain's shadow.
Air so honest it burns. Yet here I can breathe
under a bruised and purple sky.



Figure 1. Wanaka Reflection.
Source: Author.

Confluence (St Clair)

Not currently available as is in press. The poem be available from *Otago Daily Times* Weekend mix through the ODT online site once published Nov-Dec 2025.

Wednesday's swim

Laps one and two
my arm shattered, severed,
flaccid, hung by a sinew
Lhermitte's plays silly buggers
my spine an electric eel

Laps three and four
I contrive with confident denial
struggle, panic swim, one armed
through a firestorm of voltage

Laps five to eight
focus – envisage neck a locked rod
observe, two hands break the water
distract brain, re-route from sensation...
armpit to the sky, 3/4 stretch, fingertips to floor, little finger break the exit, breathe
out for four, brace from shoulder and hip, turn like a log, breath in, armpit to sky
dogged, determined, repetition
detours my central nervous system

Laps nine to twenty
breathe, 1, 2 , 3, 4.

Straight Forward

Shimmering sky – syntax spinning
teasing thoughts elude capture with words
twisting syllables become tripping steps
body weaves like an autumn leaf
blown about, destination uncertain

My neural systems relegate interpreting
instruction awry when metaphors brew
the art of achieving predictable trajectory
lost in semantics: translation, I bump his hip again.

Walking; It sounds so easy
straight forward: but requires conscripted concentration.

An offered hand “Put your mitt in here”
mainlines the required rhythm
the subtle body corrections
clue me in
we walk together - like a plumb line;
admiring the clouds.

The internal monologue of a step – uncovering neurological fatigue

Raise right hip
hoist attached leg
lightly alert muscle by touch
thigh lever forward
fix thought to action
angle at knee
now extend
exert effort – contract calf
check ground level
land carefully now, heel first
firma terra, visually confirm contact.
Commit weight firmly
follow through roll to toe
tongue out while pushing off
onwards momentum
map ahead, gauge menace
manoeuvre weight balance shift
swing left hip...

Am I cursed an Island dweller
or blessed a frequent flyer
castaway where quickness of thought
fatigues mis-fired neurons.
Such synaptic chaos
celebrates successful completion of each day,
careful allocation of energy and need, energy and want,
wanted, longed for energy.
Today no blueprint for tomorrow

Out there for those not marooned on islands
the world speedily spins
fragile plans with gossamer threads of health –
wealth, worth, career, status
eggshell futures for the sanguine.
Island life illuminates the moments that blur,
do Mainlanders revel in an obedient bladder, navigating a step, the supportive joy of a
pillow behind the head – small things that make a day
or does the nuanced challenge of being alive rush past?



Figure 1. Kapiti Coast Drift. Source: Author

Someone is missing

Stories splintered by time
leave
fragments to tug
flickering in the synaptic gap.
Taunting neurons;
spark,
connect!
Gather my spaces
darn my narrative
from hole to whole.

(published in *Listening with my heart: Poems by Aotearoa New Zealand nurses* 2017)