

52

for

25

a poem a week throughout the year

Lindsay Camp

Back in 2011, I set myself the challenge of writing a poem a week throughout the year.

The idea behind the project was to test the theory that by giving myself a deadline, and making it an absolute priority, I might be able to silence the hyper-critical voice inside my head telling me that what I wrote wasn't good enough, so I might as well not bother.

It worked.

I wrote 52 short poems, and massively enjoyed the feeling of unfettered creativity that my self-imposed weekly deadline provided. Instead of constantly worrying about whether my work was any good, I focused all my energy on getting something vaguely resembling a poem knocked into shape by Friday.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the poems produced in this way weren't bad, either. In fact, to my eye, the better ones were as good as any of the poems I'd written previously, by the conventional waiting-for-months-on-end-for-inspiration-to-strike method.

So I did it again in 2012, with similarly pleasing results.

And then, for some reason, I stopped. I continued to write the very occasional poem, at those rare inspired moments, but from the beginning of 2013 my weekly deadline went unmet.... until I decided to pick up the poem-a-week project at the start of 2025.

The 52 poems I wrote last year follow.

To be honest - and to risk losing you before you've started - I don't think that, individually, my 2025 poems are quite as good as the 2011 or 2022 crops. (Maybe I peaked as a poet in my mid-50s.) But there are some I think you might enjoy - though I've no idea which. Other people's poetic preferences are impossible to predict. And I hope you might also find that, collectively - as an unfolding record of one writer's poetic response to a year of diverse challenges - the poems add up to a bit more than the sum of their parts.

Though I should, of course, let you be the judge of that . . .

Friday 3 January

2025

For the first time we can say without fear of contradiction the year just beginning sounds like science fiction.

Friday 10 January

Recycling with you

Having accumulated an absurd amount of cardboard over Christmas, we stuff the car with it and drive out to the refuse and recycling centre. Unloading beside you there, at the edge of the city, where riotous gulls wheel and swoop across a washed January sky, I'm suddenly aware of my astounding fortune in being the only man on earth whose life includes an occasional [visit to the tip](#) with you.

Friday 17 January

Supererogatory

These days I rarely look up words; I know enough (though that may sound a little snooty). So stopping to check this one out today was *going further than required by law, or duty*.

Friday 24 January

Light lunch

Struggling, like an upturned beetle,
to regain my feet the other day,
it struck me what a lottery it is
the bodies that we get when we arrive.

True, we take good care of them (or don't)
feed them organically (or don't)
do our 10,000 steps a day (or don't)
but mostly it's genetics, a destiny
encoded long before we're born that
working out three times a week (or not)
will never change.

Mine did quite well for almost 60 years,
transported more important parts of me from A to B,
allowed me some small sporting triumphs,
helped get me girlfriends,
didn't hurt too much,
and then, KABOOM....

- heart (same age as both uncles)
- prostate (same age as my father)
- brain (encrypted specially for me),

and now who knows which part of my
inheritance is next to strike me down....

(continued)

Ah well, I'd better leave it there;
I've just time for a session at the gym,
before a light and carb-free lunch.

Friday 31 January

My Desert Island Discs

The saddest thing about my Desert Island Discs, by far -

[***Strawberry Fields***](#), of course (or, hang on, maybe [***Penny Lane***](#)),
in any case, the best three minutes of the best decade;

[***Meet on the Ledge***](#), for Sandy's voice, which seared
my soul the first time that I heard it played;

Next, [***Supper's Ready***](#) - not far off half-an-hour long;

[***Don't Take Me Alive***](#) - the perfect band's most perfect song;

[***Too Sick to Pray***](#), by Alabama 3, a pure delight;

[***Bon Jovi's biggest banger***](#) – to bring back that night
we danced as if our hearts would flip their lid
(just, as it happens, weeks before mine did);

[***Weather With You***](#), for how it brought the sun
out from behind black clouds at Glastonbury;

And last, [***Dear Lord and Father of Mankind***](#), sung
by the chorister who once lived in this broken body

- is knowing, now, no one will ever ask me what they are.

Friday 7 February

***He thinks pessimistically on his birthday
about whether he still has time to
achieve anything worthwhile in life***

68?

Too late!

Friday 14 February

Another thing that makes me sad these days

Seeing people whose old dogs I've known -
slow, arthritic-hipped, cataract-clouded,
confused, sometimes riding in pushchairs -
out walking a brash replacement puppy.

Friday 21 February

H-G-L

For my grandchildren

Of all the things I wish I'd been
but never will be now this is
the one that I'd most dearly love
to find in you: be glass-half-full
see the upside expect the best
assume that people wish you well
worry only if it might help make things better
live happy-go-lucky

Friday 28 February

***He tries his hardest to write a poem that isn't
about Death***

But when he's done, laying down his pen,
he can't help noticing how papery and thin
his hand's become, and how it tremors, and
the way the knuckles almost break the skin.

[If you liked this](#) . . .

Friday 7 March

Another poem about recycling

Riffling idly through next door's recycling
I'm pleased to see they drink much more than us:
eight bottles, loads of cans, in just a week.
Perhaps they had friends round, you say. Or
went away and missed the last collection.
Maybe. But if they did, I think I'd know.
It's not just their recycling I keep a close eye on.
I'm pretty sure they drink much more than us.

Friday 14 March

Walking past restaurants

Walking past brightly lit restaurants, I'm always struck by how worried people look when they're studying the menu.

Friday 21 March

The Decent Americans

I've always said, since this all started, that the Decent Americans will, at some point, draw a line and say enough.

Oh yes - I said - there are deplorables, and plenty of them. And yes, I can - just - see how his gargoyle glamour might enthrall the ignorant, the poor, the overlooked. But the Decent Americans - the ones who live in nice houses, hold degrees, take their children to church, make monthly donations, drive EVs - eventually, they'll have to draw a line and say enough.

If, say - I said - he brags about committing sexual crimes, and then's found liable in court, the Decent Americans will, surely, draw a line and say enough.

If, say - I said - for years on end, he shows us nothing but the worst and most destructive human capabilities - pride, wilful ignorance, contempt, mendacity, cruel vengefulness, a howling void where kindness and compassion

(continued)

ought to be - the Decent Americans will,
however long it takes, one day,
draw a line and say enough.

If, say - I said - he promises to purloin a land, and
disappear its people, to build Las Vegas by the sea,
the Decent Americans will, at last, be forced to
draw a line and say enough.

If, say - I said - he calls a bloody tyrant
friend, and names a friend dictator, and tries
to pin the tyrant's murders on the friend,
then - how could it be otherwise? -
the Decent Americans will have to
draw a line and say enough . . .

Stop press: March 2025

Price of a dozen eggs in US supermarkets hits \$5

If, say - I said - they continue to feel poorer, then,
who knows, perhaps the Decent Americans just might
draw a line and say enough.

Friday 28 March

Party's over

For Kim Leadbeater

I don't remember receiving an invitation,
and if I did, I'm sure I didn't accept,
but here I am, at this party, and
whatever enjoyment I was going to get's
long over now; the music's too loud
and not to my taste, there are way too many
people, shouting to make themselves heard,
the food's all gone, my back is starting
to be seriously painful, and very soon now
I'll be ready to leave.

Please, I beg of you, don't make me stay.

Friday 4 April

Embracing change?

It isn't easy for a bloke my age:
we grew up when men didn't give an inch.
But these days every time we meet someone
we half-expect to go in for a clinch.

The problem is we never know for sure:
does this guy really want to clasp me tight?
Perhaps he feels much the same as me,
in which case, would a hand-shake be all right?

And if we have to do it, how's it done:
arms flung out wide, full contact head to feet?
Or that brisk shoulder-bump-and-pat you see
when effortlessly cool young people meet.

Of course, I know I really should embrace it:
but every single time, I think, oh bugger,
I wish I wasn't living in an age
when everybody has to be [a hugger](#).

Friday 11 April

Was this the life?

Was this the life we dreamed together when we first met?
Was this old dog, who chases squirrels only in his sleep,
the one that we imagined walking?
Were these the children, nearing middle age, whose names
we chose on our third date?
Do these four walls enclose the space in which we planned
to spend our shining days?
Were these the bodies we expected to inhabit when time
had done its worst, or very nearly?
Was this - the life we've lived - our *why?* and our *because?*

I think it was, my love, I think it was.

Friday 18 April

A life in review

I quite enjoyed it, right up to the final chapter. I found the characters believable, not specially interesting, but largely sympathetic; some of the dialogue made me laugh; and the plot, while lacking major incident - boy and girl fall in love, work, buy property, have children, encounter various not very dramatic ups and downs, grow old - was universal enough, I suppose, to hold my interest. But that ending - with all the desolation, overpowering sense of futility, and agonised screaming - just didn't work at all for me.

Friday 25 April

Pantaloön

In the time it takes to heave and lever
myself upright from seated
afternoon
turns into evening
late middle age
to lean and slippered [pantaloön](#).

Friday 2 May

Peace and quiet

This sloping garden, which segues
softly into its surrounding valley,
where children played just yesterday,
is ours alone to enjoy now.

Nothing but the distant scream
of stratospheric buzzards and,
nearer by, the hum of bees, disturbs
our longed-for peace and quiet.

Oh if I could only turn back time.

Friday 9 May

Flutter

When we first met, I still recall how much
I liked your stutter.
It meant I sometimes had to wait a while
before you'd utter,
but we had time to burn back then, and so
it didn't matter.

These days your stutter's better;
that's to say, a little lighter,
just a lilt that follows on
from an initial letter,
not a fetter,
patter promptly follows pitter
ditto chatter after chitter.

But the way that you say
litter
sitter
batter
butter
still makes my heart flutter.

Friday 16 May

My friend Veronica-Mae

My friend Veronica-Mae
likes poems that are jocund and gay,
the kind that always rhyme
not just some of the time.
She likes language that is musical
and rhythms that are metrical
(she wouldn't like that near-rhyme,
which she'd see as a clear crime).
But what she most hates
and roundly berates
is too much doom
and gloom
and "poetry
as therapy".
She likes poems that uplift,
and leave her smiling, like a gift.

(I'd share my poems with Veronica-Mae
but I'm too well aware of what she'd say.)

Friday 23 May

Oh lucky man

Oh what a lucky life it's been,
oh what a lucky life
three children, a dozen cats or so,
one dog, a loving wife.

Oh what a lucky life I've led,
oh lucky, lucky me,
never gone hungry, never been stabbed,
never been forced to flee.

Oh what a lucky life I had,
I totally can't complain
that late in the day, my luck's run out:
heart disease, cancer, brain.

Friday 30 May

;

[I read today](#) its on its way out
apparently people just dont use it
any more perhaps because they
dont know how or maybe they
just cant see the point and feel
that like the apostrophe and most
other punctuation actually they can
live perfectly well without it; a pity
for those smug types who do know
where it ought to go

Friday 6 June

***Trying to write a poem about Gaza
without making it about me, my sadness,
my powerlessness, my rage***

No. Sorry. Nothing.

Friday 13 June

Lunch out

On Sunday we're invited out to lunch.
Just us, our hosts, another couple we don't know.
Driving home, we dissect these newly-mets:

Her I rather liked, him not so much
She must be 10 years younger maybe more
I'm pretty sure that he was Brexity
No kids, I wonder why

So much more tantalising, though, to wonder thus:
what are they, at this same moment, saying about us?

Friday 20 June

We are old now, and live in the city

Most nights, you tell me, you dream the same dream:
we are young, and live in a house by a stream
that runs down to a lake (or perhaps just a pond)
with otters, and moorhens, and fields beyond,
and outside our door there's a long sloping lawn
where our children play, and our chickens run
and oh, look . . .
here we come
walking hand in hand
across your dream grass
or, no, perhaps you have our baby on your hip
and my arm's around your shoulders
but in any case, look -
oh, just look at us
stepping into a fearless future
bathed in a shimmering golden haze
of possibility

Friday 27 June

Illogical

You're Spock, I'm Kirk;
and yet, though it's illogical,
it's magical:
it seems to work.

Friday 4 July

Creatures

Just once in a very infrequent while
you catch a glimpse, don't you, of
the creatureliness of the person
sitting next to you watching TV; the fact
that they are just another living breathing
animal that could perfectly well
at this moment be roaming a different
quarter of the planet in search of food
and shelter.

Friday 11 July

18 things I'll never do now

take any unnecessary risks

be this week's guest on [Desert Island Discs](#)

save anybody's life

steal anybody's wife

own an Aga

write a sweeping multi-generational family saga

meet Sir David Attenborough or Dame Judi Dench

speak faultless idiomatic French

open the bowling for England at Lords

win a Booker, a BAFTA - or any other awards

commit the perfect crime

serve time

invent a handy labour-saving device

be known - like, say Tom Hanks - for being nice

live fast, and die young (or even youngish)

find anything, except itself, that rhymes with youngish.

Friday 18 July

Places where I still feel (relatively) young

at that pub we like with no wifi connection
on drowsy bowling greens, in parks
in Marks and Spencer's menswear section
at gigs by Steely Dan, the Rolling Stones, or Sparks
on buses in the school day, with no kids aboard
on windswept beaches, in inclement weather
in papal conclaves, or the House of Lords
wherever Nordic walkers walk together.

Friday 25 July

***A statement from the IDF, in response to
some vile antisemitic chanting at Glastonbury***

Death, death to the children of Gaza,
death to their mums and dads;
death to the doctors and nurses, too,
but, most of all, death to the kids.

Friday 1 August

***Signing the petition to make Sir David
Attenborough's 100th birthday a UK-wide
Bank Holiday***

For once, an action we can take without equivocation;
a day off work in tribute to a treasure of our nation.

Friday 8 August

***On seeing an astoundingly attractive woman
walking by on the other side of the road***

My god, she's gorgeous;
I'd give anything to go to bed with her.
Hang on,
I can, and almost every night I do;
she's you.

Friday 15 August

Why characters in soaps never watch soaps

You never hear a character on *Corrie*
refer to anything in *Hollyoaks*,
or Emma Grundy asking Ed or Clarrie
if they've been watching those bald East End blokes.
And Emmerdale? It doesn't rate a mention
in Ambridge, Weatherfield, or Albert Square,
it seems to me a rather odd convention
that the TV's never on when you live there.
On second thoughts, perhaps I see the trouble:
might mixing soap with soap not burst their bubble?

Friday 22 August

Haven't we been here before?

Soon after they arrive - or perhaps even
on the journey out - it starts to press in
on him how much a holiday is like
a life, compressed into a week or two;
the hopeful beginnings, when plans are made
and almost anything seems possible;
the long middle part, when those plans do
or more often don't come to fruition;
and then the end cartwheeling at
terrifying speed towards you.

Friday 29 August

Smoked mackerel

Today I wanted to buy [smoked mackerel](#)
but when I went to the supermarket
there was no smoked mackerel
and I thought what if I come back tomorrow
and there is still no smoked mackerel
or if there is never any smoked mackerel again?

Then where would we be

Friday 5 September

Building plans, then and now

Back then, when we went to beautiful places, we used to say, *one day we'll come back and build a house here* - knowing we probably wouldn't.

These days, when we go to beautiful places, we still say, *one day we'll come back and build a house here* - knowing we never will.

Friday 12 September

The Can't-Make-Enough-Dopamine Blues

Woke up this morning, had those just-can't-make-enough-dopamine blues,

Woke up this morning, still got those can't-make-enough-dopamine blues,

My hand it won't stop quaking,

My heart it won't stop breaking,

'Cause I just can't shake off these Insufficient-Dopamine Blues.

Friday 19 September

In the biblical sense

Listening to you talk in meetings I know,
momentarily, what it would be like
not to know you, and how very much, if
I didn't, I would want to get to know you.

Friday 26 September

Forever house

We thought we might have found our forever house;
the one where, if we were lucky,
we'd live to be our oldest and our best;
the place where we would, finally, grow wise
raise our last hurrah
sing our swan-song
make our long home.

But sadly, someone made a higher offer.

Friday 3 October

How was it for you?

Afterwards,
I always want to
say to you
imperishable things
put into words the conversation
our bodies have just had
find nouns verbs adjectives
that explain what, with every year,
becomes more inexplicable.

Invariably, I fail.

Friday 10 October

Race to the finish

14 human years ago, nearly a century in yours,
I wrote a poem imagining your death;
to be more accurate, I wondered which of us
would come across the other's lifeless corpse.

I wrote in jest, of course.
What! I was a young man still,
or barely past the prime of life.
But now the race is on.

My heart's not what it was;
my cancer could come back;
this tremor could well shake
the living daylights out of me.

But that persistent cough of yours,
that wheezing rattle in your chest,
the way you can't be bothered any more
to chase your ball....

.... well, let's just say
it isn't over till it's over.

Friday 17 October

***Inappropriately dressed for
autumn's first chill***

Out in town
looking around
I can't help but note
I'm the only bloke
who sports
shorts

Friday 24 October

Insert new poem here

(This week, I wrote a poem so incendiary, so revelatory, so highly charged, I thought you might be overwhelmed by it; I feared for your emotional wellbeing, really I did. Also, I felt some concern that my poem's formal brilliance and dazzling word-play might be a source of discouragement to my fellow-poets. Or maybe it just wasn't very good. But, in any case, I decided it would probably be wiser to delete it and leave this page free for a less potentially dangerous poem. Or a better one.)

Friday 31 October

Brake failure

Of course any time anything happens
could always turn out to be the last time
(that runaway bus with faulty brakes
is forever careering through our lives
threatening to mount the pavement)
but when we know for a certainty
that something will never ever
happen again how is it possible
to bear it?

Friday 7 November

Earthquake warning

On the Richter scale of my affliction
a five is edging up towards a six,
which makes me confident in my prediction,
this tremor will do damage none can fix.

Friday 14 November

Another poem about listening to The Archers

We always do;
dividing the characters into those
who are Doing a Voice (we're looking at you
Ruth, Pip, Jolene, the vicar, Harrison)
and those who we believe in (Emma,
Tracey, Brian, Eddy, even Jazzer);
we laugh at the conventions; the way that
no one ever watches television,
and everyone walks in, and says, "the door
was open, so I didn't knock"; we rage
at the implausibilities; the scenes
where someone fails to say or do
what anyone, in fact, would say or do
or flies into a homicidal rage,
when in reality they might be slightly cross.
And yet we rarely miss an episode;
though if we do, there's always
[the Sunday omnibus](#).

Friday 21 November

Solo solver

On Saturday mornings, we stay in bed and do [the crossword](#). We hardly ever miss one so through long years of practice we've become highly skilled, familiar with the codes, knowing which words betoken anagrams, alert to the fact that *flower* and *banker* both often mean a river.

Today, though, you're having your hair done early so I'll have to find the answers by myself.

Friday 28 November

WFH: although

When you're Zooming with some lawyer in LA
and I bring you a cup of tea
being careful to stay out of shot
and you reach out and take it
without meeting my eye or even looking up
as if I were a clever household robot
I know what it would be like not to be
loved by you
(although I know of course I am)

Friday 5 December

Lost dog

Last night we lost the dog;
one minute he was there,
the next - pouff! - disappeared,
as if the dog-shaped hole
in space he left behind
had never been inhabited.

We looked for him, but not for long;
we thought he might be happier
living out his life wild and free
with his cousins, [Bristol's famous
foxes.](#)*

**Not true, obviously; we found him after about
20 minutes' panic-stricken search.*

Friday 12 December

Meme

This year, your birthday
isn't just your birthday
but also - it seems - a
meme

Will someone [please explain](#) to
me why all the kids are laughing

Friday 19 December

Talking to machines

Today I told the toaster I was feeling low.
Later, in the car, the engine management system offered me some useful insights into why my wife feels undervalued by me. And just now the vacuum cleaner was very complimentary about some aspects of my personality.

Friday 26 December

Upstairs

Oh how I wish
our children were
still here with us
not grown and gone
but sleeping in
their rooms upstairs

Wednesday 31 December (bonus poem)

End of year: Gratitude Audit

- arrival of a new grandchild (at last, a girl)
- still tolerated by the best wife in the world
- the fact that I am bowed but not yet beaten
- the many restaurant lunches that I've eaten
- the books I've read (particularly [*Persuasion*](#))
- and so much that we've watched on television
- some signs [*free Palestine's*](#) a little nearer
(the justice of the cause was never clearer)
- cricket; craft ales; and kindness of old friends
- and music of (excepting jazz) all kinds
- these poems, and all the pleasure thus achieved
- the love that I have given and received

Thanks for reading my 2025 poems, some of which
will probably soon appear on my poetry website:

www.poemsbylindsaycamp.co.uk