

Hope, in time



A collection of poetry
exploring experiences
of neuroblastoma

Hope, in time

"A thought-provoking collection of works, each beautiful in its own way."

Anna Philpott

Professor of Cancer and Developmental Biology
University of Cambridge

"A project that beautifully captures the synergy of science, art and feeling, and has no doubt brought a new and unique emotional outlet to the neuroblastoma community."

Emily Hall

Public Affairs and Advocacy Lead
Solving Kids' Cancer UK

Contents

I. Introduction 7

II. Poetry and observation 11

III. The Magic Words 29

IV. Group poetry 41

V. Contributors 55



I. Introduction

The collection of poems in this anthology give a voice to those with diverse experiences of the childhood cancer neuroblastoma.

From scientists working in laboratories, to patients who have survived, to parents affected and now using their lives to help others, the poems you will read give an insight into what it is like to live with, research and experience neuroblastoma.

The collection was produced through a public engagement project led by Kirsty Ferguson, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Cambridge.

Kirsty's love of poetry began in the Covid-19 lockdowns, when reading, and then writing, poems became an important therapeutic outlet. Upon moving to Cambridge, she began to explore using poetry as a way to open a dialogue about research with the public.

In 2023, Kirsty took part in the university's established *Creative Encounters* programme and began to reflect on the link between scientists and patients using poetry.

This resulted in a collection of poems titled *You, Me and Us*, reflecting on life as a research scientist, precious tissues donated by patients for research, and the voices of those with lived experience of neuroblastoma.

You, Me and Us featured 'Fly High' - a poem incorporating words from personal stories shared by Neuroblastoma UK.

This new *Hope, in time* collection expands on the "us" of *You, Me and Us*, using poetry as a universal medium to break down barriers between patients, clinicians, charities and researchers. We wanted to create an accessible environment to open a dialogue based on human connection.

From March to May 2024, a group of thirteen people with diverse relationships to neuroblastoma met fortnightly for five online poetry workshops, facilitated by Kirsty and Reverend Phil Sharkey.

Kirsty met Phil at a wellbeing event on the Cambridge Biomedical Campus in 2023 and, connected by a shared passion for poetry, they became key project collaborators.

In his role as a Chaplain at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Phil works with many patients, including children with cancer, and has published a poetry book - *Words to Remember* - reflecting on his conversations with patients with dementia at Addenbrooke's Hospital.

Poetry was new for most of the participants in our project. This created a shared experience with plenty of space to build trust, share vulnerabilities and discuss experiences.

Kirsty and Phil each shared how poetry has had, and continues to have, meaning in their lives. They used creative writing to reflect on and respond to thoughts and feelings, and a variety of scripted and unscripted poetic stimuli to encourage the wider group to do the same.

In addition to sharing the group's written work, this book will take you through the process and ideas explored throughout the project and how poetry can be an expressive tool.

The collection ends with a poem written by the group as a whole, weaving together our unique experiences and encapsulating our unity in tackling this devastating disease.

We hope these poems take you on a journey through different perspectives, hopes and challenges. Perhaps they may even inspire you to discover, or find refuge in, your own love of poetry.

There is hope, in time.

Dr Kirsty Ferguson
Scientist and Poet

Reverend Phil Sharkey
Chaplain and Poet



II. Poetry and observation

Poetry is often inspired by observations of the world around its writer. Kirsty began writing poetry during the Covid-19 lockdowns when she stopped to better observe, and listen to, her surroundings and feelings.

In scientific research, observations are often the foundation upon which hypotheses are built. This practice, of cutting out the noise and taking a step inwards, or outwards, to stop and observe, is a skill we can all learn, both inside and outside the laboratory.

In the initial workshops, Kirsty shared some of the first poems she wrote, taking a photograph during daily walks and writing an accompanying rhyme.

To begin this practice, the group were challenged to begin observing their surroundings and noting down their thoughts.

Every contributor to this collection was gifted a copy of *The Poetry Pharmacy: Tried-and-True Prescriptions for the Heart, Mind and Soul* by William Sieghart at the start of the project.

This was one of Kirsty's first poetry books, gifted by a good friend, and is a beautiful collection addressing life's conditions from happiness to loneliness, to heartbreak and grief.

The group were encouraged to begin reading poetry, in this book and others, and find a poem that resonates with them. A couple of our favourite poems are reprinted here.

'The Orange' by Wendy Cope and 'Leisure' by W.H. Davies both highlight the pleasure and necessity of stopping and staring at the world, enabling us to notice, and cherish, the little things in life.

'"Hope" is the thing with feathers' by Emily Dickinson reminds us that hope can be found in the darkest of times. The timelessness of poetry can assure us, however we are feeling, that we are not alone.

Phil led an exploration of creative writing in response to prompt words. He often undertakes this exercise with Poppy, his granddaughter, and their poems using the prompts 'sycamore leaves' and 'doughnuts' are included here.

The group were each given a prompt word in pairs and challenged to write a freehand poem in a few minutes. A selection of the resulting poems are shared in this collection. The diversity of ideas arising from the same prompt highlights how we each have unique experiences and perspectives that can be communicated through poetry.



Leisure

by W.H. Davies

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

"Hope" is the thing with feathers

by Emily Dickinson

"Hope" is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land
And on the strangest sea,
Yet never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

4 Sycamore Leaves

by Poppy Melbourne

Four wrinkled sycamore leaves,
Left there.
Alone.

Just searching for a home.
Their life has been a mystery,
At least that's all we know.

Wandering for a perfect place
To shelter from the
Cold

Why do we having feelings for something
That has been left out on the road?

*

They lay there,
All still and snug
Maybe they want a hug
No.
That's silly
They're just leaves
Or is that all we know?

4 Wrinkled Sycamore Leaves

by Phil Sharkey

Walking out into a windy blast,
Four wrinkled sycamore leaves I found huddled in the lesser leaf litter.

Blotched brown and crisped by nature's capriciousness,
They could have been in an air fryer.

Not a Ninja, or Russell Hobbs, but a cosmic eco unfriendly version

Greta would have sent a letter!

Donuts

by Poppy Melbourne

Donuts in my bag
Rolling around from edge to edge
Without a simple plan
There's nowhere to go.

But if there's nowhere to go
Then what do we call home?
They are all most like us
Hiding their bitterness from the world.

All sugar coated, are you sure you're fine?
No, not really,
But instead I'm bitter and broken inside.

They try to hide and desire to
Show us what might not be their great side.

Donuts II

by Phil Sharkey

Confectionary bread with nothing at their heart.
A quick sugar hit and then the emptiness returns.
How did the sweeter cousin of a bagel,
Deep fried and sprinkled with promise.
Ever get to be the centre of my satisfaction.
Like the emptiness at the centre of an unfulfilled life,
The vacuous donut only promises more emptiness.

When I hold a cup of tea

by Hayley Blackwell

When I hold a cup of tea I feel the warmth like a hug,
Knowing the caffeine will hit soon,
the bigger the better the mug.
That first morning cuppa hits better than the rest,
Prioritise it before everything,
some sweeteners added's the best.

When bad news is delivered it's always followed by a question,
Shall I put the kettle on?
It's such a peculiar suggestion.
Like the answer to all problems will be at the bottom of this tea,
That might not be true,
but it does work for me.

When I hold a cup of tea my brain does a dance,
For it knows it'll wake up soon,
Snap me out of my trance.
That feeling of warmth at the back of my throat,
Numbs all other senses,
To this time I devote.

Tea is the solution no matter the mess,
Just a cuppa in peace
reduces my stress.
So when I hold a cup of tea I feel the warmth like a hug,
It wraps me up in serenity
until I feel nice and snug.

When I hold a cup of tea

by Fiona Greal

They asked me "where is home?"
I said anywhere when I am holding a cup of tea.
My home lies across the east and the west,
I am home, when the smell of two-hours brewed tea hits me,
I am home, when hot-poured tea kisses its cup with a splash,
I am home, when hot summer heat hits my body and both
my hands still reach for the warmth of a cup of tea.

Was it the taste of that tea or the affection of the hands that
prepared it?
Was it the exquisite estekan cups bought from Baghdad's
market on an excruciatingly hot summer's day in July?
Or was it the warmth of unforgettable gatherings, where the
tea stayed hot while chatting and laughing for hours?

I heard the gold tea pot from Aqaba singing loudly until it
cracked,
I heard it calling, I paused and sat still...
time to turn, to blend the west with the east.
New joy, new aroma, new family, but the same warmth.
Is it a cup of tea that makes the past a happy place and the
future full of wonder?
I hold a cup of tea, sipping new flavours in new places, and
yet I am home.

When I think of a smile

by Phil Sharkey

When I think of a smile,

It's yours.

When I think of smiling, mine often escapes.
Enigmatic, something of the Cheshire feline,
It can flicker and fade.

When I think of your smile's constancy,
Beaming, radiant and unreserved, it's
Like the sun running its path through the heavens.

I'd go miles for your smiles, eschewing all similes.

:)

When I think of a smile

by Kirsty Ferguson

People should do more of this,
It makes the whole world glow...
Like sunshine on a cloudy day
If you feel one of these,
You'll know.

Sometimes I'm not sure of the weather,
It can be a little
Chilly,
Overcast.
Like summer has passed.

Then you smile at me,
And warmth floods the forecast.

When I feel a breeze

by Andrea Kohn

I feel the closeness of the summer.
The heavy weight of humid air surrounds me, stifling.
The Sun burns down on my skin,
As bright light and heat pound my eyelids.
The grass is scorched, assaulted by the elements.
The greenery bakes and withers,
Roasting, parching, sweltering, blistering.
And as the hot sun flames,
My feverish body wilts
Until at last, relief.
I am finally rescued
When I feel a breeze.

When I feel a breeze

by Becky Parris

Gentle, cool or warm
Gossamer, like a butterfly's wings
Bees. Stings. Honey...
Funny; how they create something so sweet
Flowers, pollen, sneeze
Dandelion 'fairies' dancing on the breeze
Life is a breeze; more like a tease!
Trees, branches, rustling leaves
Lifts the seeds for new life
Birds singing, soft feathers and down
Dog's tongue lolling with the car window down
Frown. If the breeze changes direction, it will stay forever.
Never! Eyes closed, warm sun on my face
Boats bobbing in the sea breeze
Sails rippling
A flag gently flapping
Water gently lapping
Me, peacefully napping
Hair soft, like a silk scarf across the skin
No better place to be in
Window ajar, curtains fluttering
Outside, nature muttering
Carried on the breeze
Ripples on a stream
Long grass swaying, children playing Pooh Sticks.
Who wins? Who cares?
Incense, perfume, carried on the air
Lovers entwined, without a care
Happy, peaceful, content, kind
Free in spirit, and in mind
How lucky am I to feel the breeze?
May it last and last, forever, please.

When I'm in a forest

by Lidiya Mykhaylechko

I hear the wind
The rustling leaves
And all its consequences.

It brings me peace and calm
But also worry.
What will happen if I never
Leave this forest?

The tall trees protect me
Remind me I am safe,
But my inner self refuses to
Accept.

Should I run, hide or
Appreciate?
The mighty wilderness,
The powerful cage.

I decide to stay
To carry out my mission.
Maybe this time it will come
To fruition.

When I feel the rain

by Evon Poon

When I feel the rain...

My first instinct is to run,

Don't get those new trainers wet,

Find shelter! Cover up!

After a deep breath, my panic muffles,

The small voice of my heart becomes audible,

Be still, it coaxes, enjoy the moment,

Embrace the gift from heaven.

As I close my eyes...

And bravely tilt my head upwards,

My fists slowly uncurl,

And my lips curve into a smile.



III. The Magic Words

In the next workshop, the group explored writing poetry using prompts from the book *The Magic Words* by writer and teacher Joseph Fasano.

Joseph believes that “poetry helps us all become better listeners to the world around us, to the voices of others, and to the voice within”. Following an invited talk to a class of seven and eight-year-olds about the craft of poetry in 2022, he wrote his book of fill-in-the-blank poetry prompts (missing adjectives, nouns, verbs and adverbs) as a resource to guide others to create poetry without worrying about the structure of a poem.

From a 90-year-old working through dementia to an autistic six-year-old struggling with verbal communication, these prompts have helped countless people to find their voice, no matter their familiarity with poetry.

Using the poetry prompts ‘Self’ and ‘Affirmation’, the group wrote poems reflecting on their relationship with neuroblastoma. The resulting poems convey the varied perspectives within the group and reflect our different identities associated with this childhood cancer.

Writing these poems was a therapeutic process for the group and sharing our poetry together opened up conversations where we could all learn from each others’ experiences.

Let the ants be collaborative,
Let the flowers be blossoming,
Let every idea inside me find its path
And stride purposefully, steadily
Toward this world.

I have a story I have never told:
Once, when I was lost,
I looked up at the horizon and saw the blaze,
And knew I was a spark made of grit.
I am still a spark made of grit.

by Lidiya Mykhaylechko

Let the pride be noisy,
Let the sadness be faint,
Let every heartbeat inside me find its rhythm
And bring me fearlessly always
Toward this world.

I have a story I never told;
Once when climbing
I looked up at the green tractor and saw the seat
And knew I was child made of imagination.
I am still a child made of imagination.

by Vicky Inglis

Let the mind be open.
Let the ideas be flowing.
Let every thought inside of me find its story and grow in time,
fruitfully towards this world.

I have a story I have never told:
Once when I was lost
I looked up at the apple tree and saw
Bees buzzing
Around flowers waiting to bloom,
And I knew I was human made of blossoming thoughts.
I am still a human made of blossoming thoughts.

by Kirsty Ferguson

Let the sunlight be unshaded,
Let the moonlight be unclouded,
Let every star inside me find its sparkles,
And shine brilliantly unmasked towards this world.

I have a story I have never told:
Once, when I was lacking confidence,
I looked up at the tree and saw a yet-to-sprout bud,
And I knew I was a child made of hope,
I am still a child made of hope.

by Evon Poon

Let the child be healthy,
Let the treatment be kind,
Let every memory inside me find its peace
And smile confidently, fearlessly
Toward this world.

I have a story I have never told:
Once, when I was scared, I looked up at the doctor
And saw the lifeline and knew,
I was a mum made of devotion.
I am still a mum made of devotion.

by Hayley Blackwell

Let the research be fruitful.
Let the destiny be fulfilled.
Let every question inside me find its answer
And sail out confidently, hopefully
Towards the world.

I have a story I have never told:
Once, when I was trapped,
I looked up at the sky and saw a distant world of opportunity
and knew I was a fearless soul made of love.
I am still a fearless soul made of love.

by Fiona Greal

My name is neuroblastoma.
Today I feel like a rebel breaking all the rules.
Sometimes I am pensive,
Sometimes I am aggressive,
But always I am lost and misunderstood.
I ask the world "who can finally guide me
Back to the correct path?"
And the answer is:
Excellent science, dedicated care and brave little warriors
Playing together in the symphony.

by Evon Poon

My name is Fiona.
Today I feel like a new research assistant
Starting my first day in the lab.
Sometimes I am a scientist,
Sometimes I am a parent,
But always I am part of a team.
I ask the world, "How can we solve this terrible puzzle?"
And the answer is:
"A new team starting our first day in the lab."

by Fiona Greal

My name is Kirsty.
Today I feel like a drifting bird searching in the sky.
Sometimes I am DNA in a pipette,
Sometimes I am ink in a pen,
But always I am thoughtful.
I ask the world, "What do you need from me?"
And the answer is:
A drifting bird searching in the sky.

by Kirsty Ferguson

My name is Vicky.
Sometimes I am a light,
Sometimes I am a guide,
But always I am a sparkle.
I ask the world "How do I know which way now?"
And the answer is:
A glistening firefly dancing in the sky.

by Vicky Inglis

defiance
resilience
relentless
lasting
challenging
cruel
unknown
lost
evasive
sinking
traumatic
how?
metamorphosing

IV. Group poetry

In the final workshops, the group explored two ways of combining their experiences in poetic form.

Firstly, the group were each asked to share one word to describe their thoughts and experiences of neuroblastoma. We then experimented with writing individual poems incorporating all thirteen of these words, shown opposite.

The resulting poems weave together our perspectives while allowing each poet space to share their own experiences.

Secondly, we each shared one line based on the prompt “what do you want to say, to one another and the world, about your experience of neuroblastoma?”

Upon sharing these lines in real-time, an initial group poem was formed. This live poem was rearranged by Kirsty, keeping the exact same words, to form our final group verses with the title 'Hope, in time'.

These exercises demonstrate the power of poetry to link together diverse groups. Together we created creative writing pieces which reflect on both our unique perspectives and our solidarity as a community.

Underlying these poems and our conversations was a message of resilience and hope. This inspired the title of our collection which you are now reading: *Hope, in time*.

The Researcher in the Laboratory

by Evon Poon

As the researcher sinks in a corner,
Deflated by experiment's loss of counts,
Trying to make sense of the unknown, whys and hows,
Metamorphosing neuroblastoma, so cunningly evasive.

She tries to remember the little ones,
Who bravely battle this traumatic, cruel disease,
In defiance of the odds,
With hope that never ceases.

Drawing strength from the children's resilience,
She tilts up her chin and heads back to the bench,
Pipette in her hand, she's ready for relentless attempts,
Neuroblastoma, challenging as you are, will soon be defeated.

That Day

by Jill Chesterton

How the unknown could
Be so relentless
That sinking feeling
The feeling of not knowing
What is to yet come.
Challenging and traumatic and
Cruel times that lay ahead.
Metamorphosing and evasive
From the microscope.
Your defiance will lead you
To be no more
We will fight you neuroblastoma.

13 Words and Neuroblastoma

by Fiona Greal

How many parents waited, enduring the traumatic unknown?

How many children had endless resilience and still lost the
cruel battle?

How many adults live with lasting effects after the
relentless journey?

When is the end for this challenging neuroblastoma?

Let research and discovery overwhelm the defiance of
evasive neuroblastoma, take and snatch it away.

Let new trails emerge before dreams start sinking,

Hopeful infants metamorphosing into adults...

Neuroblastoma

by Jill Chesterton

I heard your name for the
First time today.
The fear, the anger, the dread,
The confusion, just from your name
Neuroblastoma.
Why my Beth, she was a
Baby.
Neuroblastoma doesn't care who, why.
Test, test, test, so many tests
My child is fighting
Scientists fighting for a cure
Doctors and nurses fighting.
We are all fighting a
Battle! With you neuroblastoma.
We will lose some warriors,
But we will beat you
Neuroblastoma.

United until we defeat

by Hayley Blackwell

How is this allowed to happen?
A child gets really sick,
They say it's neuroblastoma,
This is all happening so quick.

The cells are metamorphosing,
Something went a bit wrong,
It isn't anybody's fault,
But that path ahead feels long.

My sweet innocent baby,
How can the world be so cruel,
Lost in a sea of doctors,
One stands out like a jewel.

He is our consultant,
And that sinking feeling he gets,
When another child is diagnosed,
Makes me trust him with no regrets.

The treatment is so challenging,
So evasive and at length.
The future is unknown,
And I need to find some strength.

The traumatic scream of my toddler,
As she faces another test,
The ward playroom is stocked with toys,
But my child, you need to rest.

This disease it feels relentless,
Our world is upside down,
I'm barely keeping my head above water,
I'm trying not to drown.

The hospital, it feels lonely,
The lost look upon my face,
I look around our hospital room,
Grateful for this space.

Cancer will not beat my family,
Defiance we will show,
This is just a blip in the road,
Together we will grow.

They say the side effects will be ever-lasting,
But as long as she grows old,
We'll take any side effect that comes,
And hope they can be controlled.

One day I read a dictionary,
Looking for a word to sum up my child,
Resilience is the word I settled on,
I discovered it and I smiled.

Neuroblastoma is the disease,
The one we want to beat,
Researchers, doctors, parents, charities,
United until we defeat.

Relentless defiance

by Vicky Inglis

Relentless – have to keep walking, decisions, decisions fast
paced

Shoes - no longer ones I recognise.

How am I wearing these? Have to keep walking but they
don't fit.

This path isn't easy...

Keep walking.

Unforgiving terrain...

Keep walking.

Wet, muddy and heavy, feet sinking further into the cruel
unknown.

The pace slows, thick sludge engulfing my every being
Absent of assured rhythm and soothing beat, comforting
balance lost.

Thick sludge – engulfing,

I quietly surrender, the challenge to keep walking
consumes me.

What if this compost of trauma is metamorphosing?
From the desolate decay to the relieving richness...

Let the careful beat be mine,

Banging the wet, muddy shoes against the warmth of the
south facing wall -
A towering wall that is sharp to the touch, jagged to the eye -
approach with caution.
This wall where red bricks carefully placed, absorb the
powerful sunlight in nature's awakening

Where every shadow, where every bump tells a story

This evasive wall - intimidating yet warm, inspires renewed
defiance and lasting resilience
The mud no longer sticks, embrace the weathering.

Let the careful beat be mine,

Banging the wet muddy shoes against the warmth of the
south facing wall.
This compost of complex trauma ebbs and flows, never still.
Topping up with the 'right' things

Allowing the air to flow
Suppresses the weeds of life that no longer serve me.

The unwelcome heavy shoes, sometimes pinch but I can
always wear them. Choosing when to take them off.

My own pace, my own rhythm, my own beat.
My feet will not sink.
I see things differently from the top of this evasive wall.

NEUROBLASTOMA

by Becky Parris

Not usually this quiet
Everybody said I looked a bit pale
Under the weather? Let's do some tests
Results showed a growth, size of a fist
Off to hospital, surgery can't remove it all
Blasted with radiation, must lay still
Looks bad, little chance I'll pull through
Ate a slice of gala pie, so nice, couldn't keep it down
Slowly, painfully, some improvement at last
Thank goodness, trial drugs seem to be working
On my way home after 18 months in hospital
Mum and Dad can't believe it, their baby is alive
After 52 years, I'm still here - the lucky one!

Beacons of Hope

by Kirsty Ferguson

It was cruel and challenging,
Evasive,
Traumatic.
It was relentless.

We were sinking

into the unknown.

Lost.

But we are resilient.
We are defiant.

Together we,
Are relentless.

Relentless in understanding,
Relentless in guiding others,
Relentless in creating comfort and
Lasting legacies.
Lighting beacons of hope
To metamorphose darkness into light.

Group poem

our first version

There's comfort to come and hope in sharing
It is a never-ending microcosm of uncertainty
And a relentless need for perseverance that occupies my mind.
You will not always win, we will beat you
The lens of this perspective and what I saw felt, heard and said
Changed throughout the cancer journey,
Neuroblastoma you took the wrong path
We will guide you to find the way back home,
Questions and answers chasing each other in a loop of learning
Child or parent, I am in awe of your bravery
In the face of this disease.
Neuroblastoma cells are so cunning and stubborn
It's cruel and a menace, it picks on the defenceless
Neuroblastoma is heartbreakingly complex
With little room to turn
The disease is awful, and treatment should not be so painful.
Even with hope in survivorship, there are challenges to come.
There is hope, in time.

Hope, in time

our final group poem

Neuroblastoma is heartbreakingly complex
With little room to turn.
It's cruel and a menace,
It picks on the defenceless.
The cells are so cunning and stubborn.

The disease is awful,
And treatment should not be so painful.
Child or parent,
I am in awe of your bravery.
Even with hope in survivorship,
There are challenges to come.

The lens of this perspective
And what I saw, felt, heard and said,
Changed throughout the cancer journey.
It's a never-ending microcosm of uncertainty
A relentless need for perseverance
That occupies my mind.

You will not always win,
We will beat you,
Questions and answers chasing each other,
In a loop of learning.
Neuroblastoma you took the wrong path
We will guide you back home.
There's comfort to come and hope in sharing,
There is hope, in time.



V. Contributors

Evon Poon

Evon is a senior scientist in the Paediatric Oncology Experimental Medicine Team at the Institute of Cancer Research. Evon leads on the lab efforts to understand how neuroblastoma develops, and evaluate novel molecularly-targeted drugs that specifically target neuroblastoma cells with elevated levels of MYCN oncoprotein. She has a daughter, a son and a supportive husband. This is her first time writing poetry. It has been a humbling experience for her to write with parents, scientists, clinicians and pastor who courageously fight neuroblastoma in their own ways.

Fiona Greal

Fiona was born in Edinburgh and grew up in Baghdad. Inspired by her father, a professor of pharmacology involved in providing the best care and availability of medication in difficult times for the Iraqi people, she qualified as a pharmacist and worked for many years in commercial drug research. She returned to the UK and, after a career break to bring up her family, she returned to academic research as a mature student, completing an MSc in Cancer Immunotherapy with a year's placement at Barts Cancer Institute for which she was awarded a distinction. She currently works as a research assistant in Anna Philpott's lab at the Cambridge Stem Cell Institute. In her role, she assists Kirsty Ferguson with her research in finding kinder therapy for neuroblastoma. Her journey in cancer research will continue at the Cancer Research UK Cambridge Institute.

Hayley Blackwell

Hayley is a mum of two from Essex whose eldest daughter Eva was diagnosed with neuroblastoma a week before her second birthday. In 2018 she decided that everything she had been through had to be for something and so she joined the team at Solving Kids' Cancer UK as Family Support Coordinator, helping families through their own journeys and providing them with hope. As far as she can remember, the closest Hayley had ever got to poetry was GCSE English so it was challenging but fun to explore this with Kirsty, Phil and the group.

Becky Parris

Becky is a neuroblastoma survivor. She was diagnosed in 1972 and underwent major surgery, extensive radiation, and trial drugs. By the time she was three years old, she'd spent most of her life in hospitals. She owes her life to her surgeon, Mr Solon, Dr "Apple", Nurse Muncy, and, of course, her then family doctor, Dr Bartlett, who first noticed that she didn't look quite right. Despite the long term effects, she is one of the very lucky ones to have been cured, and she is still here, over 50 years later, thanks to all the wonderfully talented and caring people involved in her treatment. She is eternally grateful to each and every one of them, and also to Professor Anna Philpott and her team at the Cambridge Stem Cell Institute, including Dr Kirsty Ferguson, for their endless work, research, and dedication to finding treatments and cures for other, and future, sufferers of neuroblastoma.

Lidiya Mykhaylechko

Lidiya completed her PhD and postdoctoral research at the Cambridge Stem Cell Institute, where she worked on ways to turn neuroblastoma cells into harmless neurons - research that will lead to gentler treatments. She will soon continue this work in Sweden. Writing poetry for the first time was an emotional experience, as it allowed her to connect with parents and others affected by neuroblastoma, finding a new understanding in their fight.

Helen Pearson

Helen is a nurse working with children diagnosed with neuroblastoma and their families. She sees the devastation this disease brings to families and how parents manage the complexities of caring for their ill child whilst they endure horrible treatments. Being involved in this poetry work has been really insightful and provided Helen opportunities to share thoughts, feelings and emotions towards neuroblastoma in a different way.

Vicky Inglis

Vicky's son Jamie was diagnosed with high-risk neuroblastoma at the age of three years. Despite intense treatment both in the UK and overseas, Jamie sadly passed away aged just seven years old. Having been so touched by all the kindness and generosity of others during Jamie's cancer journey, Vicky wanted to be there to support others going through childhood cancer. She is proud to have been working for Solving Kids' Cancer UK for over 10 years, leading the Family Support Service with an incredible team of like minded individuals. As a bereaved parent, Vicky found the neuroblastoma poetry project meaningful and creative, which has reignited her love for poetry.

Jill Chesterton

Jill is wife to Robin and mummy to Bethany and James. It was Beth who inspired her to write the poems in this collection. Jill's family's journey was not easy with neuroblastoma, and losing Beth was utterly heartbreaking, but they live in hope for a cure - raising awareness through poems, we can spread love, light and laughter.

Ali Timmons

Ali has worked in clinical research and medicine for more than a decade. During our project she was the Childhood Cancer Specialist at the Cancer Platform where she helped design a platform aiming to assist parents and families in the navigation of all aspects of their cancer.

Aditi VEDI

Following clinical training in Sydney and London, Aditi is a Consultant Paediatric Oncologist at Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge. She treats children with a range of childhood malignancies and has special interests in leukaemia and neuroblastoma. She also leads a number of clinical trials locally and nationally as well as academic translational research projects, with a PhD from University of Cambridge. Her three children provide her with the motivation to improve the lives of all children.

Andrea Kohn

During this project, Andrea was the Senior Communications Officer at Neuroblastoma UK. Andrea is now the Cancer Stories Officer at the Institute of Cancer Research, London. Here, she supports the communications and fundraising teams by telling the stories of people connected to the institute, from patients and families, to event participants and fundraisers, donors, medical professionals, and the scientists behind discoveries that will help defeat cancer.

Kirsty Ferguson

Kirsty is a postdoctoral scientist in Professor Anna Philpott's team at the Cambridge Stem Cell Institute, where she researches kinder treatments for neuroblastoma. An aspiring poet in her spare time, she loves to combine science with poetry to communicate her thoughts and experiences and learn from others. A creative at heart, she also designs wellbeing resources for her family-run mental health charity, the Cameron Grant Memorial Trust, featuring her illustrations and poetry. She will continue her journey in childhood cancer research at the BC Children's Hospital Research Institute in Vancouver, Canada.

Phil Sharkey

Phil is a chaplain at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. He has used poetry as a therapeutic approach to engagement with patients with dementia and published a volume of poetry that was produced from his work. His first degree, in English and Philosophy, was from the University of York and after two years running a young person's voluntary agency for the Joseph Rowntree Trust, he studied for a professional social work qualification at the University of Leeds.

During his social work career, he managed child safeguarding, youth justice and residential care, before moving into IT project management. His last post was Business Resilience Manager for Hertfordshire County Council. He retired early to train for ordained ministry, and studied for a masters in pastoral theology with a taught module in healthcare chaplaincy. He has worked at CUH since 2008.



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'Leisure' (p14) is in the public domain.

'"Hope" is the thing with feathers' (p15) is in the public domain.

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Hope, in time

A collection of poems written by people with diverse connections to neuroblastoma, a rare childhood cancer.

Our collaborative *You, Me and Us* engagement project brought together clinicians, research scientists, hospital chaplaincy, charity professionals, parents and families with lived experience of neuroblastoma.

This anthology explores poetry as a tool for observation of our surroundings and feelings, and expression of our unique experiences. The project highlights the value of creative writing when exploring complex emotions and feelings that are often difficult to articulate.

Poetry holds the power to form bonds between people, communicate their stories, and amplify the voices of those who work and live with challenging conditions.

