

Notes from the Field

Poems by Glenn Merrilees

Glenn Merrilees

Abstract: Poetry exploring the experience of mental illness by Glenn Merrilees.

I'm 56 years old and from Falkirk, Scotland. I've suffered with mental health problems for over 30 years with depression, anxiety and panic attacks, and have been hospitalised a few times now.

In 2004, I was hospitalised for four weeks following a second nervous breakdown. I couldn't explain orally to my partner how bad I was feeling so I started writing it down, and it just came out as poetry.

The first poem is "Am I." My partner awoke to read it in the morning and immediately called the doctor. The doctor read it and came over and hugged me saying, "it's alright, we'll get you better." He told me he had suffered with mental health issues and had lost 18 months off work because of it, so that was me back in for another three weeks after only being home for a couple of days.

The psychiatrist eventually referred me to a local association for mental health where I joined a writing group. I started to realize that people liked my poetry, and this encouraged me to write more. The second poem, "Barriers" tells of the stigma surrounding mental health issues and was my attempt to raise awareness of this. I also started entering competitions and this led to my work being published in 21 poetry anthology books and several booklets.

The third poem, "The Funny Farm," tells the story of my seven weeks in a psychiatric unit. It was featured in 'Voices,' a film by Bob Owtram that won an international short film award and was shown at the Edinburgh Film Theatre:

<https://youtu.be/ocAhIcLGM>

Does writing make me feel any better? It does slightly; after all, the paper doesn't judge, and if you don't like it you can just bin it. I think a big thing for me though is the fact that "Am I" and "A tale from the damned" both helped me get the help and support that I really needed. "A tale from the damned," the fourth poem, was written a couple of years ago as a suicide note as I'd gotten that ill again that I couldn't even go to my own daughter's wedding; when you already hate yourself that makes it worse. "A tale from the damned" also points to the fact that even though I've suffered with this for over 30 years, I'm still here because if you reach out there is help and support out there.

Am I? by Glenn Merrilees

I've sunk to the bottom
of a pit of despair
screaming for help
is there nobody there?

cowering in terror
trembling with fear
it's cold and it's dark
and it's lonely down here.

afraid of a shadow
I can't even see
stuck in an eddy
that's swallowing me.

am I free as an Eagle?
folk say I look well
my stomach in turmoil
my soul in a cell.

can't answer the doorbell
can't answer the phone
surrounded by loved ones
i'm still all alone...

can't express feelings
that cut me in two
I take pen to paper
the best I can do.

far too many questions
answers far to few
never looking forward
as tears obscure my view

try to stagger forward
my crucifix in tow
am I gonna make it
I honestly don't know.

Barriers by Glenn Merrilees

there's people throwing insults
there's people throwing stones
you cannot see this illness
no sign of broken bones.

so many nasty comments
remarks are so unkind
you cannot see this darkness
this poison in the mind.

hey look, that guy is mental
a loony, what a waste
your bitter twisted comments
leave an acrid taste.

just remember i'm a victim
of this pain you cannot see
depressions made a home in hell
especially for me.

do not judge this cover
you simply have to look
i'm drowning in a sea of pain
pages missing from this book.

would you berate the lowly cripple
and call poor soul a name
my illness needs no crutches
hang your head in shame.

I do not plead for sympathy
understanding is the key
as without this murderous illness
you're just the same as me.

just show some understanding
and maybe lend your ears
then maybe you could save a life
or stem the flow of tears.

breaking down the barriers
I try to change your view
one in four's a victim
and the next one could be you.

The Funny Farm by Glenn Merrilees

So they took me tae the "funny farm"
It might hae been at night
A really can't remember
Fur a wisnae really "right".

I'm in here, in this "loony bin"
Seemed no-one outside cared
Alone and isolated
Cold, distraught, and scared.

Those people all around you
They suffer jist the same
Depression, and anxiety
Cursed wi a different name.

Alone I sit and wallow
In a pain you cannot see
A deep, dark, sad depression
That gnaws away at me.

You only see the bad things
You cannot see the good
A gave up awe ma hobbies
A gave up eatin' food.

Never ate, a solid fortnight
Nae breakfast, lunch, nor tea,
Could only take in liquids
Enough tae sustain me.

They never even noticed
Nae appetite tae sate
Consultant telt ma misses
That I'd even pit oan weight.

So am locked up in the "funny farm"
No knowin' who wis who
People marchin' roond an roond
Awe dressed the same as you.

One NURSE a verbal bully
A wish that a could name
A thing a stood an witnessed
Like tae pit that git tae shame.

He wis oan the tablet trolley
A wis standin' in the line
But his comments tae a patient
Still chill these bone's "o" mine.

Big laddie, he came runnin'
His problem couldnae wait
Poor soul, I saw in pieces
The next bit does frustrate.

Need something fur ma voices nurse
The reply was out of order
The only thing I've got for you's
A fucking tape recorder.

Seen one nurse, a big strong bully
Pull a woman through the air
She was sittin' in the garden
But he yanked her oot that chair.

Ten folk hud sat an seen it
That nurse he didnae care
No the kind "o" treatment
You'd expect tae get in there.

So a made a sarky comment
That night, then went tae bed
Next day, pulled tae the office
And this is what wis said.

The Funny Farm by Glenn Merrilees (cont.)

You never saw the first part Glenn,
You only saw the end
There's much mare tae this story
An whit happened tae yer "friend".

BUT, It's a psychiatric unit!!!
We're entitled, patient care
A caring arm around you
No tae pull ye through the air.

Ten "o" hud saw it
An some walked aff in tears
Complaint about a bully
Hud landed oan deaf ears.

I've cawed the place the funny farm
But that isn't strictly true
As some in there would rant and rave
And scare the breekers aff you.

Schizophrenic or bi polar
Or some other "mental" name
An illness thrust upon them
It isn't them to Blame.

One woman was a princess
Another man, a Quee
Hudn,
Some were just dead scary
Inside that ward eighteen.

Some geezer oan a trumpet
But he only played one note
Another in the corner
Shakespeare he wid quote.

Others, they seemed "normal"
But at night you heard their screams
Past's came back to haunt them

Nae chance "o" peaceful dreams.

One woman wis a lady
Hud servants, butlers too
Went about in joggie suits
AN spoke like me an you.

Another wis a prophet
His orders came fae God
Took drugs that make yer mind bend
An alcoholic sod.

Then there wis the pop star
Young lassie, near nineteen
Sixteen worldwide number ones
Awe ower theworld she'd been.

A wis in a month, then oot again
Barely in ma door
Fell tae bits, a jelly
In fur three weeks more.

Another phase of madness
Hud dropped, enveloped me
Crawling through a tunnel
In which a couldnae see.

There's folk outside That really cared
But depression, am it's host
The love that floats around you
Can't see it, cause yer loast.

A Tale From The Damned by Glenn Merrilees

Lay no flowers on my coffin
Nor hang your head to weep
For I have not forsaken you
I've only gone to sleep.

Place my ashes at the lay-by
And maybe plant a tree
And each year when it blossoms

For a moment think of me.

Know how much I loved you
More and more each day
My darling that's the answer
As to why I went away.

The pain that I was suffering
On my pathway down through Hell
Burnt my soul in many ways
But was singeing yours as well.

I love you way too much for that
I'm sick, recurring pain
But every time I suffer
It hits you once again.

I'm useless as a partner
And I'm useless as a dad
I gave my children nothing
Yet It's all I ever had.

I keep on failing everyone
I'm a nightmare during day
Like the moon moves in the evening
It's time to go away.

Yet you my doll were awesome
For twenty-seven years
You held me up and comforted
This endless stream of tears.

So now my time is over
It's Heaven or It's Hell
I tried to do my best in life
But I didn't do too well.

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