

Who Are We?



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Who Are We? | by New College Lanarkshire @ HMP Barlinnie, Creative Writing Class

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Keith A.

Keith is an enthusiastic writer of rap and poetry. He has recently discovered flash fiction as well. The lyrics of his pieces get to the deep truth of everyday life and the struggles one must face.

John R.

John grew up in the South side of Glasgow. Writing illustrated aspects of his life, was therapeutic, and helped him reflect on things. He enjoys life writing and poetry that he can relate to. His work has featured in the STIR magazine, and he has had a poem anthologised in Scarfed for Life, published by Bloomsbury.

Eric R.

Eric was born in Glasgow but spent fifteen years living on the West Coast. He worked in psychiatry for 20 years, and began writing creatively when incarcerated. He can say with his hand on his heart that the truth is stranger than fiction.

Hugh Y.

Hugh was born and raised in the Anderston area of Glasgow. His passion and inspiration for writing comes from his extensive travelling. This is reflected in the fact that he favours writing from life, and basing fiction on his own experiences. His writing takes him to a world of imaginable means and vision.

Donald S.

Born on the Isle of Barra in 1971, Donald attended a small primary school with no library, but still developed a love for reading and writing. It was during his time in Barlinnie that he started creative writing. He discovered a love for haikus and mini-truths.

Shaun S.

Shaun is a prolific writer who dabbles in many genres including creative nonfiction and poetry. He has begun working on a book idea and has produced many pieces of exciting writing.

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What's your story?

One Crazy Night | Keith A.

If she did I've done something wrong and I'm already on my last leg.

I awoke in a graveyard next to a tombstone. What was happening? What did I do last night? I must have gotten drunk and came to see my wee gran. Ah well, I headed up the road towards home. On the way, my girlfriend drove by. I tried to wave her over, but she drove on. Did she see me? Who knows, but hopefully she didn't. If she did I've done something wrong and I'm already on my last leg. On I trudged, covered in muck and stinking of vodka. I got to my street and there was an ambulance. My heart stopped. Was it my brother, my mum? Please don't let it be my auntie ill again; she's on her last leg too. I crept up the street, afraid of what I would find. All my family was safe. They were standing at the front door, all accounted for.

'Thank fuck,' I said.

I walked up behind the ambulance, just being nosey. Took a glimpse inside and there I lie dead.



Clownish Identity | Fabio Sassi

'Clownish Identity' self portrait of Fabio Sassi with rubber stamps and acrylic. Fabio makes photos and acrylics using tiny objects and what is considered to have no worth by the mainstream. Fabio lives and works in Bologna, Italy. His work can be viewed at www.fabiosassi.foliohd.com

Where I'm From . . . | John R.

I am from the front loader, from Hotpoint, everything in a cycle, always going around in circles. Just like life.

I'm the friendly Henry Hoover that picks up all the dead ends off the carpet. Kind like Lenor fabric softener lingering through the air mingling with the cotton fresh aroma. The stripy wallpaper that's bright on the eye, that's me: loud and proud.

Down among the tomato plants and bluebells I'm in with the bags of dirt – compost to nurture growth. If I fail to bud, don't give in, just try and try again.

The man had sat in the interview room for about ten minutes. His clothing was unkempt and filthy, but the crowning glory of his shambolic appearance was a multi-coloured jesters hat complete with little bells that musically tinkled as he moved. Occasionally he would look up at one of the many smiling health posters on the wall and engage it in some imagined conversation. His voice was eloquent and powerful, a direct polarization of his disheveled appearance.

The room's door handle began to turn and his attention switched to the duo entering the room. Both were dressed in white shirts, ties, and sported name badges. One stating, Tom Ness, Senior Nurse. The other George McDowell, Consultant Psychiatrist. They pulled up chairs and sat down across the table.

'Hello Robert,' Tom said, 'you know me, and I believe you know Dr. McDowell here. Can you tell me what's made you self present here today?'

Robert paused, then said, 'Have you heard of Yog Sothoth?'

'Can't say we have Robert,' Tom said.

His voice was eloquent and powerful, a direct polarization of his disheveled appearance.

'You shock me sir,' Robert barked, 'I thought in your profession the study of said demonic deity would be compulsory curriculum. He is the god of madness.'

'So what has that got to do with your appearance here?' Tom asked.

‘He hunts me sir,’ Robert growled, ‘I need sanctuary in your secure unit.’

‘Why would this demon be after you?’ Dr. McDowell asked.

‘I killed his pet octopus,’ Robert replied, ‘it was a noble creature, but it had to die. It was evil. I strangled it with one of its own tentacles. It put up an infernal fight. I still have the beak and tentacle marks on my back and buttocks. I’ve done my best to protect myself. These little bells on my hat keep his imp’s at bay. Scares ‘em off. But I can’t keep them working whilst I sleep.’

Tom cut in at that, ‘I take it that you haven’t been taking your tablets again.’

Robert sneered in derision, ‘This has nothing to do with my tablets. I’ve seen him, you know. Yog Sothoth: a gibbering, fleshy mess of teeth and eyes, spheres of light spinning round him like satellite moons. My bells keep me safe, but it’s only a matter of time before he gets me. I need secure accommodation.’

Tim looked bemused, ‘Robert we only have twelve beds in the locked ward and every one is taken by someone who is extremely ill.’

This sparked off an angry tirade from Robert, ‘There are things that crawl at the edge of your sanity. Terrible venomous, multi-legged things that lay eggs in your brain, your very mind. They exist and they don’t care that you don’t have a bed for me, they’re coming anyway. I need a bed. I clearly need to be more persuasive.’

With a showman-like flourish Robert suddenly produced an eight-inch chefs knife from the depth of his jacket. It glittered maliciously in the light. Putting his left hand on the table, he brought the knife down in a hissing arc that severed the two largest fingers in a spray of blood. One of the severed fingers gave an afferent spasm before settling in the spreading pool of gore on the table.

As swiftly as it appeared the knife vanished. He then gingerly picked up a severed finger with his good hand and leaning across the table placed it in the doctors' pocket, taking the time to straighten it so that it would lie neatly next to his fountain pen.

Robert grinned across the table, showing blackened teeth like derelict tombstones.

'So, do you feel I merit a bed now?'

A shocked silence that lasted a few heartbeats followed before the doctor replied, 'Yes Robert, that should just about do it.'



Birth of an Idea | Paul Arsenault
www.PaulArsenault.com

Journey | Hugh Y.

Lush, leafy mango groves. A full moon evening. Stopped by the Goan police with their sweaty smell. 'Papers and a little something for me, sir.' Corruption with dignity.

The Beach | Hugh Y.

Silk sky, satin tides
Bright colours and incense smells
Monsoon rains and waves.

Stop for a moment 'cause I'm back again with a new idea, call it Dragon's
Den.

Came from the bottom, call me the slum dog, born on the same street
Drummy was murdered on.

Fairhill Boys, do or die.

Stranded on the kerbs, most of us die.

Start wae Gary Morton, stabbed to death.

Then my bro McLeany died in his bed.

My friend Nan OD'd on Valium; the same fucking drug wit done my cousin Ryan in.

So, my thoughts go out to all their family.

Fairhill streets.

Yeah well, call it insanity.

I will always remember, especially the pain of Pickle's mother. His life was
taken by his own little brother.

This is all fact. I don't spit lies.

Fairhill soldiers put your hands to the skies.

Pray for all the fallen and close your eyes.

But one day comrades, I'll be in Heaven.

Just a matter of time because of how I'm livin'.

I'll swagger to the gates in Converse, with a rucksack, and a few bottles of
Buckfast in case I get a knockback.

An Honest Man | John R.

Male with a tale
Spilling truths after ale

One sip of tonic
Then I'm chronic

I'm the black sheep
It makes me weep

An everyday gamer
A Union man no a Proclaimer

I'm also loyal and true
I could be an honest friend to you.



'Floating Identities' | Fabio Sassi

Fabio makes photos and acrylics using tiny objects and what is considered to have no worth by the mainstream.

Fabio lives and works in

Bologna, Italy. His work can be viewed at

www.fabiosassi.foliohd.com

I have a nasty little secret. It dwells in a dark corner of my mind, squatting like a sharp-toothed leper. Sometimes he surfaces in my dreams and I struggle to drown the sibilant accusations.



Making Art | Paul Arsenault
www.PaulArsenault.com

18th September

Another week gone by within this scene of Victorian ruthless struggle, called Bar L. I only have another twenty weeks. Before I'm out let me take you to this world.

To start, the procedure in here is vile and dehumanizing when I need to use the toilet. Day or night, there is no privacy to urinate or empty my bowels without the sickening smell eating what little clean air I have in my cell. Sometimes I pack my nostrils with bits of cloth. I clamp a lit roll-up between my teeth to fight the lingering stench in my four-by-three paces-long cell. I need to repeat the same procedure in the morning when it's time to slop out. The landing that leads to the toilet is just wide enough for two men to pass each other with their shoulders touching; 150 meters long. A hundred men walk in time in the direction of the toilet at the end of the hall, determination on their faces. Some cons carelessly miss

the toilet hole, and as the shit slides down the neck of the urinal it creates a palatable smell.

At night, I read my book by the light outside by reflecting it with my shaving mirror. I hear the voices and shouts of men trading, complaining, moaning. The screams of some men going made from detox. One can't help thinking that the grim reaper is visiting them tonight.

A faint, crackling voice from above calls out, 'Twenty-six below, twenty-six below. Came ta the window mate.'

I go to the window, erasing the shadows of the bars on the ceiling of my cell.

'What is it mate?' I reply.

'Can you grab the line and pass it to your neighbor?' he asks.

This line is made up of tens of shoe laces tied together, creating a chain where messages or parcels can be attached. They're then swung from window to win-

dow, like a pendulum. I reach my arm out of the window and attempt to seize the line as it swings by my cell. After several attempts I manage to grab hold of it. I wrap the parcel in a single sheet of paper, and slide it through the gaps around the heating pipes that run from cell to cell, delivering it as promised to my neighbor.

*I hear the voices and shouts
of men trading, complaining,
moaning.*

I never cease to be amazed by the inventions of prisoners. To boil an egg I have to crack it into a bag and then put it inside the kettle where it will get poached. Some men toast bread by putting a slice into a brown paper bag and pressing a hot iron over it. It's not all about food though; imagine having to operate a TV without a remote control. Most people have experienced this frustration no doubt, when the remote has been lost or misplaced. When a con loses the remote in Barlinnie they must overcome

this by assembling many small pens together by slotting the nib of each pen into the small hole at the top of another pen. This creates a rod to press the button from a distance without having to move the bed or chair.

Yet, survival means more than just being alive in prison; innovation, not imitation overcomes obstacles. Prison is a world of imaginable means.



The Show Must Go On | Georgia Bellas

Home | Hugh Y.

Eighteenth of September, I will
sing.
Free and Scottish.
There and back,
silenced by westminster.
Inspired by Independence.
Home yes.

No More | Hugh Y.

Identity: free Scots
Hobby: independence
Family Role: voter
Strength: independent of westminster
Weakness: no more.

Three Haikus | Donald S.

I

The ferry sails
The islands are awaiting,
Scotland is soon free.

II

Scotland's flag flies proud,
the heather carpets the ground.
England is no more.

III

I try to get dole,
The offices are shut down,
The 'Salmond' has won.

From Madness and Stovies | Keith A.

I am from a ceiling fan that spun my childhood upside down. From a nice pair of Converse that kept my feet on the ground. From kitchen lino making moves on it like a chessboard and cigarette smoke that filled up my lungs. I am from the neglected blades of grass and long bright daffodils. I am from a weekend of madness and a line of good football players. From Joanne Johnstone, Andersons, and McBrides. From running late all the time. From my dad was Superman. From fully fledged Roman Catholics. I'm from Bellshill Maternity Ward, home-made soup, and stovies. From the grandpa who lived two lives, the cousin who struggles with Cerebral Palsy, and another cousin who was murdered. I am from the photo album at my gran's house that only comes out at Christmas.

The Night Bus | John R.

The night bus jumps with spoon rattlers and smoky Joes, belting out Country & Western songs. The passengers are hyped. The usual drunks swig from their Frosty Jack bottles. Here I am, stuck in a cloud of smoke.

I tell Joe, 'Here Pal – I'm the Smoke Detector, so please refrain from smoking.'

He starts to dance, and his bunnet falls off his head. Everyone laughs.

The smoke lingers. The song misses a beat. The lyrics are improvised. The night bus travels.



Flynn sat on the sofa, meticulously grooming himself. He was mainly grey with little brown patches, and large for one of his kind: about kitten-sized. He was also a bit confused about himself. Not so much in the gender sense as the species sense. He came running at the mention of his name, and had free run of the bungalow. Thoroughly house trained, he carried out his ablutions in the corner of his tank. To further throw confusion into the mix, he had gotten quite good at training the human that co-existed with him, to do his bidding.

As he contemplated these rather baffling matters, the human in question entered via the back door, wafting in with the familiar antiseptic scent that always heralded his arrival from work. The rat bounded to greet him. Coiling his back legs, he sprung on to the human's shoulder.

'Oh, there you are, Flynn,' the human said, 'Drinking night tonight. Gordon's coming over. I think we'll get a quick drink in early, eh?' He extracted an egg cup from one of the kitchen's cupboards and went to sit in the lounge, pouring himself a large vodka and coke. He then repeated the process for Flynn, carefully pouring a similar mixture into the egg cup. The rat then

leapt down on to the coffee table and began happily lapping at the alcoholic concoction.

'Pace yourself, mate,' the human said, smiling with amusement.

The doorbell rang at this, and Gordon entered. He was a paramedic, and had the same sharp hospital aroma as Flynn's owner.

'Hi Eric,' Gordon said. 'I see Flynn's got a head start on us in the drinking stakes. Just make sure he doesn't get drunk and fall asleep in my jacket pocket again. I was halfway home before I found him the last time. He's a cranky little bugger with a hangover. Not to mention the fact I nearly had a heart attack when I put my hand in that pocket. You do know that if you die suddenly he'll probably wind up eating you? Once he gets past the gag reflex, that is.'

*. . . he had gotten quite good
at training the human . . .*

Eric smiled. 'That's the circle of life, buddy.'

Black Hawk Down was inserted in to the DVD player, and both sat down with their drinks. Gordon produced a pack of raspberry ruffles and sat them close to hand, next to his drink on the table.

Drink followed drink and humans and rat alike became merrily intoxicated. The rat staggered about the table before disappearing into the back room.

‘Looks like Flynn’s had enough,’ Gordon said, as he watched the rodent zig-zag out of the room.

Time passed, and the movie drew to a conclusion. Gordon reached on to the table, fumbling for a sweet from the packet on the table, finding only one left. He looked baffled for a second.

‘I’ve only eaten a couple of these. The pack’s empty. Have you been in at these when I was in the kitchen?’

‘Not me, mate, I don’t like them,’ Eric said.

At this, Flynn reappeared. He ran across the table and grabbed the free end of the last sweet. A tiny tug of war ensued, as human and rodent vied for control of the morsel. Suddenly, the rat paused. He then gave one last tug, and as the sweet marginally moved, he bit through Gordon’s end, leaving him with a tiny piece of cellophane between his thumb and forefinger. The rat then bounded off with his prize, leaving both humans looking from one to the other.

‘Not only is your rat an alcoholic, he’s a petty thief too,’ Gordon said.

Eric burst out laughing. ‘The worrying thing is the fact that you were outsmarted by a rat. If I’m in a car crash and you turn up, I think I’ll wait for the next paramedic.’

I Am From | Hugh Y.

I am from the kitchen sink and the Hoover running wild everywhere. From the soda stream I couldn't reach, from the fish tank and boiled fish. I'm from carved wooden fireplaces, from bramble bushes and crab apple trees on my way to school. I am from camping and 'Resourceful Clan' on the weekends. From a street life, Maura, and 'Young forever' (three brothers). I am from 'making the most of the situation,' 'a glass half full,' and, 'Don't eat yellow snow or the Bogey Man will get you . . .' From practicing the faiths of Life and Clyde-built. From Sunday roasts and hand-cut chips. From Dad the scrap man; the gypsy; the antique dealer. I am from family photo album lying in the bottom of our cupboard, that come out after a few drinks, and that always bring a smile and a tear.

Three Scars | Éric R.

I have three scars upon my arm –
tribal initiation from a Nubian prince.
I bear them with pride.

I have three scars upon my arm –
keyhole surgery in the wrong place.
I am suing.

I have three scars upon my arm –
an angry girlfriend, Chef Extraordinaire.
It was worth it for the food.

I have three scars upon my arm –
my swashbuckling pet rat,
irate at the lack of vodka and cheese.
I will always remember my furry assailant.

I have three scars upon my arm
from one who thought I was a mushroom man
living in the radiator.
I was slashed in the heat of the moment.

I have three scars upon my arm –
aliens planted a homing beacon.
I am desecrated.

I have three scars upon my arm.
One of these tales is the truth –
can you guess which one?

The cheap razor is
my only salvation.

The plastic white Bic razor blade lies on my prison table. The cheap razor is my only salvation. I am determined to continue with my art but the dark silver lead on my long Helix pencil has disappeared with all of my constant drawing. Pencil sharpeners are not allowed in this prison due to security precautions. So now I have to sharpen my blunted pencil with some means of a sharp end. The Bic razor I am going to use to shave my face is the answer. I've got a visit tonight and anyway a shave is long overdue. But first things first. I have to procure the blade by meddling with the razor's frame. I must give the razor back to the officer who has issued me with the implement. So I have to carefully remove the thin blade from the plastic frame of the Bic tool. I have to be careful and not crack the casing as if I did the officer would notice it and I would get into trouble. So I pick up the razor and I see a deep gap that is moulded around the sharpened edge. I have to use something thin so I can ease my way into the gaps which have been tightly glued in place. I use my prison issue plastic knife that I eat my meals with. With the end of the knife I wedge into the deep spaces which surround the Bic's framework. Easing the thin edge into the crevice I see that the manufactured product is loosening apart, giving me enough space to see the silver-plated paper thin razor. The razor had been glued into two small rivets, one at each end of the blade. I knew that all I had to do was fit the knife's edge beneath the silver blade and voila: I would have my very own pencil sharpener. The razor fell out onto the table making a tingly

noise which echoed lightly in my ears. I pushed the razor's framework together and a clicking sound told me that the Bic razor was tightly closed. It made a perfect alignment as if the Bic razor had never been opened.

Sharpening my pencil is no easy feat. The razor is so small in my big hands. So with careful ease I grab the razor and strike its edge down the Helix pencil. I do so like a lumberjack using his axe to chop wood. After a minute I successfully fashion a sharp point onto the pencil. On the table a residue of shavings gathers, a smile arriving on my face as my every-day drawing utensil is complete. Suddenly the cell door opens: 'Have you finished with that razor?' the officer's mouth mutters. 'Sure have,' I say keeping my smile back a bit so as not to give the game away. The officer gives me a strange look before throwing the razor into a yellow disposal box. Door shut, I sit down on my bed contented, when I catch a glimpse of my reflection in the mirror. Suddenly it dawns on me; I've forgotten to shave.

Who am I? | Shaun S.

I have many scars on my body from my
head down to my toes

Accidents and fights youthful highs and
lows

I'm so stupid and careless which drives me
completely mad

My thinking is thoughtless and mad in-
sanelly stupid deliriously sad

I wanted to be an astronaut floating in orbit
like Neil Armstrong

I want to change and create I'm thinking of
living so long

In my dreams I'm always falling revolving
dropping onto land

I am stone I am concrete until I dissolve
crumbling into sand

I wish I was strong as a lion roaring at the
top of my voice

Courageous and standing proud letting the
world hear my noise.

Independence | Shaun S.

I am writing about a word that has been ringing in my ears ever since the Scottish National Party won the last Scottish elections and that word is: INDEPENDENCE!

Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon have went on and on, bleating about how independence will be good for Scotland's future. I don't know too much about political matters as I don't understand it and my faith in all political issues has let me down all my life. But can independence restore my faith in the Government? I don't know...

If independence happens what would it mean for a person like me? I don't know but I do know that Scotland would pull away from the English and Great Britain. And no one could interfere with Scottish matters. I think this would be a big mistake as Scotland depends on these other countries. If it wasn't for them Scotland wouldn't be the country it is now.

What I really want to know is: if Scotland becomes independent will the lives of Scottish people be any better? Will it mean that the thousands of people who live in poverty receive better care? Will it mean that thousands of Scottish prisoners get the right to vote? What will it mean for immigration and the bedroom tax? But if independence would improve our lives then it would have my vote any time and it could restore my faith in political and governmental matters.

But if independence doesn't work it could put Scotland back to the days of old and we could lose everything including banking, investments and European funding. So I hope this independence theory does work because it's important that as a nation we take a step forwards and not backwards.

Losing Sight | Keith A.

Identity – Not yet found

Hobby – Contemplating

Family Role – Black sheep

Strength – Coping

Weakness – Losing Sight



Who Are We?