



**Age UKs in Lincolnshire
Writing and Poetry
Competition
2017**

Winning entries

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Congratulations to all this year's county finalists and our appreciation
and thanks to Mrs Lorna Hannah for judging the finalists' entries

First Place
A Walk in the Woods
Max Hadley De Winter
Age UK Lincoln & Kesteven

Stewart

“Come on Stewart, sixty’s the new forty, it’s a chance to do all of the things we’ve always wanted, I honestly don’t understand you. For thirty-five years, I’ve listened to your complaints at the beginning of every term. Now you’re free for goodness sake! No more wretched kids, no more marking, no more “*directives*” for the head!” Susan disappeared into the utility room, swearing under her breath, a bale of laundry clasped protectively in her arms.

I really couldn’t blame her, undoubtedly, she was frustrated by my lack of fervour. For the past twelve months, at least, I’d been desperate to retire from my position as a history teacher, at the local comprehensive. The kids were bored, no two ways about it, and all my enthusiasm, had been eroded long ago. Who would now believe, as a rather callow and idealistic young graduate, I once had such aspirations to write? I’d virtually completed an initial draft, for a medieval mystery, when Susan found out she was pregnant with Paul, and that was that. We got married and I took the first job I was offered. A mortgage with the “Mablethorpe and Sutton”, was agreed, and however unconvincingly, I continued to play my part as a “responsible family man”.

Now here I was, with career sacrificed on the altar of mediocrity, and life’s opportunities having slipped by. I sighed ruefully aware, that I harboured far too many regrets.

“**The past is a foreign country**”. Oft quoted, had been L.P Hartley’s astute observation, but perhaps, “**a destination one should never revisit**”, might have been an appropriate codicil! “Blimey”! Was I always so cynical? I wondered.

As for the future? Although Susan happily anticipated short breaks in the Highlands and weekends in Paris, I fully expected that we would drift aimlessly into genteel old age, competing against each other for the highest score on “countdown”, or pottering about the garden, making sure Monty Don’s weekly tasks were complete!

I glanced at my retirement gift from the school, at least a bit of consideration had gone into it. Oddly enough, I had promised myself a metal detector, but never got around to buying one. This was a Garrett, with relatively good specifications, it must have cost a fair few quid, I smiled wryly, as I imagined the headmaster putting his ‘hand in his pocket’ for my collection. We never had seen eye to eye, I was typical of the “old school” he a product of L.S.E. with more than enough drive to succeed! How pleased he must have been, to see the back of me. My less than inspirational lessons had not gone unremarked by him, over the past couple of years.

“What the hell”, I snarled the words aloud, staring through the misted window of my cluttered study, surveying the bleak January morning outside. The sky was leaden, heavy with the threat of rain or maybe even a flurry of snow. Stark skeletons of naked trees, with branches drooped low in despair, seemed to mock my indecision. In the end, Susan lost patience, “go for a walk, do something for goodness sake, you never know, the blessed snowdrops might be out in the woods already” she sounded desperate, tetchy, her patience wavering, despite her good intentions. The last thing we needed was a full-blown row, we’d made it through Christmas swapping polite conversation with our nearest and dearest, still masquerading as a “perfectly happy couple”.

A strategic withdrawal from potential conflict, seemed the best policy, so discretion being the better part of valour, I donned my well-worn wax jacket and grabbed a pair of aged, green gardening wellies from the boot cupboard in the hallway. Pausing I looked again at the metal detector, pristine, still packaged. "I'll give it a go". I thought after all I had nothing to lose...

Annis

Despite Aiken having recently inherited considerable wealth and more than five and twenty hides of choice pasture and dense weald throughout the shire, my father heartily disapproved of our relationship, "That boy is too full of himself, besides I've got my own plans for you girl".

I shuddered with distaste, I had been introduced already to the man, whom my father considered a "suitable match". An odious fellow, with thinning hair, and at least twice my age! I would rather die, I thought, as I remembered the urgent embrace of Aiken, his body lithe and strong, his russet hair, luxuriant to the touch, and his kisses as sweet as the violets, growing lush and abundant, in the shade of the "green man", the most magnificent oak in the whole of the great wood.

Defiant of my father's wishes however, at every opportunity, I would wend my way betwixt the trees, twigs cracking beneath my feet, as aconites and primroses sighed with relief at winter's passing, and bluebells heralded the coming spring. For, well hid from prying eyes in our woodland covert, happily, and with abandon, we continued to enjoy our clandestine meetings under shelter of that mighty oak, where Aiken and I lay upon my blue woollen cloak and dreamt of the future which we would share.

Discovery was inevitable of course, it was my mother who spotted first my swelling belly. Tears and protestations were in vain, I was forced in the end to admit the identity of my un-born baby's father. My parents rage was fearful, but eventually it was agreed that Aiken and I should be wed, bound together, by holy the church in sight of kith and kin. I felt the child quicken as vows were exchanged. And whilst, a solitary osle sweetly serenaded, we were pronounced man and wife. It was then, the worlds stirred, as bleak mid-winter loosened his chill grasp just a little. At last I thought, perhaps dreams can come true....

Aiken

All hopes and aspirations, dashed by cruel fate, my heart broken, as she died, giving life to our weakling child. The grief was unbearable. Alone, and totally bereft, my only relief, to drown all sorrows with copious flagons of mead. My friends, offered solace as best they could. Thinking to comfort, they would tell me that "I was young and would find love again". Yet they were wrong. Annis whom I had worshipped. Would never be replaced.

In her memory, I thought to keep her possessions, the gold brooches, the clasps, the pins and bangles, all pretty gewgaws' indeed. Yet eventually, recalling how she had so loved to walk in great wood, and how she had revelled in ancient tales of Hearne and Tyr, Eostre and Frige, I thought to bury her treasure beneath the "Green Man" her favourite oak tree, majestic in that secluded glade, where we had first declared our love. I followed the mossy trail, which led among hazel and ash, hawthorn and rowan, and they; bowed in sorrow, watched silent, as gently, I lowered the precious bundle, deep into a clumsily formed hollow. Then pressing down so firmly, deep into the fecund earth, a tiny acorn, disturbed by my recent excavations, I thought, "in a thousand years my friend, you will mark this place"...

Stewart

Although having set the discriminator for precious metal, never did I imagine that I'd get a result! Most certainly, beginners luck!

Clambering the rickety stile into our neighbour Alec Rowe's field, I navigated the scrubby headland, avoiding the worst of the bramble, and followed the well-worn bridle path, which led to Aiken's great wood, protected slightly, from a freshening, northerly blast, by a dense, thorny hedge of senescent blackthorn.

Susan had never cared for the woods, “too sinister”! She said dismissively. It was a shame that she’d never shared my pleasure in “the great outdoors”, I mused and remembered how, along ago, I’d bring Paul, regardless of the weather to wander among the trees.

Excitedly, he’d run about, hunting for beetles and grubs, spiders and slow worms, hidden under rotting logs and with crimson gloved hands, gather piles of autumns blown, satyrid, leaves, as a ‘safe-haven’ for ‘homeless’ hedgehogs! Carefully we’d study his “I Spy” book, hoping to identify the oak, and ash, and horse chestnut. We’d collect acorn caps for pixies and shiny conkers nestling within their spiny cases, whilst listening intently, for the hoot of a disgruntled Tawny owl. We chuckled at the chattering antics of an agitated squirrel, and the incessant rat-a-tat of the green woodpecker. Delighted, if we glimpsed a tiny shrew, or mouse, timid amongst the ferns and flowers, which grew in such profusion, under a verdant canopy. “Happy days”, I thought with momentary nostalgia, and shivered involuntarily, as though someone had just walked over my grave.

All the while, I’d been “sweeping”, a rather haphazard route with a steady, methodical arc, when almost tripping over a large, badly decayed stump, I practically fell into the secluded glade, dominated by one enormous oak tree. Slightly shaken, I hardly registered at first, the insistent buzz in my earphones, it was unmistakable, and I’d got a “find” for sure.

Taking the pick from my shoulder bag, (a Christmas present from Susan), I began tentatively to break the ground around the gnarled roots of the huge oak. The soil, being surprisingly friable, it wasn’t long before I’d made an impression. I’d gone down perhaps a foot when I spotted the first trinket, lustrous, refulgent, beckoning me on. Down on my hands and knees, impervious to the cold striking through my cords, urgently scraping, sifting, I trembled in anticipation, I hadn’t felt such tremendous exhilaration in years. Then, exposed at last, I gazed in awe, upon the most astonishing array of brooches and clasps, bangles and pins.

(How greatly was Annis Adored?)

The hoard must have laid undisturbed for more than a millennium. Whose secret had I stumbled upon? I was convinced that the treasure was Angle Saxon in origin. Aureate, of such quality and beauty, the workmanship though naïve, intricate and exquisite in its execution.

Almost tenderly, I collected the objects, touching history with my own bare hands, and utterly, completely over-whelmed, I realised, how extraordinary, how rare, are such events in life.

And not so very far away, in sight of the ancient and venerable oak, with hands tightly clasped, and as much in love as they had ever been, a russet haired youth, and a winsome girl wrapped warmly in a blue woollen cloak, smiled fondly at one another, as they continued; walking that familiar footway through Great Aikens Wood.

Second Place
A Walk in the Woods
Mrs Rosemary Dorricott
Age UK Lincoln & Kesteven

A walk in the woods in winter
When woodland creatures sleep
For trees have lost their summer garb
And frosty fingers creep!

The soft, soft feel of winter's snow
Gentle beneath our feet
Muffling the sound of crisp brown leaves
As through the woods we creep!

The bark of a fox in the distance
-Not all creatures sleep-
Though birds have flown to warmer climes
Still the robin sings- our treat!

A walk in the woods in spring time
When all the world awakes
To the returning sound of birdsong
As winters cold grip breaks.

Spring flowers in the hedgerow
Buds on tree-tops show
And creatures, waking from their sleep
Are dashing to and fro!

Everything is moving
Where once the whole world slept
-my heart lifts in harmony
With my foot-falls gentle step

A walk in the woods in summer
When all the worlds aglow
And trees now wear their mantle green
As through the woods we go!

Nesting birds have reared their young
Fragrance fills the air
Blossom covers every tree
Buzzing insects everywhere!

Leaf mould on the woodland floor-
A carpet beneath our feet,
Harbours insects, large and small
In a secret world they keep!!

A roe-deer peeps from behind a tree
Gently sniffs the air
Then startled, hurriedly darts away
As he scents that we are there!!

Next into our autumn walk
When leaves have turned to gold
Woodland life gets ready
For winters approaching cold!!

Falling leaves surround us
And cover the earth below-
Woodland creatures gather them
For warmth 'gainst winters snow!!

Which brings me back to winter
When the world is fast asleep
'Neath the cold, cold snow of winter
And frosty fingers creep!!

Third Place
First Love
Audrey Pestell
Age UK Lindsey

The war was causing massive changes in a small country town in Devon but the children although unhappy at the disappearance of father figures, all called up to fight, took all the changes such as evacuees, rationing and gas masks in their stride. Mary with her two sisters and a brother lived on a new council estate. They all loved school and life though different, quickly moved into a different routine.

During 1939, several new children known as Kinder children who were not evacuees, arrived in the town and one boy was placed with a family a few doors away from Mary. When he arrived he did not speak English and it was soon discovered he had escaped from Germany. He was one of several Jewish children who had been sent by their parents to escape the concentration camps and deprivation that now was taking place in Nazi Germany to anyone of the Jewish faith. Arriving by train the children went into lodgings provided by local families, whilst waiting to be placed with more permanent Jewish families either in Britain or abroad. Most of them looked different with dark curly hair and dark eyes and some of the boys wore skull caps. They all attended school and although avoided initially and viewed with suspicion, they were soon regarded with awe and admiration as they quickly became fluent speakers of English and showed academic prowess which gave a more exciting breadth to lessons and terrified the teachers. Most of them were older and attended senior school but the boy placed in lodgings near Mary, was her age. He cut a sad, lonely figure the first day he came to school.

Mary had always been considered the brightest in her class, loving the challenge of everything that school had to offer, she was always keen to be up in the mornings to start her day. She found the young Jewish boy called Walter, an enigma and a force to be reckoned with. The teacher placed them at the same desk and good naturedly grumbled that nightly she had to go home to prepare extra work to keep them busy and occupied the next day. The competition between them both, stimulated new thought and depth to their learning, feeding off each other's intellect and enjoying the stimulation and excitement, that only new discovery can provide. At playtimes when they all played together Mary made sure Walter was included. In spite of the teasing and the constant singing of the Gracie Field's song, "Walter, Walter lead me to the altar", a firm friendship developed between them even out of school.

Walter came from a much more affluent and sophisticated background and had previously been to an expensive private school but both found they had experiences to share that held a fascination for them both. Mary being country born and bred was allowed to roam freely within the Devon hills, and had knowledge of nature that Walter lacked. His knowledge came from travel and although young had been to most of the famous cities of Europe. Being with Mary he saw a different side to life, watched a badger and her cubs playing in the dusk, outside their sett, saw where a rare orchid grew in a secret corner of the wood and the stony armour made of tiny pebbles protecting the soft body of the caddis fly larva at the edge of the river. Walter knew about paintings and literature. His ambition even at his young age was to be an architect and he showed her the intricacies of the architecture of Roman arches in the ancient town church and the beautiful leaded windows, where ancient craftsmen had poured their very souls into creating images that told stories of religion and history, by skilfully manufacturing pictures of lasting beauty with their primitive tools.

As they shared their individual experiences each gained a knowledge that no books or formal lessons could provide and the intellect of both children expanded to a degree would have astounded the experts. However there was often a deep sadness that Walter could not hide, because he missed his parents and was fearful for their well-being, his culture and his faith.

Mary's mother having always lived in the small country town, had all the natural suspicions of someone from a different country and cultural background. Fearing what she didn't understand and seeing how close the two young children had become she was afraid for her daughter. Not knowing how to explain her fears and prejudice to one so young and missing the support of her beloved husband, she spoke to her daughter quite harshly about the dangers of being too friendly and the need to be careful with foreign boys of his kind. Mary felt very confused and although she knew the difference between boys and girls because she had a brother, her knowledge of anything else was non-existent. When she tried to ask questions, her mother got very flustered and uncharacteristically very sharply banned her from seeing Walter out of school.

Normally a very obedient child, Mary could not end her new friendship as she had found someone who although he could not replace her beloved father gave her someone with whom she could share her hopes and dreams so both children secretly arranged meetings after school in quiet wooded areas hidden behind the houses. Trees sheltered the area around a tiny pond full of wild life and lush green grass grew up all around it with a vast array of all kinds of wild flora which gave it a fairy like quality. Mary would never have found it on her own although she had passed it on many occasions when out with the other children. The growth of brambles all around did not make it inviting to any would be passers-by. Walter had found it when he had seen a sheep caught in the brambles and set it free. It was their secret and seemed, to the two young children to have a magic and mystery that previously had only been supplied by books.

They spent all their time talking and sharing their short life time of experiences. Although his had been a life full of culture in a city with a wealthy Jewish family, this had all changed when Hitler came to power, to a life of fear, deprivation and dread. The nightmare of the Nazis and horrific parting from his family followed by a terrifying train ride which, while telling, made him succumb to a fit of sobbing which racked his body to the very soul was very hard for Mary to understand. In her world men and boys did not show their emotions and never cried, keeping the British stiff upper lip. Her background was so different and she had never had to experience the horror he had had to endure.

He spoke little of his journey by train, where after a traumatic parting from his parents, he was squeezed into a compartment with other children who were strangers, some of whom were younger than him but many older as he was only six. His mother had sewn a few family treasures into his underpants and he was very aware of them pressing against his stomach. Soldiers boarded the train and some of the children were searched. As the soldiers came nearer, Walter was so terrified he wet himself. One of the soldiers came up to his carriage, looked at him and he started to cry. The soldier looked down at his wet trousers and the puddle on the floor and just smiled at him and touched him sympathetically on the shoulder. His partner a Nazi, made some crude remark about circumcision, which he didn't understand but made both soldiers laugh crudely and to Walter's relief they moved on.

As his sobbing continued, Mary just didn't know what to do. Remembering her missing Father, she knew if she had lost all her loved ones, as her friend had done, she too would be heart broken. Quietly she held his hand until the sobbing stopped. Things went on as usual and with the resilience of the young, Walter started to fit into Mary's world and life went on. One day however he seemed very preoccupied and she asked him what was on his mind. He explained to her that if he had been at home he would have been celebrating the Passover and the whole family would have been read the story from the Torah, which was their Bible and had been given to Abram by God at Mt Sinai.

Mary knew the story from hearing it at chapel from the Old Testament. Mary having existed in a family where money was always in short supply was not one to give up if things needed doing and she did not like to see her friend so sad. Walter with some persuasion from Mary discussed how to improvise and celebrate the Passover as best they could. Being young and full of ideas they both sat down and worked out what they needed so that they could celebrate the religious ritual, in their own way, following the ceremony as near as possible, in their secret place. Mary knew her God as a God of love and knew they both really worshipped the same God but with different cultural interpretations and He would not mind that they did not have the right equipment or leadership from a priest. Knowing all things, He would understand and would hear their prayers because they were said in faith and love. With a little improvisation they would celebrate Walter's Passover in their own way and this was something at which Mary had become quite adept since her father had gone away to war.

Walter fetched his skull cap and Mary covered her head with her rather grubby handkerchief. With a lighted candle from Mary's bedroom and ten pieces of bread to represent the ten tribes of Israel, Mary watched as Walter chanted prayers in Hebrew and lit the candle and burnt the bread, as his father would have done at home. When he had finished and sat in silence, with his head bowed, Mary felt she mustn't leave out Jesus especially as it had been the Jews that had crucified him and solemnly said the Lord's Prayer and sang a Sunday School song, "Jesus wants me for a sunbeam", Both children then returned home both feeling in their innocence, at home with their God and happy in their faith.

Since Mary's mother had warned her about seeing Walter out of school they had found a secret hiding place for messages on their way to school. There was an old wall on the way home from school with gaps in between the brick work. It was here that they were able to hide notes to each other. Walter had not attended school for several days and Mary missed him. After school she was impatient to get to the hiding place in the wall to find out what was wrong and there to her relief she found a note. Walter wanted to meet her that evening as he had some news for her. Missing tea, she walked to the fields and crawled through the brambles to their secret place. Then she sat and waited and after a short while, Walter appeared. He had been crying and surprised her by taking her into his arms and kissed her on both cheeks in a formal way and told her his news. A family member in America had agreed to take him in and the very next day he would be off to board a boat for the long and dangerous trip. The tears he wept were tears of joy as he missed his own world and traditions and would be able to deal better with the loss of his family if he was among his own people.

Their young years and different cultural backgrounds had made explanations and goodbyes commonplace in this time of war. They held hands and promised to keep in touch with all the faith of the young and he promised one day he would come back to see his only true friend in the strange new world at war, in which he found himself. As they peered out from their leafy hideaway at an apple tree in full blossom, Mary loving all its beauty reached out her hand as if to touch the branches brimming with beautiful pink and white blossom. Birds were busy building nests in its branches and bees were busy collecting the nectar from the blossoms. With the ambivalence of the young, her mind could not dwell for long on the sadness of the situation, when her world was still brimming over with the wonder of all the natural beauty around her and she touched Walter's arm, "If I were a giant I would dig that tree up and put it in a pot on my window sill. I would leave the window open and let all the birds fly in and out to build their nests and I would be so happy watching them whilst I lay in my bed." Forgetting the problems of their parting and as a child not wanting to be out done Walter responded by also reminiscing about how when he was an architect he would design a beautiful house around an English apple tree, so that even though they could never be giants they would enjoy its beauty and share it with all the other living creatures.

His departure forgotten for a while, the two young enquiring minds entered a world where all dreams were possible. By the time they reached home they had acquired a dog called Wilfred who could perform impossible tricks and a magic cat called Esmeralda “ Laughing loudly they went their separate ways to their homes still playing as children do, their game of make believe. They parted enjoying their impossible childish dreams which were full of hope and dreams of a better future, helping them to forget the forever changing reality of their present lives, at peace with the same god made different by man.

Although they never saw each other again, Mary often thought about their time together with affection and wondered if the ship on which Walter had travelled to America had managed to dodge the torpedoes and other dangers that lurked in the seas through which he had to travel. In her mind she always felt sure that he was safe, knowing if he had managed to write a letter, her mother would not have understood and been fearful of the unknown, hiding it from her.

After the war when all the dreadful atrocities perpetrated on the Jews became big news, she thought of Walter and ran to their secret hideaway which she had not visited for several years. She found it quite overgrown and it was impossible to reach the inner sanctuary that had been their special place, as it was now well protected by brambles. In sorrow she turned away and seeing her apple tree and ran towards it. Hugging its now ample trunk and resting her head on the rough surface, she thought of her friend and first love and wept.

**Highly Commended
Awestruck
Reinhold Joseph Willisch
Age UK Lindsey**

*please note that this piece contains graphic descriptions of war atrocities

The name of the village was Partschendorf, (now called Bartosovice), in the Cowland, a province in Eastern Moravia, in the former state of Czechoslovakia.

During the last days of the month of April 1945, the rumbling thunder of gunfire became louder and sounded more threatening. The order came to evacuate; to move westwards towards the German Reich's frontiers. Hastily, horses were harnessed and trek wagons were loaded with essentials. It was difficult to know, what to pack and heart breaking to leave your home with all your treasured possessions. It was mostly women who made the decisions and did all the work. There were no young men here; only a few men over the age of 60 and boys up to the age of 14 were about.

After three days of arduous trekking, the wagon train was overtaken by advancing Russian tanks with infantry riding on top. This first meeting with the enemy Soviet combat soldiers was relatively harmless. An officer tried to placate the hysterical, horrified, physically worn-down people with the words: "The war will soon be over; go back home; we are all brothers now". There was a general feeling of relief, as the return trek began.

But soon they met other units, who displayed their true character. The wagons were ransacked; anything of value or worth was stolen. Any food was confiscated by the hungry soldiers. Their beautiful farm horses were taken and exchanged with the soldiers emaciated, worn down horses or oxen. Every attempt of protest was threatened with the point of a bayonet or a rifle butt, with unbridled violence. Brutal rapes and the ravishing of women and girls became a kind of sport. The gravel roads were by now torn up by the tank tracks and so the return progress was becoming slow and tiresome.

As the trekkers arrived on the outskirts of their village, they were intercepted by a band of irregular, self-styled Czech partisans, called Vybor, and were more or less robbed of everything they had left. The returned refugees now found that 58 of the total 387 houses in the village had been completely destroyed during the recent fighting. Dead bodies were still lying untended and all the remaining houses had been looted and mindlessly vandalised. There was broken glass and china, dented cooking pots, torn books, ripped clothes, human excrement, half butchered animals, torn bedding with feathers floating like snowflakes, covering the mess. Curiously, there were no soldiers about

People tried to clean up and put some order into this chaos. But it all changed suddenly, when a garrison of fresh infantry arrived. The following days were horrifying and painful for the returned women, children and old men.

Drunken Russian soldiers were on the prowl, grabbing any female, child, mother and grandmother, to be brutally gang raped. Women and girls were forcibly held down and jeeringly ravished, while the men, i.e. fathers, some elderly husbands, grandfathers and young brothers, had to watch the infamous violation of their women folk. No one was able to help or stop this sacrilege without risking his own life or the life of the victim. The shrieking cries of the terrified little girls could be heard and no one could or was able to help.

The old men who physically tried to restrain the rapists from assaulting their women, were shot or beaten to death, are named as: ALFRED BOENISCH, ADOLF BOENISCH, JOSEF FREISSLER, FRANZ HINNER, FRANZ HESKE.

The women who valiantly fought back injured their attackers and were either stabbed, shot or beaten to death, are named as: ROSINA TENGLER, MARIE BSIRSKE, KAROLINA REPPER. A young woman, ROSA HESKE, fought bravely with her attacker. She scratched his face and bit his ear. After being clubbed senseless, she was still violated. Her rapist then calmly shot her with his pistol into her vagina. For two days she suffered in agony before she died.

The women and old men were forced to collect and bury all the fallen soldiers, friend and foe. The Soviet soldiers were buried in the local cemetery and were marked by a wooden cross and a name plate. Later, they were transferred into a large war memorial in FRYDEK-MISTEK, (which ironically now no longer exists; it has been bulldozed down and levelled out.) The German fallen were buried in a mass grave in a field; the ground was then levelled out so that no trace could be found.

In the local cemetery, the women and the old men had to remove and smash all gravestones and crosses, level the ground, which was then sown with grass seed. The local war memorial, dedicated to the fallen soldiers during the seven days Austrian-Prussian war and the first World War was torn down and the stones used as road building material.

All the archives, documents and books in the library; the church and the school were burned. There is no record what happened to all the parish council documents.

Once again some of the old men resisted and protested about this inhuman treatment by their Bolshevik masters. WILHELM SCHINDLER, ROBERT SCHINDLER, JOSEF BOEHM, RUDOLF SCHLESER were sent to the Gulags in Siberia, never to return.

My pen is struggling to record some of these infamous acts. But I know, all must be recorded. The present victorious masters in the West either do not believe any of this, because it actually appears to be unbelievable or they simply do not want to know. I want to stress this as well: It was not only our women and girls who were violated. The menfolk too were raped by having to watch it.

Imagine if you can: A silver haired, old man sits with his hands tied behind his back; the sharp point of a bayonet pointed at his throat. Sneeringly, mockingly he is told to watch carefully, because this sight might re-awaken his long dead desires. They have torn the clothes off his old, frail, terrified wife and mockingly shout to him, to watch as she is being rejuvenated, as they call it. He cannot take any more of this and closes his eyes, when now his daughter is spread-eagled, held down and ravished. They yank his hair and shout at him to watch. This woman is gang -raped into unconsciousness, but even at that point the attackers do not stop. However, when they infamously violate his screaming, 8-year old granddaughter and bring his grandson to watch his sister being ravished, he loses consciousness and sags forward; the bayonet piercing his throat.

This infamous sacrilege went on unchecked for 3 weeks, before the Soviet High Command ordered it to stop. However, I must also tell, there were officers and soldiers, who risked their careers and their lives by helping some of the poor ravished wretches. There were pregnancies; there were abortions, suicides and infant killings.

Nobody cared!

Highly Commended
The Festival
Sarah Bartle
Age UK Lindsey

Last night I went to the Festival. Almost all the tribe from both the northern and southern sectors is camping with us on the plateau above the Willow Grove. They brought with them several deer and much small game. So, after the sacred ceremonies, we roasted fresh meat on the bonfires that we had prepared during the previous days. The smell of cooking carried through the night air and whetted our appetites as we moved around the groups welcoming old friends and admiring their children, whilst offering them drinks from jugs of mead and fermented fruit juices for which we are famous.

Most of them arrived some days ago and have visited the Grove to inspect their willows. I too went today and counted again the cuts on my tree. There were forty. It is a tradition with us that a new mother will go down to the riverside and cut a fine looking willow twig to plant in the Grove. That is slightly up from the wetland but it is still welcoming ground where the cutting will easily take root. So hopes the mother that her daughter will prosper in the tribe. There during the Longest Night Festival she will pare off a small sliver of bark to mark her child's first year of life as will everyone mark their own willow. Everyone will eventually have their tree as part of their funeral pyre.

We all know our own willow. So much tradition and mystery are tied up with the trees, they are sacred and no one would dream of touching them in other than a reverent manner, for they are visible signs of someone's inner being, their spark, and their soul. When at the end of a life a tree is uprooted it is done with care and respect.

I took my daughter with me to the Grove, for before many moons pass she too will be cutting a willow for her daughter. I hope that this, her first will be a girl, because of the sadness of having a boy child taken away. Our Midwife Elder will decide at a boy's birth what happens to him. Only she will know whether he is one to live. Even if he was to be a chosen one he would still be taken away to another part of the tribe to be raised so that his seed in due course would not produce weakened offspring with his near relations. The Holy Scrolls tell how hundreds of years ago they discovered that a stronger tribe would result from a wider range of matings.

Whilst we were looking round the Grove I saw Ailissa's tree. She is my mother and I counted the marks on its trunk. Some are so old they have healed over with thick calluses but they total fifty-five, a great number. I thought last night that she looked so very frail, which is not surprising. She must be worn out with carrying the weight of the Sacred Scrolls for us. I dread the day that I have to uproot her tree and at that moment take on all her responsibilities. But she has trained me for this, just as I am training my own daughter. We have to carry on the family tradition.

But now I have to face the fact that Ailissa is dying. At fifty-five she is a great age for our tribe. She was only fifteen when I, her first born came along, for we mature early here since our span is so short. Yesterday she was very weak, asleep more than awake whilst we sat with her. But she had insisted on being carried on her pallet to the Longest Night gathering where she rested a while by the fire listening to the old songs and the chanting by the Elders. Everyone knew how worn she was and came to bow in front of her according to our traditions. Very few spoke, merely smiling and inclining their heads. Only the Elders touched her thin hands or kissed her forehead. Soon she asked to go back to her hut and I walked by the group that carried her so tenderly. She appeared to be totally exhausted as they put her down, but she lifted a weak hand to me and so I knelt down beside her. She seemed a little stronger but her voice was very low and I had to strain to hear her,

‘Shahna, look after the people – don’t let them wander away, we need every one of them.’ She coughed and my own daughter came and lifted her a little and held her as she tried to speak again,

‘You are a good leader – choose another Elder to take my place and keep on instructing the young. We need to keep the Sacred Scrolls up to date. We must never lose all the Readers. Think about training some extra ones....’

Her voice faltered and she sank back into the pallet.

‘Get some sleep’, I said, ‘it’s been a hard evening for you.’

For a moment there was a sweet smile on her lined face and she said,

‘Hard maybe, but wonderful. Now I am happy.’

I took her hand and for a moment held it to my breast, knowing full well that my mother and I would soon not be together here, but would one day meet in the Great Beyond. I kissed her on her forehead as she squeezed my hand before letting it drop onto the smooth fur rug that covered her. Later she rallied a little and asked to be taken to the shelter in the Sacred Grove. It is only a very simple structure of a frail framework covered by deer skins. We lit rush lights each side of her with a particularly large one at her head while she faced the opening to the east and smiled towards the lightening sky as we made her comfortable.

Then I stepped outside to look up at the top of the hill. There were no trees there and I knew that the long smooth crest was about to be breasted by the rising sun. The sky was already shot with the bright colours of dawn, and the greyness of night was giving way to the tones of a new day. As I stared I saw the first sliver of scarlet touch the ridge and imperceptibly the disk grew bigger, soon so large I could hardly bear to look that way.

Then a plaintive cry reached me from the sky above. I looked up quickly and saw a lone swan make a single circuit of our village before heading east with strongly beating wings. It made height to cross the hills as it headed straight towards the now fully risen sun, a black silhouette that quickly disappeared.

I shivered suddenly and knew that Ailissa was dead, had gone to the Great Beyond. I had been watching her life force depart, carried by the big white swan. It seemed so fitting that it had been this majestic bird being used for someone who in life had been both regal and wise. She had been our senior Elder, our Matriarch, beloved by everyone. I would have a hard job to follow her.

My work had begun at that very moment and would carry on until I too was taken as she was. But first it was time to extinguish all the candles but one – the one behind her head which would remain there until it guttered in the molten fat. Then I called everyone to the village square to announce her death and to order the building of her pyre in the Far Field. This place was specially chosen for our cremations so that there was no danger of contamination to our fields or our water supply.

We did our work well, quietly but with some tears, and at dusk Ailissa was reverently laid there. On her breast we Elders placed all of her willow that we had managed to uproot from the Sacred Grove. Then after reciting some of the sacred texts I lit the pyre. Only the Elders and family members remained to keep vigil and in the morning we collected the few remains and scattered them over the Willow Grove to a chanting of the Final Texts. Ailissa our loved and revered Matriarch had been transported to the Great Beyond. Now I had to take her place.

Commended Entries

**Awestruck
Wendy Niles
Age UK Lincoln & Kesteven**

Look at the state of it, Nellie's voice reached soprano. "It looks fine to me" the young stylist said placing her hands on her hips. "You said you wanted it short" "Short yes but not a blooming crew cut, I'm seventy-eight not eighteen" "Yes but you did say take the lot off" she argued "and besides you did have a lot of dead ends" "Dead ends my foot and if you think I'm going to pay for this you have another thing coming".

Nellie looked at the clock it had taken just twenty-five minutes for the girl to wash cut and blow dry her hair. Not the usual hour or so it took Janice to do a shampoo and set, "You should be paying me young lady to be your guinea pig" she tossed the gown from her shoulders. "But you really did say you wanted to manage it on holiday" the young hair dresser smirked (something she always did when nervous) "Manage it on holiday, I shall have to walk round Llandudno with a head scarf on, lord knows what my old man will say" "Well I think it looks awesome" "Awesome Nellie screeched what type a word is that when it's at home?" Lesley raised her eyebrows "you know it means fabulous, stunning"

"Is there a problem Mrs Goodwin?" Janice the proprietor ushered Nellie to one side seeing one of her oldest customers becoming distressed. "Yes I will say there is, just look at the state of it" she pointed her finger towards her head eyes filling "If you're expecting me to pay for this" her words trailed off. "Look am really sorry but I did hear you say take the lot off. And I think it looks rather nice" "Nice" Nellie screeched "She couldn't even get rollers in, I've said that to you in the past Janice but you've never scalped me" Nellie was really wishing she hadn't bothered, Janice hasn't been able to fit her in when they had decided to take a last minute short break with the over sixties club to Wales she had insisted she needed it doing today, now bitterly regretting it.

"Lesley go take a break" Janice shot her young assistant a hostile look whilst helping Nellie on with her coat apologising profoundly "Look you don't have to pay" Janice said holding her hand in the air "Come for your normal appointment next Saturday and I'll sort you out, believe me that girl's cards are marked". Lesley had really pushed her limits this week she had already received a warning for being late, untidy and cheeky, yes this was the last straw. "Very well" Nellie said fumbling in her handbag for her head scarf "I'll see you next Saturday" she folded it into a triangle placed it on her head tied it underneath her chin, leaving the shop in a huff.

Lesley was casually sipping coffee and smoking a cigarette when Janice flew in the door. "Right you're fired young lady" her boss hissed between gritted teeth "do you want me to lose all my clients and what have I told you about smoking in here" "Ok I'll go" she tapped ash into the sink "but I will have you for unfair dismissal, that silly old bat did say take the lot off it wasn't only you who heard her, Mrs Western did too, anyway it could have been worse I could have given a grade two then she would have had something to moan about. Janice felt herself break out into a sweat, "Get out there Lesley" she commanded Mrs Western wants combing out, and you've a full head colour at two" "Thought I was sacked" Janice sucked her breath resisting the will to slap her "You are but you've got to work your notice."

Nellie sat on the pier at Llandudno eating her egg sandwiches, better half Stan sat alongside stretching his neck out towards the sun. "Ehhh this is grand isn't it love" he patted his wife's leg "sun sea and sand, say aren't you hot with that head scarf on" "I've told you Stan am keeping it on I'll be the laughing stock of the hotel" "Don't be so bloody stupid woman what you going to do tonight when you put on your best frock" "I'm not putting on my best frock I'm having dinner in my room" "What and miss the bingo and the dancing, you stupid woman your hair looks okay" she cast him a disapproving look.

Nellie followed her husband into the dining room head bent, Stan had said her hair looked nice but then again he would say anything for a quiet life, she sat down at the table noticing Lizzy Grey shoot her a funny look, Gwen who was sat next to her did the same nudging her sister in-law Dora in the side they both smiled. She wanted the floor to open and swallow her away. She just finished the last mouthful of sponge when Lizzy Grey passed the table on the way to the Ladies, "Nellie whatever have you done to your hair" Nellie shuffled in her seat "It looks wonderful" she continued "Its knocked ten years off you, we thought you'd got another woman Stan" Stan's chest puffed out "I told her it look's nice" "Nice Stan, just nice, it's gorgeous Dora wants to know where you had it done." "Really" Nellie preened casting a smile to Dora and Gwen which was returned by nods of approval. Nellie had a wonderful couple of days her hair had grown on her so to say, all the compliments thrown her way lifted her spirits she found herself glancing in shop windows, and there was even a spring in Stan's step as he walked alongside his wife. She knew she was going to have to go to the hairdressers and eat humble pie when they got back and really hoped the poor girl hadn't got the sack.

Janice really didn't want to lose Lesley, in spite of a couple of mishaps, she had flair, unlike some of the girls that had come to her straight from college, yes granted she had an attitude issue that needed to be dealt with but knowing the poor girls home life there was any wonder, Janice felt sorry for her and so wanted to give her a chance, she made the clients laugh and flirted with the males who was insisting she cut their hair even if it meant waiting, yes maybe she had been a bit hasty. Likewise Lesley didn't want to leave crowning glory but she knew she had pushed her boss to the limits this time, she had only wanted to make her clients look good, most of the older woman had the same hair styles for decades and didn't want or like change but she believed if your hair looked nice, you felt good, more confident, yes maybe she should learn to discuss it with them first and not go in with a pair of scissors like a farming in a shearing sheep contest, she should convince them a blow dry got the same results as having rollers in, she really needed this job even if it was just to prove to her Mum she wasn't useless, every opportunity her mother had she put her down especially when she'd been on vodka, But Lesley was determined to prove her wrong and make something of her life but she knew she was going to learn to control her temper.

Lesley had got her head down over the last couple of days getting on with her job with a smile hoping by the end of the week Janice would have a change of heart and give her another chance.

"Hello Nellie how was the trip?" Janice took her coat, Lesley looked down sweeping a pile of hair into the dustpan not wanting to make eye contact. "it was a lovely break" Nelly preened whilst fishing in her shopping bag "Here you are I've fetched you both a stick of rock" she gave one to Janice held the other out to Lesley, glances were exchanged "For me" Lesley eyes lit up, "no one's ever brought me a stick of rock before, thank you" Janice looked puzzled. "Look am sorry for flying off the handle last week, it's just it was so dramatic having my hair so short, you know I have had the same style for god knows how long" she gave a half-hearted smile. "Does that mean you like it" Lesley cried "Yes I like it it's awesome she said casting Lesley a wink and I think a few of my pals will be making appointments with you" Lesley cast her boss a hopeful look "Does that mean am staying" Janice laughed "Yes I think maybe I'll give you a second chance, What do you think Mrs Goodwin? Shall I give her a second chance?" "Yes why not" Nellie smiled, somehow I think this girl will go far"

A walk in the woods
Stephanie Lamont
Age UK Boston & South Holland

Two sudden, white flashes appear in the corner of my eye. I know, at this moment, I am not alone as I meander through my beloved wood, known locally as Music Wood. Today is a crisp, frostbitten day, hardly a sound can be heard, except for the wind as it travels in front of the North on a twisting, winding path through the tall, majestic trees, making the sound of a haunting melody as it does so.

There is again, that brief flash of light I have experienced so many times before on my walks in the wood. I continue toward the top of the hill, stopping only occasionally to rest my tired, aching feet. My devoted pilgrimage, to the very top of the hill, promotes a deep sense of calm and wellbeing as I make my way to the Celtic burial mound just ahead of me. Tired and cold from the long walk, I stop and catch my breath before I take the last few footsteps to the mound. At last, I am at the resting place of the spirits who accompany me on, my many walks through the wood. I look around the mound, all about me are flashes of white, pure energy, dancing and darting about, excited to have their friend here to visit. At this ancient, sacred spot I can relax. I take in my surroundings. The splendour of the scenery is breath-taking. Time stands still here, no cobweb of enticement and entrapment of modern day frivolity dwells here. The air is clean and pure. I take in deep breaths of air and concentrate all my thoughts towards the Celtic souls that inhabit this wild yet serene terrain. I pause for a second and listen. In the distance I can hear a voice, it seems to be calling my name. I look around but see no-one. Through the trees I espy a glimpse of someone, making their way up the hill toward the mound. I watch, fascinated to know who it is. The voice is becoming much quieter now and as I watch the person approach me, who I can now identify as a young woman, she suddenly fades away before my eyes, until all I see is a flash of brilliant, white light. I tremble, not with fear but with excitement. This is the first time one of the spirits here has made themselves known to me. I feel privileged to have gained her trust, to be shown her true self. Perhaps if I talk to the young woman she will appear to me again. I talk, but in vain because she does not return. I feel a deep sense of loss, a longing need to see her again, if only for a second or two. Why did she want me to see her, only to then dematerialise?

I have no knowledge of what time of day it is now. I feel I have only been in the wood for minutes, when in reality I have probably been here for hours. I look up at the sky, yes I most surely have been here for much longer than I intended. The sky is beginning to darken slightly as day gives way to dusk. Could I really have been here all day? I know I get mesmerised by the energy here at the mound and it's true I could easily have lost an hour or two, but all day melting into what feels like minutes. This is too strange even for me to comprehend.

I turn to make my way back down the hill, back to my cottage. Where has all the white energy gone? I can no longer see the bright flashes of light around me. Amongst the trees it is becoming darker. I never stay in the wood this late in the evening by myself. I am suddenly, inexplicably frightened, I begin to panic. My husband will surely be home now from work and he will be wondering where I am. I have explored this wood a thousand times before and yet, as night time approaches, I am beginning to lose my senses. I can't remember which way to go through the trees toward my home. I stumble over a tree root and fall, why have I stayed in the wood so long today? I compose myself, stand up, brush the dirt from my knees and proceed on my journey home. I am beginning to tire, I hope I am on the right path, homeward bound to my husband and warm, inviting cottage. I must surely look untidy now, my hair feels dishevelled and my knees are dirty. What will my husband make of my day when I tell him.

I can see the moon through the trees, a full moon. The light will help me on my way. I can see a little clearer now where I tread, I walk more slowly, for fear of stumbling again. I stop briefly to try and pinpoint the direction home but to no avail, so I carry on, recklessly it seems. In the distance an owl hoots and I hear a laugh, I hope this is a sign that I am nearing civilization once more. I seem to have been walking for hours now, how I long to be home in the warm with my husband. I summon up all my strength and continue onward, forever hoping and praying the end of this nightmare is in sight.

Could that be a light I see in the distance? My pace quickens, I am sure I have just seen a light. As I get nearer I think I know approximately where I am. I recognise this house in front of me, I have walked this way before. This is not the usual way home I take. In my confusion I must have walked down the hill the other side and I now realise I am about two miles from my cottage. At least I am back in civilization once more. I could knock on someone's door and ask for help but I've come this far and I haven't got much further to go. I pass the church and glance toward the clock, it's 10pm, I have been out for twelve hours. I must hurry home. My husband will be worried sick not knowing where I am. Just ahead I can see my cottage. How lovely and inviting it seems. How I long to be there, inside in the warm, sitting in my armchair with my husband sitting opposite me. Home at last, I take a deep breath, unlock the door and go inside. I expect to see my husband pacing up and down waiting for me or telephoning family and friends to enquire if they have seen me today. But no, it is exceptionally quiet. Where is he? I go upstairs to see if he is there and as I enter our bedroom I see him why he isn't looking for me, but I let him sleep and I go back downstairs.

I can hear someone moving around in my kitchen, surely there isn't an intruder. I edge closer to the closed kitchen door. I can see the light is on, through the gap at the bottom of the door and I can hear a female voice humming a haunting melody. It must be my darling daughter, my husband must have telephoned her to see if I was there and now, she has come over here to wait for me to return home. Even though my husband is annoyingly oblivious to my presence, my daughter will be thrilled to see I have returned safely.

I push down the door handle, open the door, step inside and gasp with disbelief. There looking back at me is myself. Unable to comprehend what is happening, I stumble back through the door into my living room. On the wall next to me is a mirror, I glance at the mirror and it isn't me looking back at myself, it is the young woman I saw today at the Celtic mound. I am struggling to understand what is happening. A million thoughts are racing around inside my head. The person in the kitchen approaches me, and whispers words in my ear, "Go home".

Suddenly there are bright flashes of intense light racing around my living room, whizzing and darting all around me. I have a weird sensation coming over me. I feel light-headed and sick, I feel weightless. I can see my body slowly fading away and being replaced by an intense white light.

I can hear my husband calling for me to go to bed, I try to answer him but I am unable to. The woman in my house replies back to him and I hear her say, "I'm coming darling". She turns, looks at me, and smiles, then she goes upstairs. I feel myself being pulled by the white lights, out of my house and back to the top of the hill, back to the Celtic burial mound. In just a few, short minutes I am back at the mound. Am I destined to spend eternity here? Are they my friends or my captors? Only time will tell.

First Love
Brian Skinner
Age UK Boston & South Holland

Sam, my next door neighbour, asked me one morning who my first love was. I stopped to think about that but could not come up with an answer. Who? I tried to remember if I was ever enamoured with a young lady at any time but if I had been I had forgotten who it was – in fact I don't think there ever was a young lady that I had a crush on. "I don't think I ever had a first love Sam, what about you?" He began to regale me with stories about his first girlfriend, I had to listen very carefully as Sam is deaf and sometimes his pronunciation of certain words is not quite as they should be and as I am blind, lip reading or even sign language was out of the question. We continued our chat for a while then he asked me what I was doing the next day and if I would like a trip out to the coast and I readily agreed.

It was nice of Sam, you know, to take me to the coast but friends do things like that for one another and Sam was a good friend. I was sorry he was one of those drivers who never speak until they have parked up, but as he is deaf it does limit conversation when driving especially when his only passenger is blind. Despite that I wasn't lonely. I like to have a window open, not much you understand, but enough so that I can hear what is going on outside the confines of the car. Same, he doesn't mind at all, as long as it's not too draughty.

The traffic is really busy in town what with all the different types of engine. Mind you some are quiet and I can imagine that type of car being driven by elderly, sorry, more mature people. The ones that rev up all the time or the motor bikes that road pas us, well they are the youngsters of the world always rushing from place to place doing what they now consider to be important things, that probably, in a few years' time, will have little or no meaning for them. Then there are the other noisy cars, the ones with dodgy engines and faulty exhausts. Apart from the very distinctive sounds they make there is also the pungent aroma of carbon dioxide fumes, or is it monoxide? I can never remember.

We were stationary for a while at a crossing. I know that because I could hear the bleeping sound that is made when the lights are on go for pedestrians. Very handy that sound especially when you are blind. I could also hear the sounds of people walking too. Some were shufflers, some were confident striders and at least one had metal studs on the soles. They sounded like brother used to sound when he was a soldier. We passed a coal lorry. You can always tell coal. It has very distinctive smell, sort of soft and dusty, unlike petrol which smells sharp and clean.

Slowly we passed out of town and ventured into the countryside, although maybe countryside is the wrong word to use when you are speeding along a main road or a motorway that is full of other vehicles all rushing to get past you. We got stuck in the inevitable traffic jam and came to a halt. The fumes were really bad and I had to shut the window until we were on the move again. This may sound strange to you but I often wonder what a traffic jam looks like. Sam doesn't like too much traffic, thank goodness. He told me once that he never felt in control when everyone else was flying about, so I wasn't surprised at all then we turned off and went by, what he called, "the back roads". We were going a lot slower now but I could hear the mournful sound of cows and the sharp complaining voices of sheep. I thought I heard a chicken too but it was rather distant so I could have been mistaken. We followed tractor towing a trailer full of manure. No chance of me being wrong there. I didn't close the window this time though. It's a proper countryside smell is manure. We waited at a level crossing until a small train went roaring through, hooter blowing. They're all diesel engines now of course and they don't sound very interesting at all. When I was a child they were all steam engines with high-pitched whistles and even though I never saw one I could feel the power by the sounds they made.

The journey via the back roads was very interesting. I could feel the sun hot on my skin as it shone down through the windscreen. Sam must have felt it too because I could hear him opening the sun roof. It didn't make that much difference really as the draught was angled towards the rear seats but the rushing sound of the air seemed to make it cooler. He had also opened the window on his side and every time a vehicle came the other way there was a "whoosh" sound as it passed us. I knew we were approaching the sea long before Sam. The bird song changed for one thing and I could smell the salty tang of the sea on the breeze. When we had parked up Sam helped me out of the car and linking arms we strolled down to the beach. The tide was in and the waves crashed on the shore. The water ran up the beach laughing as it did so, and then seemed to hiss in annoyance as it was pulled back again and I was reminded of my childhood and stopped to listen. My parents used to bring me to the seaside at every opportunity when I was young. They took me paddling but most exciting of all were the boat trips we had. I never ever saw the sea but then, I didn't have to, I could feel its power and hear its sound and my imagination used to draw a picture although how accurate that picture was I have no way of knowing.

Sam jogged me out of my daydream and back to the sounds of the waves when he said; "Tell me what the sea sounds like Tony", but how do you describe the sound to a deaf man? "You tell me what the colour of the wind is first", I replied jokingly. He laughed and I added; "I remember my first love Sam", "Oh good, what was her name?". "It wasn't a "her" Sam, it was the sea and I have to say that it still is". We both laughed and continued our stroll along the promenade, Sam happy at having his sight and me happy at having my hearing and being able to hear my "first love".

First Love
Alec Carrotte
Age UK Lincoln & Kesteven

I've always been a loner
Treading a lonely path
Trusting no one with my sadness
Covering all with a carefree laugh,
No one has ever been allowed to watch
My cheeks of running tears

No one that is, till you my love
You came to me like spring
To drive away my morbid thoughts
To make me laugh and sing,
My love for you my darling
Grows deeper by the day
I love the thoughtful things you do
And the loving things you say

To me they mean so much my love
To me they mean so much
For you are something special, love
For me to love and touch,
You fill my heart with happiness
So much it beats in pain
I long to hear you speak your love
Over, and over again

And as we start our journey
Please take my outstretched hand
And if you hold it tightly
We will both understand.

First Love
Carol Meeds
Age UK Boston & South Holland

He was my first love from when I was very young
His face would show such warmth and pride
Like a new spring had sprung

Just one look of tenderness
One word of sheer delight
A hug, a kiss, a simple smile
Could really make my night

He knew how to make my day
My thoughts my feelings inside
When he held my hand and murmured words
They filled me full of pride

I can remember every wrinkle, every crease
Those twinkling eyes
Every touch, remark and compliment
Just filled my heart with sighs

He was my constant, through all my life
And I am so, so glad
This first love that I speak about
Was my special dear old Dad

First Love
Alan Boner
Age UK Boston & South Holland

Whilst I was working picking spuds
Just beside some great big woods
I thought before I go home today
Into the woods I just might stray
Eventually to the woods I walk with glee
Just a wondering what I would see
Rabbits, squirrels, pheasants at every turn
A little fawn peeping behind a fern
A giant oak with a fairy door
Acorn shells crunching on the floor
Linnets, finches singing their tunes
With such nature I was over the moon
Flora and fauna all about
So quiet, so peaceful, no need to shout
The time in there went really quick
Then suddenly I heard the crack of a stick
What it was I did not know
But I thought it was time to go
And this is my little tale of the wood
Which I think is rather good!

Formal Dress Required
Maureen Amos
Age UK Boston & South Holland

No more work, No more woes
No more uniform but what about clothes
I did not realise that when retired
There is a sort of Formal Dress Required.
Do I really have to go all beige?
Or can I just wear all the rage

I look around for a few clues
Furtive looks at others shoes
And what's this about Matching Coats
Do they feel safe in numbers?
Nanny's got one and Grandad has too
Just the colour of Porridge Oats

Is it the shops or is it us?
As we think of our next holiday on the bus
No packing of kaftans and 'kinis we like
No, my pile looks like we're going by bike
A bobble hat from one shop
Thick jumpers from another
Requisite black slacks from M & S
Oh I'll fit in all formal
But be a hot perspiring mess

Once in a while I cast off this gear
And leave it all at home
High heels, tight sparkly dress, I dance all night,
Wear what you like at the Gliderdrome!

A Walk in the Woods
John Malvert
Age UK Lincoln & Kesteven

Tall trees stand pale and stark,
 Against the dark grey,
Chill and wet, November day.
 The closeness of the trees
 Within the wood itself,
Helps keep the drizzling rain at bay
 As wraiths of mist, twist and curl
Like drifting smoke- while an unseen owl
 Hoots hauntingly,
A drawn out echo- from an ancient oak.

 Stood alert with both ears crocked,
 The old dog pauses to stare,
 But then- sensing nothing amiss,
She continues along her thoroughfare.
 Sometimes she glances back at me
 To check that I'm still here,
 And I softly call to her
 To allay her growing fear.

 Later along, the woodland track,
 The winter sun throws out a ray,
 That filters through the clouds,
And brightens up remaining day,
 I stroll slowly through the wood
 Immersed in thought,
 Oblivious of the passing time,
While the dog continues to saunter on,
 Tho' by now, well past her prime.

My woodland walk was a sudden impulse,
A random thought- a passing 'whim' maybe,
 I'd walk the dog and exercise us both,
We hadn't walked for quite some time you see.

 The day is almost over,
 The night is drawing in,
And as the woodland echoes to our passing,
 I feel contentment deep within!

First Love
Kenneth Batty
Age UK Lindsey

At 4.30am the alarm did ring
I open my eyes but what will today bring
Now I'm up I have my first fat
Pick up my snap tin and have my last drag

Onto my bike and down that pit lane
The cold wind does blow and it's started to rain
I get both my tallies and it's now .30
Change into my work clothes but they are a bit dirty

At the front of the baths I have my last fag
Then over to the lamp room as I have my last drag
With cap on it's into the cage
Now someone has passed wind and it's started a rage

Down into that deep hole we go very fast
On go the brakes we're down there at last
On to the paddy and go for a ride
Down to the coal face and no place to hide

Into the stable and I start to drill
The face chain 'as started and the coal has started to spill
The shot holes are primed and we hear a big bang
It's time for shovels for all the gang

As the stable is ready for that big machine
And there's that much coal dust we cannot be seen
It's now 12.30pm and time to go home
So It's off to the paddy we all start to roam

We run to the paddy to the sound of pit boots
Back to the pit bottom and back to my roots
The first thing I do is go for a fag
Now into the shower as I have my last drag

It's onto my bike and up that pit lane
Oh no it's just started to rain
As I get to my home my eyes start to roll
Because in front of my home was a tonne of home coal

I sit down at the table and eat up my dinner
Look out of the window at the coal
But there is only one winner
With shovel in hand and a pain in my head
When I've got this coal in I will be ready for bed!

Carole Morris
A Walk in the Woods
Age UK Lindsey

Breezes drift, sighing, teasing
Rustling through the leaves
Along the path the sunlight flickers
Trees just gently breathe

Slowly first, then much quicker
Clouds build from the west
Wind is pushing through the woodland
Branches then protest

Rain rips through the tree tops
Tearing at the leaves
Branches bend and start to moan
Trees struggling to breathe

The storm is quickly over
Sunlight flickers once again
Rain has soaked the woodland paths
Trees are then refreshed

First Love
Sylvia Hickman
Age UK Boston & South Holland

Jimmy who lived next door
He was three and I was four
His Mother called him James
I called him Jimmy or Jim
We played marbles to win
I was a tom-boy who owned a red crane
Which had a large handle to turn
Jimmy had a three-wheeler bike
We took turns to ride in the yard
Cowboys and Indians we played in the garden
Hide and seek in a creepy old barn
When the weather was bad
I sat indoors watching the rain
Until sunshine appeared
Then I'd knock on his door
"Can Jimmy come out to play?"
But on this day there was no answer
I knocked even harder
Shouted through the letterbox
"Can Jimmy come out to play?"
Jimmy had moved away