

## Storylines Margaret Mahy Medal Lecture 2025

Paula Green



### **Kites and Anchors: a collage of writing poetry for and with children**

I am sitting on a bench at Te Henga Bethells Beach café, under a shady tree, drinking double shot coffee in a small cup, the music a warm beat, the sun shining, everything moving on chilled summertime, and I am writing this, I am asking myself why I write, read, review and blog poetry. And in this shiny bright moment, why I write and read, review and blog poetry for children. A family of Italians turns up and I find myself speaking of books, reading, art, cities, food and home, in another language. How good it feels to open up the Italian room in my head, to acutely feel, in this heavenly setting, the power of language to connect and delight, in the ear, on the tongue, in both mind and heart.

In the 1970s I fell into the writing of Margaret Mahy, just as I fell into the writing of Janet Frame, two women who fuelled my need to find my own voice. Local children's authors were a rare breed in the 1970s, but here was Margaret daring to imagine what words can do, how poems and stories can be our kites, our skateboard parks, our navigation aids, our anchors. She understood writer's intuition is far more magical than rules and regulations, how music on the line is as satisfying as an album on sweet repeat, how characters can bust out of stereotypes, how stories can send us travelling, and how the imagined world is as vital as the experienced world. She made me laugh and she made me wonder.

Margaret's gift to us was she wrote for and with and because of children, children of all ages. She wrote with daring, dexterity, dance, seasonings of mood and humanity. As a published author, she showed me how authors can be. We were in a green room once, and she turned to the young Australian author and told him she was halfway through his book and utterly loving it. We were all moved.

So back to my question. Why write poetry? Why write poetry for children?

For me, poetry is the playground, the place to test things out, stretch reach discover. When you get children writing poetry, you offer them opportunities to recognise themselves, their whanau, their hopes and dreams. Reading and writing poetry

establishes travel routes, discovery channels, points of recognition, switchboards of invention, moments of wonder.

Let me sidestep to a second question. Why write and read stories for children? Something I also love to do. Now more than ever, in these turbulent times, with the wellbeing of the planet and people under threat, fragile peace, insistent and persistent greed, toxic political voices and choices I simply don't want in my head, now more than ever, we need the stories and poems we share, of past present future, of who we are and who we have been, of bridges built and how we listen. No matter how old we are. Stories and poems of a thousand possibilities.

It's 1972. My sixth form teacher stood over me, and in front of the whole class announced I would never get anywhere in the world writing as I wrote. I have no idea what I had written, but I would love to read it now, to map trails and travels, epiphanies and rebellions, collisions and enchantments, between that piece of writing and what I am offering to you today. At the end of the year, I walked out of school an academic failure, too young to realise that the school system had failed me. I put a pack on my back and headed off with a friend to hitch around the South Island. It took us a month to reach Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington with our sidetracks and rest stops. Our money had run out so we moved into a huge house on Percival Street and I read wrote painted and played 1970s albums on yes, sweet repeat, especially Joni Mitchell.

Then in 1976, against all odds, I went to Wellington Teachers' Training College and worked with Jack Lazenby, Ralph McAllister and Brian Carmody. Literature drama art. My three loves. The college was earmarked the most liberal Teachers' College in Aotearoa. I discovered there were myriad ways to spark and advance a child's love of learning, to build curiosity, to nourish the foundation stones of reading writing arithmetic, to build science avenues, history pathways, creativity, empathy, and an ability to question. To expose senses to the natural world, to listen to the stories and taonga of our elders, to learn from cultures alongside us. To value different paces and ways of learning. And crucially for me, to celebrate and nourish the power of books of all genres, to read and to be read to. To read what is familiar, to read what is unfamiliar, to read for comfort, joy and for challenge.

For the last few years, after my bone marrow transplant, I have been travelling along a rocky recovery road and have devised various mental and physical aides to help. I

recognise my energy jar is small and picture each morning as a patchwork quilt. Each square stands for an activity: gardening cooking breadmaking walking emailing blogging reading writing listening. Some days the patches are minute, barely visible. But at lunch I drape the quilt over my shoulders and feel comforted, ready to sink into a children's book, a UK detective programme, an audio book, sleep.

Today I am offering a collage of ideas that matter to me as a poet. Think of it as a patchwork quilt stitched out of my love of poetry. It feels personal and perhaps even political. There are so many other patches that belong in my poetry quilt; the way a poem can house stories, how the look of a poem matters, how the form of a poem is such fun to play with. Today I am sharing ten poetry patches with you, with the proviso there is no single rule on how to read or write a poem. Just as we might make a recipe for pasta primavera our own, so to do we create a poem.

## **1. The ear**

I begin with the ear. I begin with the idea that words are like musical notes that ring and chime and sing. Margaret was a whizz at this. How I loved reading *The Lion in the Meadow* and *A Summery Saturday Morning* to my daughters. Bill Manhire is a whizz at this. Peter Bland. Elena de Roo. Sacha Cotter. Phillipa Werry.

Across time and place, music offers connections. It gets our bodies and hearts moving and makes us feel good. What happens if I invite children to make music with words. If we tip a bucket of words on the table and listen when we test the sound of this word alongside that word. A silver sky, a crumpled cloud. A crumpled sky, a silver cloud. We might make a long poem that snakes around the room as each child adds a word to go with sky or tiger or peach. We might jam with rhyme and rhythm, alliteration and assonance, repetition of all species. Explore how words sound good in our ear, how music can enhance the subject matter.

Jo van Dam's animal poems brim with fun and fascinations and beg to be read aloud. She loves playing with rhyme and rhythm.

On my blog I always invite children to read their poem out loud. To jam with words. To listen for the word sounds they love on the line. So, as part of my poetry collage, I will be reading you a few poems, some by me, and some by children.

### **O'Keefe the Giraffe**

O'Keefe is a very very very tall giraffe  
not as tall as a sky-flying aircraft  
nor as tall as town-centre flagstaffs

but photograph this magnificent animal  
in her wild habitat  
with gingerbread spots blazing  
her long neck grazing

and you will see her reach the sweetest  
leaves on tippiest toes in the tallest trees

**Paula Green** from *Roar Squeak Purr: A Treasury of NZ Animal Poems*, Penguin,  
2022

### **Snow Leopard**

Snow leopards live in the snow.  
They love the snow.  
They don't love the desert.  
Snow leopards live in the snow.

**Xavier, age 6, Westmere School**

### **Seasons**

Wind billowing in the breeze  
Colourful autumnal leaves  
Blossoms blooming in the trees  
Buzzing tiger-striped bees  
Spring summer autumn winter  
Watch the snow glimmer

**Maelie H, age 11, Richmond Rd School**

## 2. Eyes

What catches the child's eye? What physical detail resonates, rebuilds a memory, a portrait of a mother father grandparent, a back garden, favourite beach? Words can establish physical visual anchors. A way of planting oneself at home, in the earth, in the world we know. This seeing, no matter how old we are, is a way of enrichment, of making the world acutely present. Let me show you the tūī perched in the sticky flax bush feeding to heart's content, the wind sending shivers through the manukā.

A sidetrack. *Perfect Days* directed by Wim Wenders is one of the best movies I have ever seen. We follow in the footsteps of a toilet cleaner in Tokyo as he finds joy in each day, his daily routines, the cassette tapes (best soundtrack ever), the old camera he holds up to sky and city treetops, the prevalence of observing and absorbing.

I want to bring the joy of seeing into writing for and by children. Similes are an ignition point for me, and for the child. Similes are like a row of little test colour pots. Is that sun buttery or is that sun cheesy? Is that marigold sun dropping petals? Is it a pineapple sun or a sweetcorn sun?

Bill Nagelkerke is a poetry wizard and most definitely uses his eyes: "I like the straight-down / Silky rain".

### **Hippo in the Mud!**

Look at the hippo!  
She's buried in the mud  
lying like a log  
still as a gemstone.  
It's heaven in the mud  
relaxing in a sludge bath.

Wait a while  
and you might see  
the faintest tremble  
of an ear.

**Paula Green** from *Flamingo Bendalingo* Auckland University Press, 2006

### **Great Nana June's Bracelet**

rusty like an old car  
golden like a one dollar coin  
delicate like a twig  
it reminds me of her

### **Harper B, age 9, Te Parito Kōwhai Russley School**

sitting on a shelf  
the cat basks in sunlight  
black glass sparkling

### **Bernadette S, age 10, Te Parito Kōwhai Russley School**

### **3. Imagination**

We are back with Margaret again and her ability to stretch her imagination to the moon and back. How important to send a child, as both reader and writer, soaring along the tracks of what if and what next and why not? A poem is a perfect vessel of imaginings. A place to invent and dream and surprise yourself. I never know what will happen next when I write a poem, there's no set itinerary. Writing offers the joy of discovery as do the very best books I read, whether penned for children or adults.

Imagination might plant surprises in poems for readers to discover, surprises that flourish for each of us in different ways. I might invite children to imagine what it is like to be looking at their home from the top of a mountain, to be their favourite animal, to invent a bird or a new fruit, to choose what is inside a mysterious box. I might invite a child to test five different endings for a poem, five different beginnings, to play with sweet sour surprising funny sad puzzling.

Check out the dazzling imagination of Joy Cowley in *A Lot of Silly: A Book of Rhymes and Nonsense* and the equally dazzling imagination of Elena de Roo in *Wizardry to Wētā Verse*.

## **When I Am Cold**

When I am cold  
I get goose bumps.

When I am very cold  
I get tiger bumps.

When I am very very cold  
I get rhinoceros bumps.

When I am very very very cold  
I get elephant bumps.

When I am very very very very cold  
I get whale bumps.

When I am very very very very very cold  
I drink hot chocolate and wear thick socks.

**Paula Green** from *The Letterbox Cat* Scholastic, 2014

## **Stars**

The cow's eyes are  
pointing at ships  
sailing through stars.

\*

The sheep climbs  
the tallest mountain  
searching for stars.

\*

Like eyes of the high sky  
they shine.  
Stars.

**Vitek M, age 10, Ilam School**

#### **4. Experience**

Experience pulls us into the terrain of living, the multifacets of humanity, the sweetness sourness, the sharp unfathomable behaviours, the kindnesses the daily miracles and understandings. Experience is the cornerstone of difference and similarity, daily routine, personal and familial challenges, personal and familial celebrations. We eat and we speak, and we build. A self a home a life.

This is the blood of my poetry. I am writing of our cats and dogs, the sand at the beach, stars, rugby, moony cheese and cheesy moons, rainy days, nutty food. I am inviting children to draw closer to who and how they are through the power and magic of words. I am inviting them to show me what they love and fear, what tickles their sense of humour, what makes them feel good.

#### **Bird song**

The tūī in our garden  
is a poet bird.

At dawn she rhymes  
musical with bicycle.

The notes in her throat  
sing sweet and sharp.

At breakfast she rhymes  
beautiful with icicle.

She sings my car horn  
and she warbles my phone.

At lunch she rhymes  
magical with waterspout trickle.

At dinner she rhymes  
unusual with sour green pickle.

She sounds like my hairdryer  
she sounds like a campfire sparking.



Every morning she wakes us  
with her tūi poems tumbling  
across the echo valley.

**Paula Green** from *Groovy Fish*, The Cuba Press, 2019

### **The Sky at New Brighton Beach**

The bright blue sky forms around the beach.  
And slowly disappears into the bright sunset.  
Then it starts to rain.  
When it disappears,  
the sky is as black as coal.  
The clouds gather around the moon.

**Haajar, age 6, Ilam School**

## **5. Feelings**

In interviews or features for Poetry Shelf, I often ask poets to name a few words that matter as both reader and writer. I personally settle upon heart and connection, along with music and wonder. These words, let's say ideas, apply to both poetry and fiction. If a book has heart, whatever genre, whatever target age, it generates connections, and from that, feeling. To feel a book, as both reader and writer, is as important to me as thinking a book.

And here we are in the complex thickets of feeling, the way life is a melange of love hope pain sadness laughter grief fear dread envy awkwardness anger self-doubt self-love familial love delight comfort. For centuries, poetry has negotiated and navigated feelings. Veiled or overt. Hidden in metaphors, similes, physical descriptions, objects, what is not said as much as what is said.

I am reminded of Melinda Szymanik's sublime books *Lucy and the Dark* and *My Elephant Is Blue*. *Lucy and the Dark* really made me *feel* something. I feel the dark, I

feel for Lucy. I feel sad touched delighted. This is what a story can do. A poem can do. Oh and she also knows how to make music with words.

### **Charlie**

A scruffy puffball kitten  
grey as concrete with hole-punched ears  
turned up in our back garden  
because we are a family kind to cats.

A tiny little fluffball ready to scratch and bite  
until our cat Weetbix sniffed the puffball's wee nose  
miaowed a welcome miaow,  
and the snarly toughball moved in.

Now Charlie is our oldman cat with spiky  
grey fur who sleeps in our laps and laps up love.  
He purrs when we pat him and shuffles  
down the hall like a rickety grandfather.  
He used to waddle like a duck.

**Paula Green** from *Roar Squeak Purr: A NZ Treasury of Animal Poems*, Penguin,  
2022

### **Poppa's Rug**

After my Poppa  
died, my Nanna made  
a spectacular  
rug. She made  
it with all  
of Poppa's ties!  
Now the rug sits  
hanging on the old rocking chair.

**Maximus H, age 8, Westmere School**

## 6. Ideas

As much as I love feelings, I love ideas. Plant an idea in a poem and watch it grow. A thought a musing a philosophical thread. There seems to be a rich crop of children's books on being human. Ideas on behaviour, our fragilities alongside our strengths. Ideas that benefit the world or conversely damage the world. Ideas that ignite curiosity. Pick up an encyclopaedia of curious facts or everyday facts and step off into a poem of your own making. Take the idea of loss or animal behaviour, peace, grandparent wisdom, climate change or aroha and explore it in the form of a poem.

A picture book that has resonated with me over time is Kyle Mewburn's *Hill and Hole* - and how vital it is in these turbulent times we coexist and learn from difference. James Norcliffe's *Packing a Bag for Mars* is a vibrant poetry collection but is also a collection of ideas for writing poems. It is like a packed suitcase that you can take on your own poetry adventures to the sea, moon, city, foreign countries, zoo, park, home or school.

### A Whale Poem

I need a lot of room to write a whale poem.

I need a lot of time to write a whale poem.

I might pick a humpback whale or a spy-hooping whale  
a grey whale, killer whale or tail-slap whale.

I want to show you the blowing-air whale  
the bowhead whale, the blue whale and sperm whale

but instead I whisper in the ocean  
'Don't fall asleep and forget to breathe whales

don't get caught in buoys and fishing nets  
or stranded on the beach until we weep whales.'

**Paula Green** from *Roar Squeak Purr: A NZ Treasury of Animal Poems*, Penguin, 2022

## **Huia**

I used to fly up high  
and perch down on a branch.  
I used to sing a beautiful song  
but now it is gone.  
I am very sad to say  
that I am extinct.

## **Layla M, age 8, Westmere School**

A pencil has a limited life.  
Life gets shorter when sharpened.  
If ever sharpened to the end, life runs out.

## **Kelvin M, age 9, Te Parito Kōwhai Russley School**

### **7. Wonder**

A poem can be a way of showcasing beauty, the things and places and moments that mesmerise. Things in the shadows. When we drove back home after my five and weeks in Motutapu Ward, it felt like I was looking at the world with new eyes, with incredible miraculous wonder. I kept exclaiming at the way the light caught the harbour, the old man laden with shopping bent in the wind, a dog pulled at its lead, the trees moved like dancers. My hospital room had a view of Rangitoto, the harbour and the wide ever-changing sky. Such beauty. Such wonder. Opposite me, a wall-size photograph of a Rakiura Stewart Island inlet. Again the vital combination of beauty and wonder.

When I say 'wonder', I am drawing upon the connotations of both awe and curiosity. What fertile ground for the young child writing poems. For me writing poems. This opportunity to contemplate, to be surprised, astonished, to be nourished. To be open to curiosity. Where does this road lead? What is the tūī singing? What does that cloud remind me of? This opportunity to embrace the moment, the beauty of the tūī for its own sake, the sheen of feathers, the white tuft.

In *Elephant Park*, Melanie Koster takes something both everyday and iconic, and brings it to life in a story fuelled by imagination and heart. The playground elephant has been in Bishopdale Park in Ōtautahi Christchurch from the 1970s. Generations of children have slid and scrambled down its slide. Stories and poems are hiding in things our eyes become immune to.

Philippa Werry wrote a sublime verse novel in which she wondered about the life of poet Robin Hyde. In my Poetry Box review I wrote: "*Iris and Me* is a book to hold to your heart, to help you find your own courage and strength through adversity and epiphany, to fight for what is just and fair, to find ways to do what satisfies you. I would have loved to have read this when I was a young girl finding my own voice and my own way in the world."

### **Midnight**

for Daniel Lovewell

At the stroke  
of midnight the dark  
black night hides  
the bright blue  
ball in the long green  
grass and all the stars  
go hunting  
shining shining shining  
their faraway light  
as they look down,  
but the bright blue  
ball is hidden in the  
dark black night because  
it's waiting for the brother  
and sister to get up  
with the yellow sun  
and race into  
the long green grass  
and throw the bright  
blue ball into the bright

blue sky and catch  
it before they eat  
scrambled eggs  
all golden and pillowy.

**Paula Green** from *Groovy Fish*, The Cuba Press, 2019

### **Wonderful Things**

Loud waves crashing  
against the shore  
Dark black dog fur  
covers the couch head to toe  
Cold ice tea, swishes  
around in my glass  
Sweet smell of pelargoniums  
just a few feet away  
As I walk along the sand  
it gets stuck in between my toes

**Adrianna P, age 13, Te Parito Kōwhai Russley School**

### **A Cat in a Box**

I see a box rattling round  
I decide to creep a little closer  
Then a little closer...  
I decide to have a tiny peep inside that box  
No, it might be dangerous!  
Oh, but I guess just a tiny peek...  
Let me show you how I can be as brave as a lion!  
I will open that box!  
Aaaah, I'm not scared!  
So I tiptoe over to that box...  
Lift the lid

A cat springs out like a jack in a box!  
I leap backwards...  
But I wasn't scared!

**Harriet F, age 8, St Andrew's School**

### **My Secret Box**

I will put in my box  
the swish of an orange, sparkly basketball,  
my old, dusty football boots,  
my favourite football top with letters spelling HAALAND.

I will put in my box  
black thunder clouds that make me shiver,  
the smell of McDonald's chips,  
the orange-yellow sunset going down at the beach.

My box is made from shiny suns that turn to gold.  
At the edge of the box sleeps green roaring dinosaurs  
snoring very loudly.

I will get to a football match in my box  
and see the big, popular football teams  
and get signatures  
from all the players.

**Mason O, age 10, Te Parito Kōwhai Russley School**

### **8. Speed**

There is no correct speedometer setting for reader or for writer. I am drawn to a breakneck speed of writing and reading like my bicycle whizzing downhill as much as I am to a snail-paced crawl, where I have to stop and savour every word, image and poetic effect as though every word, image and poetic effect is a dawdle spot. A rush of ideas is as satisfying as nestling into the gap between moon and scone, between stone and wind.

On an author visit a Principal once told me: “Once upon a time, if an alien craft landed in our playground out of the blue, we would tumble out, teachers and children, to draw, write, measure, paint, question. But now it’s fifteen minutes, then on to tick the next box.

Imagine the child who can pull the threads of writing and creating, and lose themselves in reading as though time stands still and wonder prevails

## **9. Where do you get your ideas from?**

This is the question I am most frequently asked by children and it is the trickiest question to answer. Ideas fall into my head mysteriously like little seeds carried on the wind. Not all stay but some of them sprout and ferment over time, to the point I need to get them on paper, with pencil, pen and notebook. And then at some point, laptop. Instead of ideas, I see these arrivals as starting points. Seeds that arrive from the world I experience and the world I imagine. Whether something I hear, see or read. A memory, an object, a question, a secret.

For example, I have written a children’s book called *The Island* which is in debt to the memory of my Scottish grandmother. I would travel by train from Whangārei with my sister to stay with her in Lower Hutt. My suitcase would be crammed with books to read. My idea of heaven was to have my nose glued in book after book all holidays long, but she would yank me from fiction travel and get me playing cards. All these decades later, I recognised an aching hole in my life, the stories she never shared with me, her childhood, her Scotland. I have cycled across that land on a number of occasions and felt so at home, but I had never spent time with the myths and legends. And so I created this novel.

*Hedgehog and Goat*, a book that is so special to me, was prompted by the goat in the paddock up the road that would look quizzically at me every time I ambled past. He needed to come alive in a story.

Perhaps the most rewarding starting point was for a whole collection. When I was on a gigantic author tour to celebrate *A NZ Treasury of Poems for Children*, I invited children to give me titles for poems. These titles were my stepping stones for the poems in *Groovy Fish*. I found myself entering unfamiliar territory as my imagination and wonder stretched in new directions. As the mantra goes: write what you know and write what you don’t know.



Reading is such a vital part of my writing life. I have mentioned a number of local children's authors (picture books and poetry) who have inspired and nourished me, but here are a few children's poets from overseas who excel at what a poem can do: Calef Brown, Paul B Janeczko, Shel Silverstein and Karlo Kuskin.

## 10. Love

Love is the key ingredient for me as writer reader blogger. I write for children, and I write for adults, and for me, unlike some authors, there are both discernible differences and crucial links. When I write for children, I want a rich vocabulary, Margaret's linguistic inventiveness at work, but I might draw upon a different lexicon in my adult writing, play with grammar in different ways. In both cases, I strive for poetic fluency, for rhythms that breathe further life into the subject matter. Rhymes that add to the musical effect, tropes that augment rather than detract. A crucial difference: what I share in my adult writing is not what I share in my children's writing. I seek humour and playfulness in my children's writing, and in my adult poetry, perhaps seriousness and play, the light and the dark. Yet there are bridges, motifs, themes, feelings and ideas that reverberate in both. The bridge between is wonder, that sweet marriage of awe and curiosity, and in both cases, as adult and children's author, love is the ink in my pen.

In 1997, Elizabeth Caffin, the publisher at Auckland University Press, published *Cookhouse*, my debut collection of poetry. Almost ten years later, she took a risk and published *Flamingo Bendalingo: Poems from the Zoo*, my first collection of poetry for children. I went to Swanson School, the school my daughters Georgia and Estelle attended, and invented a poetry trail at Auckland Zoo. Rather than take groups of children handpicked by teachers, I did poetry workshops in every class, and chose my own mix of students. They became my co-authors and were part of the bookmaking process – their poems appearing in the book.

Herein lies my motivation to work with children, whether sophisticated or reluctant writers and every child in between: I want them to fall in love with poems, to discover the joy of reading and writing, not as chore but as windows and doors opening onto our world. On Poetry Box, I want to share a love of books, to open poetry possibilities for teachers, librarians and children, to resist narrow straightjackets of how a book can be, how a poem can be. I want to hold tight to that young me in the 6<sup>th</sup> Form who wrote out of the magic, miracle and imagination of writing, who has

since travelled and worked outside and within education systems, who has a taught in tough London schools and watched children flourish, who went to university and loved it so much stayed until there were no degrees left, who spent time with Italian women's writing across the centuries, who brought women's poetry in Aotearoa out of the shadows in *Wild Honey*, and who wants to forge poetry possibilities and nurture poetry communities on both Poetry Box and Poetry Shelf.

But after all of this, everything comes out of a love. A love of baking the daily sour dough, cooking the evening meal, messaging friends, hanging out with family, planting tomatoes and zucchini, writing the next poem, the next blog post, the next book, regardless of whether I will ever be published. I do this because each day, when I picture and create my small patchwork quilt of doing, writing and reading give me such joy, with my dear family, Michael, Georgia and Estelle, in the home I love. And there it is. My key word. Love. Amore. Aroha.

### **Guitar**

in my case my guitar  
with memories like gold  
memories  
when I played my first song to my dad  
on his special day  
with love

when I was nine  
on my special day  
my dad bought me my own guitar

**Sanuthi G, age 11, Te Parito Kōwhai Russley School**

## **A Slow Sky Tonight**

The clouds are moving  
across the sky like tiny snails,  
the trees whisper tiny secrets  
that nobody can hear  
and a pink light lights up  
the faraway hills.]  
Dinner is nearly ready.

**Paula Green** from *The Letterbox Cat*, Scholastic, 2014

I pick up my pencil and I start writing.

### **blood test**

will it show traces of  
right and wrong how I am flying  
with my golden ticket over spikes and bumps and joy

the sound of the bush tūī the fires raging  
the wars waging Marley's three blackbirds still singing  
the blanket sky a wonder magnet

will it show wealth and poverty the thirsty earth  
the dead children the dead grass the hazard buildings  
rumbling guts and dreams of peace hurtling hurting missiles

or waking in the night to hold the light and hold back the tears  
shining words on a world to be loved and cared for  
the white blood cells low the iron carrying the load

will it show a train of thought in the midnight pitch  
potholes in the tracks of our day the need to feed hearts  
to speak together with tangata whenua to speak of manaakitanga

will it show I am dying or alive or the album I have on repeat  
that wild southerly wind bending the bush or the garden lush  
with tomatoes zucchini strawberries herbs or platelets steady

how it's one small step after another the water tank summer full  
home as sweet as pocket notebooks a skychart of life stains  
the dark and light patches of knowing unknowing seed sowing

will it show what people say and do the stabbing headlines  
how we build bridges out of hope and flax and rivers and mother tongues  
how we bake bread and make our beds and dip toes in water

will it show the doubt and the fragility and the homeless  
a helteriskelter hijacked world a woman humming with blues guitar  
in the middle of a bombsite a kererū arcing over Waitākere sky

my hair turning symbolic grey at the need to be fierce and  
face the corrupt and greedy the lullabies that soothe  
the books that send us into zones of comfort and challenge

will it show traces of this poem a healthy liver a new recipe book my loved ones  
how we make art and music and teach our children to care and mend  
and how in the early morning light we can roar and hope and sing

**Paula Green**

**Poetry Shelf, Jan 15<sup>th</sup> 2025**