Notes from the Field

Poems by Glenn Merrilees

Glenn Merrilees

**Abstract:** Poetry exploring the experience of mental illness by Glenn Merrilees.

I'm 56 years old and from Falkirk, Scotland. I've suffered with mental health problems for over 30 years with depression, anxiety and panic attacks, and have been hospitalized a few times now.

In 2004, I was hospitalized for four weeks following a second nervous breakdown. I couldn't explain orally to my partner how bad I was feeling so I started writing it down and it just came out as poetry.

The first poem is "Am I." My partner awoke to read it in the morning and immediately called the doctor. The doctor read it and came over and hugged me saying “it's alright, we'll get you better.” He told me he had suffered with mental health issues and had lost 18 months off work because of it, so that was me back in for another three weeks after only being home for a couple of days.

The psychiatrist eventually referred me to a local association for mental health where I joined a writing group. I started to realize that people liked my poetry, and this encouraged me to write more. The second poem, "Barriers" tells of the stigma surrounding mental health issues and was my attempt to raise awareness of this. I also started entering competitions and this led to my work being published in 21 poetry anthology books and several booklets.

The third poem, “The Funny Farm,” tells the story of my seven weeks in a psychiatric unit, It was featured in ‘Voices,’ a film by Bob Owtram that won an international short film award and was shown at the Edinburgh Film Theatre: <https://youtu.be/ocAh_I_cLGM>

Does writing make me feel any better? It does slightly, after all the paper doesn't judge, and if you don't like it you can just bin it. I think a big thing for me though is the fact that "Am I" and "A tale from the damned" both helped me get the help and support that I really needed. “A tale from the damned,” the fourth poem, was written a couple of years ago as a suicide note as I'd gotten that ill again that I couldn't even go to my own daughter’s wedding; when you already hate yourself that makes it worse. "A tale from the damned" also points to the fact that even though I've suffered with this for over 30 years, I'm still here because if you reach out there is help and support out there.

# Am I? by Glenn Merrilees

I've sunk to the bottom

of a pit of despair

screaming for help

is there nobody there?

cowering in terror

trembling with fear

it's cold and it's dark

and it's lonely down here.

afraid of a shadow

I can't even see

stuck in an eddy

that's swallowing me.

am I free as an Eagle?

folk say I look well

my stomach in turmoil

my soul in a cell.

can't answer the doorbell

can't answer the phone

surrounded by loved ones

i'm still all alone…

can't express feelings

that cut me in two

I take pen to paper

the best I can do.

far too many questions

answers far to few

never looking forward

as tears obscure my view

try to stagger forward

my crucifix in tow

am I gonna make it

I honestly don't know.

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# Barriers by Glenn Merrilees

there's people throwing insults

there's people throwing stones

you cannot see this illness

no sign of broken bones.

so many nasty comments

remarks are so unkind

you cannot see this darkness

this poison in the mind.

hey look, that guy is mental

a loony, what a waste

your bitter twisted comments

leave an acrid taste.

just remember i'm a victim

of this pain you cannot see

depressions made a home in hell

especially for me.

do not judge this cover

you simply have to look

i'm drowning in a sea of pain

pages missing from this book.

would you berate the lowly cripple

and call poor soul a name

my illness needs no crutches

hang your head in shame.

I do not plead for sympathy

understanding is the key

as without this murderous illness

you're just the same as me.

just show some understanding

and maybe lend your ears

then maybe you could save a life

or stem the flow of tears.

breaking down the barriers

I try to change your view

one in four's a victim

and the next one could be you.

# The Funny Farm by Glenn Merrilees

So they took me tae the "funny farm"  
It might hae been at night  
A really can't remember  
Fur a wisnae really "right".

I'm in here, in this "loony bin"  
Seemed no-one outside cared  
Alone and isolated  
Cold, distraught, and scared.

Those people all around you  
They suffer jist the same  
Depression, and anxiety  
Cursed wi a different name.

Alone I sit and wallow  
In a pain you cannot see  
A deep, dark, sad depression  
That gnaws away at me.

You only see the bad things  
You cannot see the good  
A gave up awe ma hobbies

A gave up eatin' food.

Never ate, a solid fortnight  
Nae breakfast, lunch, nor tea,  
Could only take in liquids  
Enough tae sustain me.

They never even noticed  
Nae appetite tae sate  
Consultant telt ma misses  
That I'd even pit oan weight.

So am locked up in the "funny farm"  
No knowin' who wis who  
People marchin' roond an roond  
Awe dressed the same as you.

One NURSE a verbal bully  
A wish that a could name  
A thing a stood an witnessed  
Like tae pit that git tae shame.

He wis oan the tablet trolley  
A wis standin' in the line  
But his comments tae a patient  
Still chill these bone's "o" mine.

Big laddie, he came runnin’

His problem couldnae wait  
Poor soul, I saw in pieces  
The next bit does frustrate.

Need something fur ma voices nurse  
The reply was out of order  
The only thing I've got for you's  
A fucking tape recorder.

Seen one nurse, a big strong bully  
Pull a woman through the air  
She was sittin' in the garden  
But he yanked her oot that chair.

Ten folk hud sat an seen it  
That nurse he didnae care  
No the kind "o" treatment  
You'd expect tae get in there.

So a made a sarky comment  
That night, then went tae bed  
Next day, pulled tae the office  
And this is what wis said.

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# The Funny Farm by Glenn Merrilees (cont.)

You never saw the first part Glenn,  
You only saw the end  
There's much mare tae this story  
An whit happened tae yer "friend".

BUT, It's a psychiatric unit!!!  
We're entitled, patient care  
A caring arm around you  
No tae pull ye through the air.

Ten "o" hud saw it  
An some walked aff in tears  
Complaint about a bully  
Hud landed oan deaf ears.

I've cawed the place the funny farm  
But that isn't strictly true  
As some in there would rant and rave  
And scare the breeks aff you.

Schizophrenic or bi polar  
Or some other "mental" name  
An illness thrust upon them  
It isn't them to Blame.

One woman was a princess  
Another man, a Quee

Hudn,  
Some were just dead scary  
Inside that ward eighteen.

Some geezer oan a trumpet  
But he only played one note  
Another in the corner  
Shakespeare he wid quote.

Others, they seemed "normal"  
But at night you heard their screams  
Past's came back to haunt them  
Nae chance "o" peaceful dreams.

One woman wis a lady  
Hud servants, butlers too  
Went aboot in joggie suits  
AN spoke like me an you.

Another wis a prophet  
His orders came fae God  
Took drugs that make yer mind bend  
An alcoholic sod.

Then there wis the pop star  
Young lassie, near nineteen

Sixteen worldwide number ones  
Awe ower theworld she'd been.

A wis in a month, then oot again  
Barely in ma door  
Fell tae bits, a jelly  
In fur three weeks more.

Another phase of madness  
Hud dropped, enveloped me  
Crawling through a tunnel  
In which a couldnae see.

There's folk outside That really cared  
But depression, am it's host  
The love that floats around you  
Can't see it, cause yer loast.

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# A Tale From The Damned by Glenn Merrilees

Lay no flowers on my coffin

Nor hang your head to weep

For I have not forsaken you

I've only gone to sleep.

Place my ashes at the lay-by

And maybe plant a tree

And each year when it blossoms

For a moment think of me.

Know how much I loved you

More and more each day

My darling that's the answer

As to why I went away.

The pain that I was suffering

On my pathway down through Hell

Burnt my soul in many ways

But was singeing yours as well.

I love you way too much for that

I'm sick, recurring pain

But every time I suffer

It hits you once again.

I'm useless as a partner

And I'm useless as a dad

I gave my children nothing

Yet It's all I ever had.

I keep on failing everyone

I'm a nightmare during day

Like the moon moves in the evening

It's time to go away.

Yet you my doll were awesome

For twenty-seven years

You held me up and comforted

This endless stream of tears.

So now my time is over

It's Heaven or It's Hell

I tried to do my best in life

But I didn't do too well.

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