**Roshni Beeharry : CRxeate Fellow with an interest in Creative Writing for Wellbeing and for enjoyment**

**My writing journey**

Like many people who write, I have been a keen writer and reader from a very early age, but like so many who go into science and healthcare professions, that all went on hold at secondary school when GCSES and A-levels beckoned.

I wrote short stories when I was a child, and would make little books which I would ‘illustrate’ myself (and I use the word ‘illustrate’ loosely as I would say I am not artistically blessed)!

***Fast forward several years***

I qualified from St Mary's Medical School, Imperial College London in 1996.

Tragically, during my clinical years my younger brother became gravely unwell with colon cancer, and died six weeks before my Final MBBBS exams.

Perhaps unsurprisingly,I developed a severe depressive illness a year later in part due to an abnormally delayed grief reaction, and it was then at the age of 26 that I wrote my first poem, as many people who are grieving do. It might have been that the concision and often abstract nature of poetry, could express so much of what I was experiencing or thinking.They are also a ‘snapshot’ of a time, memory, emotion that you can look back on and reflect.

Happily I fully recovered, but the poems kept on coming and haven’t stopped! For this I am truly grateful.

I carried on my training in London and the home counties, and worked in the NHS in London and Essex until 2011, with my last five years in clinical practice as Consultant in Rehabilitation Medicine in Bath then back home to London, sub-specialising in Neurological Rehabilitation of adolescents and working age adults.

In large part due to my own experience benefiting from poetry therapy (“a form of expressive arts therapy, involves the therapeutic use of poems, narratives, and other spoken or written media to promote well-being and healing “ definition referenced from <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/types/poetry-therapy>), I decided to study for the MA in Creative Writing & Personal Development at Sussex University 2003-2005,with an aim to use poetry and creative writing to help others alongside my work as a doctor.

Here the main focus was developing the skills to facilitate writing groups in the community, schools and education and health care as well as develop our one’s own writing. I loved it and especially studying with a range of lovely and like minded people from all walks of life. My dissertation, ‘Creative Writing as an adjunct to self-management of Chronic Pain,' involved me running what was my first writing group for three self-selected patients with a history of chronic pain , admitted for a three week an inpatient Pain Management Programme. This was a satisfying and enjoyable process for me and the participants.

**Education, education, education!**

I have always had a passion for learning and developing myself as well as others, so the ethos of education runs through the core of me as a person, and as a doctor and I held various leadership roles in education during my training and into ‘Consultanthood.’

In 2010, whilst working as a Consultant in London, I undertook the MA in Clinical Education, Institute of Education, London,-it was a great chance to ‘learn about learning’ for the first time, including how *I myself* learnt. I was hooked.

So, in large part due to this drive to develop my career in medical education formally and work at undergraduate level as well as postgraduate level, I left clinical practice to become a dedicated medical educator.

It was a breath of fresh air transitioning from working in hospitals which was all I had done since graduation, to working in University settings.Once again, I was hooked!

I have a keen interest in the Medical Humanities, and I co-developed and taught a humanities based SSC at my first academic post at St. George’s University of London medical school, for Year 1 MBBS5. This focussed on students using art and artefacts in museums, as a stimulus for students to reflectively examine their stance on medicine and society from the lens as a young person in the wider world and a young future doctor with a foot on threshold of a whole new world, the medical profession; I am delighted that this SSC continues to run successfully today at SGUL.

I completed my MA in Clinical Education at Institute of Education in 2013 with my dissertation ‘a systematic review of the potential roles of creative writing in healthcare education,' carrying forward some of what I had learnt and developed in my MA in Creative Writing for Personal Development.

During a further career break 2015-2017, but in that time I developed an early version of my own SSC module which I pitched to Brighton & Sussex Medical School initially.I then decided to spend some time abroad, as I had not had the opportunity before, and spent an amazing, horizons-changing, six months in the Republic of Ireland,travelling and teaching the 6 week module at TCD to 13 talented Year 1 medical students. This was a complete joy for me,and my students produced some stunning work, which they collated into a group anthology.

I now deliver a modified version of this module as an SSC for Year 3 medical students at Brighton & Sussex Medical School since 2018, and will hopefully be running it for Year 1 and 2 students there from 2020/21 academic year.

My SSC is a satisfying culmination of my experience as a clinician, educator and writer, and has drawn on theory and practice from both my Masters degrees, as well as life and career experience working with people in healthcare and the community.

I am keen to do this work more widely with postgraduate interprofessional staff in health and academic settings,as a form of reflective practice and personal development, and ran my first workshop at that level at the Academy of Medical Educators (AoME) conference in April 2019, with a mix delegates who were medical students, trainees and Consultants and a health psychologist-great fun!

**Why my interest in using writing in healthcare and healthcare education?**

You may well ask! There are several reasons, including the fact that there is evidence reflective writing is a powerful educational tool in many professions, and is a seminal part of medical training as some of you will know from your own training in different fields.I firmly believe, as others in education and Medical Humanities do, that creative writing can be one way of writing reflectively and a cost-effective, low-tech way at that-paper and pen or a computer whichever you prefer and your imagination is really all that is needed!  
  
Couple this with,that I have been writing as a hobby and for enjoyment, since I was a child,and it will all I hope start to make sense why I do what I do today!

I find my facilitation skills from education work in NHS and university settings melds very nicely with the CW PD ones and vice versa-handling the dominant member of the writing group who likes to air their feedback, is not dissimilar to managing the chatty or disruptive medical student! All great transferable skills!

**Publication history and example of my writing**

Over the past 25 years, I have been an active member of four writing groups, and continue to attend local groups and literary festivals, conferences and short courses, which like any CPD, have really helped develop and inform my writing process and practice. I am also a professional member of the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) which I can recommend as a great resource (<https://www.nawe.co.uk/>)

I freely admit that when I started writing again as an adult all those years ago (I was a house officer by that time), I made a conscious decision NOT to “write about medical stuff," but Medicine has, inevitably, crept into my writing in the latter years!

Although I write mainly poetry, I also really enjoy writing fiction and creative non-fiction e.g. :

* travelogues of my adventures and misadventures of living and working and travelling around the Republic of Ireland for six months, in 2018
* dabbling in memoir
* flash fiction
* short stories
* I dabble now and again with a radio play I started years ago, about a mid 30s year old ‘stand-up’ comedian whose life and work relies on his communication, suffering a stroke resulting in severe aphasia ,so his thoughts are in internal monologue-spot the link to my “past life” as a Rehab Medicine doctor!

I have been delighted to be published in a range of UK, American and Irish online and print outlets, and had great fun at performing some of my work at open mics locally and in Ireland-the perfect country for the literary-minded with it’s rich literature and arts heritage.

I performed competitively for the first time in my life, my as one of 20 competitors at the Spoken Word Platform, of Cuirt, a major international Literature festival in Co.Galway, Ireland .As I am a glutton for punishment, I chose to perform my published flash fiction pieces, \*\*’Peas and Love,’ a comedic twist on the fairy tale the Princess and the Pea, rather than a poem. Shaky knees, but like giving a lecture or presentation as an educator, great fun and a buzz once you actually are up there doing it!  
  
Again, all good transferable skills!

2000 **Winner** of the Gold Cup for *Enfield Arts Network’s* Poetry, Enfield Music and Drama Festival for poem ‘*The Apple Tree’;* second entry ‘*This Garden,'* Highly Commended.My two winning poems have been published in Enfield Writer’s Workshop writing group anthology *‘Impressions’* in 2002.

2004 Several poems published in the *Art in Essex* - funded Gibberd Garden anthology in 2004.

2009 **Long listed** as one of the top forty entrants in an international short

story competition, the Aeon Award for short story ‘*The Firebird.’*

2012 Two poems (‘*Alyosha’s Shirt’* and ‘*Polar Bears overhead’)*  are published online as **Best of the Rest** category in the 2012 Mayor’s Enfield Poetry Competition (<http://www.enfield.gov.uk/info/200045/arts_and_culture/2243/poetry_competition_2012>)

2013 One of the 40 **highly commended poets** in the ***Hippocrates Poetry Prize*** which is an internationally recognised competition with an emphasis on the relationship between medicine and poetry; poem \*’Invincible’was published in the competition anthology (May 2013)

2015 \*’*Invincible’* and my analysis of how and why I wrote it, is

published in **Writers’ Forum magazine**, Issue 163 (May 2015), one of the two main UK based publications for writers, which has national and international readership.

My flash fiction piece *‘Peas and Love’*, was published by online American journal *Kind of a hurricane press,* in online form ([www.kindfahurricaine.com](http://www.kindfahurricaine.com)) and print in *Twice Upon a Time Anthology,* May 2015

2016 Three poems **published in online form and print anthology** *Secrets and Dreams* ([www.kindfahurricaine.com](http://www.kindfahurricaine.com))

2017 *‘Love Letter to London’* a prose piece p**ublished in Litro online magazine,**  22nd April 2017.

2018 **Shortlisted competitor** (one of 20) performing flash fiction *\*\*’Peas and Love’,*  Spoken Word Platform ,Cuirt Literary Festival, Galway City, Ireland

**First runner-up ’**Talking Statues Dublin, monologue writing competition,

*Apples and Spheres*, [www.londonsing.org](http://www.londonsing.org)

**Invited poet** at opening night at first Enfield Literary Festival, London, 22nd June 2018

2019  **Finalist (one of 23 poets)** at Jester to the Kingdom Humorous Poetry

competition, Tralee, Country Kerry, Ireland-performed October 2019

**2020 One of the selected poets for poem \* Invincible, *NHS ‘These are the Hands poetry Anthology, November 2019;*** launch event with children’s author and poet, Michael Rosen and Royal College representatives, 20th March 2020,London

**A poem that I wrote as a Year 4 Specialist Registrar in Amputee Rehabilitation part of rotation at RNOH Stanmore, 2005 .For more on this background please see Writers’ Forum magazine, Issue 163 (May 2015)**

Invincible

I think of the little girl

who will wear this spinal

jacket, its candy pink hardness

coated with butterflies

forcing her kyphotic spine

in to conformity.

Clasped between its two halves,

like a turtle shell

it will keep her protected

from the taunts of others-

*Cripple! Hunchback!*

These names will bounce off

her new suit of armour,

like ricocheting bullets.

Inside, she starts to grow,

straightens like a sapling

seeking the sun.

She begins to feel

Invincible.

**A piece that reflects my ambivalent relationship with my home city, London:**

*https://www.litro.co.uk/2017/04/love-letter-london/*

Love Letter to London

You annoy me sometimes, but still, I’m drawn to you like the magnetic north. Like iron filings in a school physics lesson; fragments of me arc this way and that, partly repelled, partly attracted.

That’s how I feel about you – sometimes invigorated, excited – there’s an anticipation of being with you. Other times, I am bored, frustrated, even disgusted by your unkempt streets like an unmade bed; then, I tire of you and feel like getting as far away as possible from you and your noise and smell.

But, oh, then I think of your wide lush green spaces, your interesting nooks and crannies holding so much history, filled with tiny bookshops and ephemera. I can explore you then, feel warm and safe, cared for; I can hide away from the world as you wrap me in your literary overcoat to keep out the chill.

I like too the way the sun glints on the Thames on a sunny day, ricochets off austere buildings, reflects in endless eyes. I try to see through your eyes, as if through the lens of an old camera; slightly blurry at the edges but crisp and clear as an autumn day in the centre.

There are some days of course when I am less enamoured by your charms when I’m in a rush and frustrated by your slow dawdling – leaves on the line and some sun excuse for not meeting. I know you can’t control it, but…

Other days your near-manic rush to be places, carry people, disorientates me; you move so fast I find myself turning around bewildered, looking for you, like a ballet dancer trying to find that special focal point to fix on as she pirouettes, as the audience stays still around her, breaths held in awe.

The descent of night brings on disturbing changes: you become brooding, sometimes threatening, lit up and garish like a circus has come to town. I am half in awe, a quarter frightened and a quarter in love with you at these times. A different you emerges with the denizens of the night; day workers transform on Fridays as if at a masquerade ball, changing identity temporarily, only to wake up with heavy heads and go back to their normal lives on Monday.

The arches; I’ve been meaning to have a word with you about these. I don’t like the boxes you keep there, full of crumpled cold homeless bodies, trying to get enough of your night overcoat to cover them, to keep them warm. Sometimes the inhabitants call out, sometimes they sit quietly head down, cardboard signs illegible enough to make me slow my pace a little in order to try and glimpse the story behind their lives. That’s a trick you don’t fall for of course; however, you’re soft-hearted enough to spread out your wide arms around man, woman and child of every colour and creed in this seething city.

It is under these dank cold arches that I long to escape to my own safe haven, box-like in itself but warm and with a roof, away from prying eyes, where I can wake up in the daylight. Then you seem kinder, safer, have a sense of purpose about you. Although people are still rushing through your streets on blindness missions, bumping into me rudely, it is sometimes heartening to strike up random conversations with perfect strangers. Don’t be jealous, mainly the conversation turns to you!

Who says you are unfriendly? They don’t know you as well as I do. I don’t feel I can ever get to truly know your ever-changing soul, your all-encompassing heart. Too many facets, too many nooks and crannies to explore, to get lost in.

Lucky we have many years together, to get to know each other better. I can only hope.

**Future ventures**

I am excited to share my plans to finally develop a parallel freelance career as a Creative writing facilitator in healthcare and the community, running creative writing workshops for wellbeing locally and elsewhere ,alongside my career as a portfolio medical educator here and abroad over the next year or so.

With the increasing recognition of arts in healthcare and Social Prescribing in primary care, this seems the perfect opportunity.Wish me luck!

**Community writing workshops experience:**

* Enfield Women’s Mental Mental Health drop for women with lived experience of a range of Mental Health conditions, 2017-(volunteer)
* Keats House, Bluestocking Society poetry and writing group (first one) 5th July 2019, Keats’ House Museum gardens (volunteer)
* Dragon cafe,Southwark, and Dragon in the City cafe as part of the Wellcome Trust projects for mental health, Spring 2020. The Dragon Cafe is the flagship project of Mental Health fight club charity, and is a wonderful FREE weekly resource for anyone living in the London region with lived experience of mental health issues.

**https://dragoncafe.co.uk/about-us/**

* I will holding two workshops on 25th April 2020, at the 2nd Enfield Literary Festival ‘Creative Writing for Wellbeing: Nature as inspiration’ and ‘Creative Writing for Wellbeing : Art as inspiration’ so please do consider coming if you are in the London region then.

Details of the festival will be announced in the next month or so on:

***https://www.enfieldfestivals.co.uk/***

**Contacting me**

Please feel free to get in touch-it would be great to hear from you! My email is [**beeharryroshni@gmail.com**](mailto:beeharryroshni@gmail.com)*.*

*I have listed some useful resources below, but happy to chat about this field of work, resources, or writing in general.*

*Also really happy to discuss designing bespoke workshops if you want to explore something in your writing workshop in your local community or workplace-e.g. for personal and professional development with your student/staff group.*

*Open to all possibilities and happy to travel!*

*I look forward to facilitating some writing sessions as part of the cRxeate cafes in London and with Cathy Wield and Jo and other writerly Fellows in Devon.*

*Look forward to meeting you in the future.*

*Warm wishes*

*Roshni*

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**Useful resources**

Lapidus international **http://www.lapidus.org.uk**

National Association of Writers (NAWE) [**www.nawe.org.uk**](http://www.nawe.org.uk)

National Association of Poetry Therapy USA is a useful resource

**https://poetrytherapy.org/**

Irish Poetry Therapy Network run excellent conferences in Ireland

[**http://irishpoetrytherapynetwork.blogspot.com/**](http://irishpoetrytherapynetwork.blogspot.com/)

Fancourt D, Finn S. What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review. Health Evidence Network (HEN) synthesis report. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2019