



2026 Poetry Collection

*Thank you to everyone who
shared poems as a way to
remember a loved one.*



GO WITH GRACE



I stand cold and tangled beneath towering,
barren branches, searching for you.

Rotting camelias adorn the ground beneath me,
some still with signs of life, some long dead.

Death surrounds me. And so does life. I know
that your dead body is deep under ground,
I know too that your spirit is alive, soaring.

I watch and wait for signs that you live. A child
laughing and playing, early morning birdsong,
the smile from a stranger, the sight of a friend,
purple flowers at the garden centre, every single
sushi shop I drive past.

And slowly I begin to untangle.

by Louise Allen

In memory of her daughter Rose



*I wrote this just a few weeks after my
daughter Rose died. I was in shock and
disbelief that she wasn't here anymore.
Her death was sudden and unexpected and
in those first few weeks I needed to know that
she was still alive somewhere, somehow, so I
searched for her everywhere I went.*



For Carol

Friend, you are a source of great delight
because you speak about your death with candour.
With equal force you name the f...ing brute that takes your life,
and claim your choice to live the last as best.
You've called yourself a howley-bag, a messed-up piece of work,
and then you've told yourself to quit the sorry stuff and harden up.
'You know the rules,' you tell the doctor.
'I want the truth, and no resuscitation.
I'm not afraid of death – it will come when it comes.'

You say you won't win in the end,
but you've won respect and time and your bucket-list requests.
In simple ways you've laid a claim on life,
and she has given you her best.
You've shopped for coffins, shed the scarf that hides your balding scalp,
and asked a curious child to touch your hairless head.
You've planned your funeral, despite the opposition,
and lined your nephews up to dance the haka.

And now you're sounding tired and near the end.
Dear friend – allow your world to shrink.
Don't ask me how I am – tell me what angers you,
and secret moments warranting repeat.
Look out across the water – can you see
your baby, father, friends you want to meet?

by Margaret McCallum, 16 June 2010

*The poem was written after a visit to my friend.
I felt so inspired by her response to her coming death.*



It's the first day of spring, my love,
but my second spring without you.
You would have loved the Kapiti sunset last night.
We used to sit on deck chairs on the driveway and watch the swallows swoop
and circle as the sky turned gold and pink,
Heaven's finger painting.

I visited Harrison's on Sunday.
Bees were humming in the lavender.
I use your card still and collect your points.
I bought pots of apricot-colored pansies for the back deck and yellow for the
front of this house you've never ever seen,
But I was too tired to plant them.
Perhaps I'll get around to it this weekend.

I've been thumbing through your NZ Gardener diaries.
September 14 2024 you wrote that you sowed peas
'Blue Shilling'...but mostly...'Utrillo'
And you drew your special smiley face beside your entry.
You grew peas because I loved them.
You'd secretly pick them when they ripened,
And count them out exactly into little white bowls,
Then present them to me with a flourish,
Singing 'Please peas me like I peas you.'
You loved surprising me!
My darling man.

by Lisa Streekstra

*These are some of my memories of my
husband in his happy place, growing
plants and watching the birds and sunsets*





Death and dying

by Keith Brady

So, death is upon me, apparently, or so I was told nearly 4 years ago.

This bit of writing here is not necessarily about death, it's more about supposedly dying, but actually living in the meantime.

I do not have any experience "on the other side of the coin" as in caring for somebody at the end of life, only my own experience of having been given a prognosis of 1 – 2 years to live at best. November 2022 was.

These are my very personal offerings on my thoughts, feelings, emotions and how I have coped and am still coping with this bit of news. I share this, in the hope that it may offer encouragement and hope on your journey, whatever it may be. Realising of course that everybody's situation is unique to them, and "no one size fits all"

A brief intro on what happened. I had a brain tumour diagnosed October 2022 (Labour weekend) which was removed and subsequently diagnosed as Glioblastoma, of which the survival possibilities are very slim after about 14 months, which seems to be the norm. Anybody surviving longer is classed as being quite rare, or an outlier, so I was told.

Get your affairs in order, start your bucket list and get prepared because that's about it. However, in the same breath I was also told that there are some people – a very few who live longer. Some 2 years or more, but don't get your hopes up, this is what it is.

Well, once the shock of the news had subsided, I realized that, in those moments, or very soon following, I was not really that worried about being dead. A bold statement you may say. But think about it. We are all going to die one day. There is no denying that.

Death and taxes. Well some people may be smart enough to avoid paying taxes, but death, no, no-one is exempt from this. It is a fact; it is a given that we will all expire at some point. So when you die

it's impossible to be upset, or emotional, or in fact anything, because you do not exist. My point is then, you/we/me are all understandably emotional about a prognosis of that sort, of course, who wouldn't be. I tried not to be, because it physically can't matter after the fact, for yourself that is, being dead. Once I had this notion in my head, I was ok with the prognosis. Ok with it, but not really accepting it, or being resigned to it, or was going to succumb to it. Cold comfort to your loved ones and others you leave behind, I know.

At least, I think anyway, by having a realistic, or pragmatic approach to the prognosis you are then able to talk it over with your loved ones more easily, with some of the emotion/sting/hurt removed from it.

That is how I rationalized my thoughts in those moments anyway. And it was just moments in getting my head around this. My focus was then removed from dying in a year or so, to deciding to conveniently ignore what was just told to me – bury my head in the sand if you like and rather, make the most of living for however long that may be. Forget the supposed end date, it's only an arbitrary number derived from averages.

Now I live with this hideous terminal brain cancer with no cure and a high probability of recurrence. Sobering isn't it? But you will probably garner from what I have written above that I am just getting on with living and certainly not dwelling on the negative "what if" Instead, what if I keep living for a number of years yet, until I can no longer look after myself, then slowly fade off the face of the earth. Wouldn't that be something to aspire to?

Fight, fight like hell. As I said to people, I'm going to be kicking and screaming all the way, I'm not going down without a fight. With my last dying breath, if it got to that I will know I tried.

Go well, live well.

Keith



We lifted your coffin.
You were light,
already missing,
the husk of a seed
winnowed by the wind.

But when I held in my hands
the ashes
of blood, bone and sinew
that once defined the
limits of your life,
my arms were stretched
with the weight
of my grief.

by Maureen Sudlow
In memory of Jean

Published in my book 'Antipodes' in 2014



There are no days without you

There are no days without you.

On Sunday I sleep late. The morning is barefooted. Old women wear large hats outside the front doors of churches. Inside, I hear the sound of singing.

On Monday the tide goes out, Later it returns. The beach looks like a wide mouth chewing bread. At times we hold conversations.

On Tuesday the moon appears in the afternoon like a ghost, a ball kicked over the fence by small neighbours. I see their round eyes staring at me.

On Wednesday I watch a narrow boat leave for fishing, one fern of grey water following. I think of soft plaits in long hair.

On Thursday I catch the bus into town. The man beside me turns over the pages of his newspaper. I consider the delicacy of skin.

On Friday I decide to go shopping. I wait in a long line at a counter to buy groceries and recognize the small bones that queue along the back of your spine.

On Saturday I rise early and walk down to the sea. A row of seagulls argue in the breeze. One leaf falls against my path as though it was carefully planned.

There are no days without you.

Written for Aunty Rongo

By Glenn Colquhoun

www.glenncolquhoun.net



Remembering

By Stacey Sim

I can feel things are changing for me
No one needs to tell me; I just know
My body is speaking to me
I am weary, and I am tired.

I have lived well, but I'm not done just yet.
I must tell them, all gather.
All gather and laugh, oh, how I love that sound.
Laugh about things that don't make sense to me; I don't mind, just laugh.

At the day's end, whisper your hopes and dreams to me;
share these, that way I can feel a part of your future.

Don't bring me flowers; instead, bring rosemary and thyme so I can remember the
smells of the many meals I have cooked for you, oh, how I loved to cook.

When you have nothing to say, play the music that reminds you of me; I know that
this will remind me of you too. These songs will take me back to times and places.

Bring my favourite blanket, yes, that one, the one you all wanted me to throw away,
but it holds the warmth of my life; I want to be embraced by that warmth.

Lastly, hold my hand in yours. I know each time that you do, you are telling me how
much you love me; know that I love you too, even if those words fail me.

At the end this is all I need, no less, no more.