



BANK OF SPRINGBURN

**Connection is our Currency:
Poems from the Bank of Springburn**

INTRODUCTION

These poems were written over two months of residency at the Bank of Springburn, a pop-up community art space created and curated by myself and the National Theatre of Scotland. Situated in a vacant unit within Springburn shopping centre, the bank became a temporary hub for creativity, learning and sharing at the heart of a much-maligned community.

During the residency we hosted workshops, drop-in sessions and live performances from a range of amazing artists. Each Friday I also invited members of the community to commission a bespoke poem from me on any subject they desired. I imposed some parameters in order to keep myself on track and provide a bit of an artistic challenge. The poems had to be completely original and not borrow from any of my previous work, they needed to meet the brief of directly engaging with the subject matter and – crucially – I only had half an hour to create the work in.

The people I met and the conversations that led to the poems were special for all kinds of reasons. By its very nature poetry is a vulnerable artform. I asked strangers to join me in this vulnerability by sharing parts of their life as I attempted to synthesise these conversations into imperfect pieces of art for them to take home. This led to some beautiful insights into people's lives and minds as they chatted about the small and the personal with someone they just met. For my part I felt truly privileged to be given these opportunities to listen and capture these chats into something fresh and alive on the page.

I've prefaced each piece here with a brief description of the commission and any interesting information that came from the preliminary discussions. I have not edited these poems, each one is a raw sculpture of a brief moment of connection between two people – an attempt to arrest this fleeting alchemy in ink.

- Kevin P. Gilday, June 2023

Connection is our Currency

For the opening of the Bank of Springburn

In this bank
Connection is our currency
Not the vapid facsimiles
Of aspirational wealth
Smiles plastered on ecstatic
First home owners
But the true value
Of shared moments
Instances outwith the reach of explanation
Independent of the GDP

We've spent too long under the influence
Of selfish markets
Capital choking the ventricles
Greed clogging the arteries
But the heart of our community
Beats still

And here it is
This financial powerhouse
Who abandoned the high street
At the first sign of profit
Repurposed, reborn
Into this temple of the temporary
Where art accumulates in waves
Filling our accounts with meaning
A current, electrical

So let us gather
Hear voice and stories
Deposit memories like a Fabergé egg
Experiences beyond worth
We understand that our value
Is not tied to any market fluctuations
No percentage can match our entirety
No crash can dim our spirit
No suited conmen can rob our soul
Because in this bank
Connection is our currency

This piece was written to celebrate the opening of the bank and was performed at our 'opening cabaret' afternoon featuring poets, comedians and musicians entertaining the local audience. It was an attempt to create a sort of poetic manifesto for the project. A promise that we would be a space where magical connections would be an everyday occurrence.

The first person to engage with our poetry takeaway service was not interested in getting a poem written for themselves, instead they told me all about their friend who was having a hard time dealing with grief after the sudden loss of someone close to them. We chatted a bit about what kind of poem they'd like – maybe something light and cheery to take their mind off things? I admitted that light and cheery isn't usually my forte but I can do a good line in soothing perspective which I think I just about pulled off here.

Simple, Being

For Chris

Life isn't always suffering
Though sometimes it feels like it
A great void swallowing our light
Extinguishing joy like a candle
The scent of what was
Still lingering in the air

Life isn't always suffering
But we're all allotted our share
The times when we are forced
To carry great weight
A burden thrust upon us
Passed down like a sentence

Life isn't always suffering
When we have our memories
The moments of connection
Where spirits welded with laughter
The nights you'll never remember
With friends you'll never forget

Life isn't always suffering
Grief gives way to understanding
That absence and pain
Transforms into meaning
Reminds us to love fully
Our lives as temporary as the seasons

Life isn't always suffering
Some days sparkle like a gem
The sun shining in simplicity
The hours passing in gentle contentment
Before we have realised how
We've begun to live again

Life isn't always suffering
But it is always a privilege
To carry on the legacy
Of those we have lost
Speak their name out loud
And hear it echo around empty buildings
Feel it float on the breeze

Thirty trips around the sun

For Jamie

Thirty trips around the sun
Each one a voyage
For an affable astronaut
Blessed with gravitational pull

We all have our role
Some to be extras
Others to be the heart and soul
Embrace yours

A magnetic field
That turns strangers to friends
The world shifting on its axis
Upon you entering a room

What a gift to be here
To witness the setting of the sun
To provoke a body to motion
To hear the jungle roar

We've all known a Jamie or two
Charisma beyond the laws of physics
Smile like an invitation
A riot waiting to happen

So wear this day like a privilege
A celestial body to adore
Thirty trips around the sun
Here's to thirty more

Birthday poems are probably the most popular commission you'll receive doing a project like this. They can become pretty rote if you don't attempt to find something unique about the person in order to give the piece a strong throughline. Here I heard all about Jamie's bubbly personality and ability to bring people into his group, I immediately imagined him as a planet with a great gravitational pull which fitted perfectly with the idea of years passing as an astronomical phenomenon.

This piece was written for my friend Annie. I had fun connecting with her personality as a storyteller – not just on stage but in everyday life. I think we're two people that believe in the freeing power of art and its ability to reach beyond our immediate reality, I tried to capture that magic of creation here.

Blessed Be the Storytellers

For Annie

Tell a story like a secret
Unravel the past like a wish
These dusty tomes of yesteryear
Aching under the weight of lost time
Begging to be endeavoured
Tattooed with fingerprints
On neglected papyrus
A distortion in the infinite

Blessed be the storytellers
Opening chambers of mirth
With sonorous crowbar
Let us inherit this earth
Reinterpret it like a tale
Shape it to our utopia
Ours is a world unshackled
Life without limits

Let us not be the last
Come future archaeologists
Sift through our ancient script
Cry, 'I'm bringing you back'
And let our words dance anew
To the beat of a foreign tune
Reanimated language porous
Wracked with sweat
Steeled by the certainty
That stories are never finished
Being told

I Want the World

For Nadin

I want the world
And I want it now

I'm tired of waiting
My turn always delayed
Clueless adults debating
Leaving me dismayed
This is my time to shine
My era to be adored
Worship me like a shrine
My talents no longer ignored

I want the world
And I want it now

It's simply my destiny
To rule the world
A heavenly entity
With potential unfurled
I won't accept second best
No runner up prize for me
This life is a quest
And the answers don't come for free

I want the world
And I want it now

When all is said and done
You'll remember my name
When the race is run
My legacy like a flame
Mark me in the history books
Record my endeavour
Let the earth turn to look
Echo my name forever

One day at the bank we were visited by Rod, a community facilitator for SiMY – a youth development group based just down the road in Townhead. He'd heard about our project, the bespoke poems in particular, and had come armed with a list of subjects from the young people in the group. I love writing for young people as they often break any preconceived notions of why a poem should be written in the first place. They didn't disappoint, giving me some unique starting points to work from. This piece came from a simple prompt of 'I want the world' which Rod expanded on by telling me about the ambitious and single-minded nature of the young person which I tried to capture in this piece.

The prompt for this one was 'What are girlfriends for?' which instantly took me back to being a child myself and wanting to ask these important questions but having no outlet for them. In this case the poor wee guy has asked a poet, perhaps the worst people in society to answer a question in a straightforward way. Sensing that this poem could be part of a formative time in this young man's life I tried to keep it simple and wholesome, a piece reflecting on the multifaceted relationships we form throughout our life – romantic or otherwise.

A Good Question

For Tidiane

What are girlfriends for?

For listening
For respect
For learning
For imagining
For empathy
For warmth
For understanding
For growth

What are girlfriends for?

For equality
For love
For patience
For support
For supporting
For a month
For a year
For life

What are girlfriends for?

For laughing
For crying
For conversation
For chats
For believing
For dreaming
For now
Forever
(If you want)

Noise Comes easily

For Elaine

Noise comes easily
Seeps from vacant mouths
Fills up rooms
With a gaseous intrusion
It is the sound of ignorance
The frequency of one hand clapping

Noise distracts
Holds court without opinion
Spreads reckless misinformation
Through flapping gums
Talk without consequence
Words without weight

Noise envelops
Saturates silent space
Permeates parts untouched
Impenetrable wall
Of boisterous babble
Curtain of caterwaul

But quiet,
Quiet finds us waiting
Taking up residence
An emerging garden
Unspooling around you
Confidence in the silence
No need to ruin the moment
With mindless repertoire
Content in the knowledge
That quiet is strength
Quiet is resilience

Quiet is everything

This young person wanted me to write a poem about being a quiet person. Although some would debate it, I think I have a good hold on the benefits of being quiet and what we can achieve when we are. I wanted to reframe it as a superpower, an ability we have that lets us see the world in a different light.

This felt like another uniquely vulnerable subject that would only be suggested by a young person. They wanted a poem about 'being in the middle' which is such an interesting concept and so full of meaning in relation to our self-confidence and the way we see ourselves. Again, I felt it was my role to bring a little perspective and reframe this as a good thing, a unique skill in the world.

Being in the Middle

For Ore

Being in the middle
Is a perplexing perspective
Eyes crossed
Neck sore from twisting
Always trying to see
In both directions

You get taken for granted
At the centre of the spectrum
Not aligned to either side
No man's middle land
Wandering wilderness
No tribe to call home

But there's a unique view
From the middle
One that can't be glanced
From either border
An understanding of the whole
From the heart of the matter

Maybe being in the middle
Is a gift
A superpower
Absent of the extreme
Balanced and fair
A narrow angle shifting
Into a peerless panorama

Landscape perfectly in proportion

Realisation

For Hoda

It's called *realisation*
That wee moment
That lightning bolt of recognition
That light bulb of awareness
The knowledge drip, drip, dripping
Until it cannot be denied

I AM ACTUALLY REALLY GOOD AT THIS!

And of course, it's true
Because hard work pays off
Practice meets perfection
At the end of a long road
That time invested, sprouts
Grows miraculous into a hardy tree
Of experience, whole forests
Of wisdom

So, let's celebrate the destination
Honour our input
And reap our reward
For just a bit
Before life takes us
Leads us by the hand
On our next joyous journey
Of discovery

The prompt here was simply a poem about finding out you're good at something. And who wouldn't want to celebrate that in words? I hope this young person continues to have this beautiful realisation over and over throughout their life.

Misunderstood

For Holly and Leah

The thing about a twin
Who is evil
Is that they're not necessarily
Bad
Not to their pals at least

And we're best mates
My shadow and me
Inseparable
Incorrigible
Two sides of the same raucous coin
A disaster waiting to happen

The thing about having a twin
Who is evil
Is it's actually pretty fun
Reputations precede
And no-one expects
Me to instigate

Not the quiet one
The good one -
The sun shining unobstructed
From my backside -
But I can navigate
The dark alleyways
Just as I know the streets

The thing about having a twin
Who is evil
Is that you're never short
On drama

Excitement follows us around
Like a black cat
The stench of the unpredictable
Mapped to our clothes
And I know
Some of you could never live this way

But for me
It's just a word:
Family

I don't think I've ever been asked to write a poem about having an evil twin before, but I was very happy to receive this prompt and see where it took me.

Flowers and Trees

For Josephine

Some people plant flowers
Others grow trees

It's the strength to last the seasons
That sets them apart
That bit of heart
That beats through a crisis
And finds a laugh at the other end

There's wisdom in the soil
Advice to be passed on
Guidance transmitted across seas
To land in grateful ears

Some people plant flowers
Others grow trees

The generosity of the earth
Reciprocated
For all who need it
Experience was made to be shared
Sweet like a Scottish cake
Home-baked
And never to be abandoned

There's an independence
To planting seeds
Taking life in your hands
And nurturing
A commitment to others
That cannot be ignored

Some people plant flowers
Others grow trees

And we must show appreciation
To the gardener
Who is always sowing positivity
A distant beacon
Forever rooting for the underdog
Generosity in the undergrowth

And though that support
Can sometimes feel prickly –
Barbs of unvarnished truth
Like thorns in a hand –
We understand
That it comes from a place
Of caring
And all sins are forgiven
When you're only wee

Some people plant flowers
Others grow trees

Some people plant flowers
Others grow trees

This piece is an ode to a great woman who is always giving useful advice, inspiring others but also telling it straight with an unvarnished truth. I really enjoyed hearing about her idiosyncrasies and the way she tends to the needs of people as she tends to the flowers in her garden, it made me think that sometimes the most caring people are actually the most honest.

Why Is There A Tree in My House?

For Tom and Alex

It's a reasonable question
I think
To ask about its origin
The sudden appearance
Alien timber
Landing on the floor like a UFO

I've tried to remain calm
Regarded it from afar
As lights twinkle out of time
Watched the baubles sparkle
Interrogated the tinsel

But the question still remains:
Why is there a tree in my house?

What is its purpose?
This incongruous shrub
Plucked from some remote hillside
Relocated to urban living room
To stand testament
Tell a story of migration
In fallen pine needles

Do we mock it?
Dressing its regal trunk
In frivolous fancies
Trinkets traded from the cupboard's darkest reaches
Or is it born for this moment?
Fulfilling an ancient destiny
To be the centre of attention
In the year's dying days

I ask again:
Why is there a tree in my house?

Not that I'm complaining
I've begun to acclimatise to its presence
Lights morse-coding against the dark
Tinsel tightened around the branches
The curious ornaments hanging perilous
Each one with a story attached
Waiting to be told

That's before I've even mentioned
The enigmatic boxes nestled beneath
Perfectly wrapped mysteries
Infinite possibilities
Waiting to be liberated
From their ribbon-lined prison

So, though I might not know why
I've come to love this spiky interloper
An adopted outsider radiating
Warmth and beauty and cheer
A festive icon
Demanding we slow our pace
And gaze upon its tasteless wonder
Part of the family
For now

Even though
No-one seems to know
Why there's a tree in my house

When my friends Jim and Dan visited the bank with their kids they commissioned a piece based on their reaction to a Christmas tree suddenly appearing in the living room. I had fun playing with the iconography as a foreign object, as seen through the eyes of a small child.

This was a great example of the shared vulnerability between the artist and the person requesting the art. In this instance they were looking for a poem that relayed the message 'you got this' to a sister who was experiencing issues with her mental health. I used some lines from our conversation verbatim in the text in order to create a more personal connection.

Grace Notes

For Audrey

We danced into this world
Fifteen minutes apart
Two notes of the same song
Ringing in harmony
Though it may feel
Like your chorus has diminished
We still hear your voice
Clear and true

Your song is one of joy
A bubbly confection
Added to any conversation
Your presence
An anthem of connection
A hymn to loveliness

You gave care like a gift
Years of putting others first
You were there for us
Now we are there for you

We know you are a fighter
Our support your ammunition
Rattling with the refrain
You got this

This is just a blip
A diversion from the path
A moment of dissonance
No matter what happens
No matter the trial
We will listen for the chimes of change
Together

Our melody plays on

Lessons

For Emma and Bramble

We're not all born selfless
Moulded with an innate willingness
To share
It's not always second nature
To invite in a newcomer
Open the doors of our home
Open our paws for a cuddle

Sometimes love is just another word
For trust
Trust that must be built, earned, maintained
A magical ingredient
So often absent

Differences are what make us unique
Some of us are older, lazy
Like to luxuriate in palaces of quiet
Spend the currency of time relaxing
Others
Are spring-loaded
Congenitally energetic
Possessed with the vigour
Of a kitten with the zoomies

I think Emma and Bramble
Might have a lot to teach us
About tolerance
About acceptance
About love/trust

How we can eschew our jealousy
Share attention like a litterbox
Inhabit a space of contradictions
With compassion

Some of us senior
Imbued with the experiences
Of a lifetime
Some of us fresh
Champing at the bit
To explore everything this world has to offer
All of us
In dire need of a treat

If we give it space
And give it time
Love will develop in the division
And like Emma and Bramble
We will learn
To look after each other

The prompt here was to write a poem about two cats. Literally, a poet's dream. I asked many probing questions about the personality of said cats and their relationship, trying to work out a way to represent their dynamic in words. In the end I think I managed to convey a message that I think always rings true – we have a lot to learn from the animals.

Ruby

For Helen and Rikki

Forty years
You'd get less for murder
Half a lifetime as half a unit
Four decades as a team
Some shift

Love often begins with a letter
Though not usually a bill
The postman always rings twice
A missive of desire delivered daily
A whole future in the post
A consignment of contentment
Waiting to be signed for

Adventures called from a withheld number
On the back of motorbikes
In utopian new towns
In the potent screams of a newborn
Three children bestowed
Like a sequence of lightning bolts
Sharp and vital
Upon an unprepared world
Each one a gift, given freely

Some people are like jigsaw pieces
Looking for a place to rest
For forty years you have completed
A picture of perfect union
A landscape of all you have achieved
And all that is yet to be seen
The fragments of a life shared
Rendered in bold brushstrokes

But family is written in sacrifice
The things we give up
To make others whole
The destiny we delay
To forge a future
For those we love
The thanks that we give
Will never be enough

Forty years does not pass without teamwork
The coming together of two halves
The avid knitter creating the patchwork basis
On which the details can be added

The troubadour bringing music to the world
Aided by printed lyrics
The driver and the navigator
The tent constructor and the cook

Some relationships transcend
Reach a place of mutual meaning
An unspoken bond
Measured in togetherness
An example of eminence

For that we say thank you –
Thank you for the sacrifices
For the life you provided
For the generosity
For the guidance
For the goodwill
That sails us softly through this life

Forty years of fulfilment
Forty years of love

Anniversary poems are always fun to write because they tell a whole history of a relationship in a few lines. You get to hear how people met, how their lives progressed together, the way they are with each other – it's the nature of humanity that I find so interesting.

Draw a Picture of the Future

For Alexis

Your individuality is a superpower
An earth-shattering originality
Carved from your very core

It's hard some days
Not to be nervous
Not to worry about what people think
To let the weight of the world
Slip of your shoulders like a schoolbag
But your innate gifts
Will always shine brighter
Than any dark day

Do not be ashamed to build your own world
A place of joy in your image
A palace built with unique bricks
Guarded by plushie toys
Lose yourself in art
Draw a picture of the future
Don't be afraid
To colour outside the lines

Be confident
You are everything you need
Just by being yourself
You already have all the tools required
To help make this world
A better place
(thanks in advance)

The only thing you need
To learn in this life
Is how amazing you are
The rest comes naturally

We had two guys come into the bank, intrigued by the sign outside promising a free poem for anyone who wanted one. I could immediately feel that they were a bit uncomfortable in these surroundings and clearly felt a bit out of place despite my attempts to tell them about the project. One of the guys said he'd like a poem for his daughter, I asked a simple, open question – 'what is she like?' – and his face lit up with animated pride. He told me that she had a hard time showing her confidence in public but was really creative and loved to express herself. Sensing a kindred spirit, I wrote this piece as an aide memoire to her burgeoning creativity.

Distance Translated

For Lexi

Sometimes distance speaks
Without knowing the words
Whispers untruths
From the space between us
Making us feel apart
When we are anything but

Time might feel short
But it is mighty
A few hours to connect
Is never enough
But we can move mountains
In a matter of minutes
Such is our strength, together

This distance translates as:
I love you
I miss you
I care
These are truths that can never
change
No matter the circumstances
These are facts fit
For every situation
Forever

There'll come a time
When distance disappears
When time grows organic
As you will
Into something strong, confident
Untouchable

A constant fixture in life
Like a father who overflows
With love
For a special girl
Who fills the world with joy
A dad who is only ever
A phone call away

After ten minutes the two guys returned. The other one had been a bit shy but also wanted to ask for a poem for his daughter. He explained that his family life was complicated and that he couldn't see his daughter as much as he would like but he would like a poem to remind her that he's always there. I was really moved with this sudden outpouring of emotion, it felt so important to have this kind of conversation in the bank – grown men talking openly about what matters to them in a community setting.

Making Space

For Glasgow City F.C.

Football is all about making space
About movement
The incisive run
The meandering dribble
Conjuring yards that don't exist
You have to create your own
Space in the box
Your own seat at the table

This club wears the underdog spirit
Like an Orange jersey, naturally
Inclusivity sewn into the badge
Our colours uniting a community
Brought together by disparate hope
An affinity stretching
From the first-team to the stands
Affection beaten out
On a battered drum skin
A morse-code message
Of change

Box to box we are powered
Like a livewire centre forward
By our shared values
Kindness is first on the teamsheet
Friendship a perennial starter
Our support for each other
Loops and multiplies
Like a tricky winger
Always forging forward
Win, lose or draw
Together

After the whistle
This club is a sanctuary
A shrine for those who believe
Football can still be beautiful
That it exists beyond bank accounts
That it can change lives
That it belongs to us all
A team content to be seen
The power of visibility
A beacon to the young

Football is all about making space
And like a line-splitting diagonal run
We've created our own
A space open to all
A space free of judgment
A space that welcomes the outsider

So, get behind us
Raise your voice for good
Join our ever-growing squad
Fill the stands with joy
Some revolutions start with a gunshot
Ours starts with a whistle
We are Glasgow City F.C.
Our time is now

One of the volunteers at the Food Initiative was also a part of the local football team, Scottish champions Glasgow City FC. I was already aware of their on the pitch success, but I was really warmed to hear about the breadth of their community work and the general sense of belonging attached to the club. It became clear that this was a place for people to be authentically themselves, to be supported by an institution that extends beyond the stadium to the city as a whole.

The Table Is Set

For North Glasgow Community Food Initiative

Springburn grows
Plants seeds of promise
In fertile soil of hope
Shepherds nature to do her bidding
Wills wandering shoots skyward
In search of better days
Harnesses the environment
Our organic birthright
The rich Northern land
And all that never-ending rain

Springburn cooks
Takes the raw ingredients
Of genuine connection
And makes a meal of it
The nourishing yield of the earth
Transformed by skilled hands
Into a bountiful banquet
An everyday alchemy
Imbued with meaning
Bound together by trust

Springburn feeds
Measures community in full plates
And sated stomachs
Tastes solidarity in a hundred languages
Spices imported from around the world
Coalescing here
In our wee corner of the globe
A diverse cuisine born to be shared
Cultures syncing in symphony
On the soft canvas of our tastebuds

Springburn cares
Feels fellowship with the forgotten
Sews concern into ornate banners
Demanding more of this life
Passion powering togetherness
The vital spark of change
This is our home, our humble kitchen
Scented with the aroma of unity
The table is set for progress
And you are invited to eat

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND THANKS

The biggest thanks are reserved for Karen and Paul at the National Theatre of Scotland who believed in this project (and me) and helped me bring art to the heart of my community. This poetic document of our time at the Bank of Springburn would not exist without your backing. A huge thanks also to the rest of the NTS team who joined us and helped facilitate the project – Phoebe, Gillian, Courtland, Dexter and Rab.

Thanks to the people of Springburn who commissioned this work and inspired me to create far beyond my usual subject matter, it was both a challenge and a privilege to do these conversations justice with my poetry. I hope to be back creating art with you all again soon.

I was privileged to be visited by Sineadin, the manager at the North Glasgow Community Food Initiative. I could tell from our first few words how passionate she was about providing this incredible service for the people of Springburn. She asked if I could write a poem about their work which was the perfect opportunity for me to ask lots of questions and understand the full range of services and amazing opportunities the initiative offers to the community. I tried to capture it here: that mixture of passion and goodwill that drives an organisation like this one.



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