

# AWOL

Poems in Celebration  
of Advocacy  
by  
Jo McFarlane

ABSENT WITHOUT LEAVE  
INVISIBLE WHEN HERE

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## Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this specially written collection of poems by Jo McFarlane.

Jo's recital of poignant, sometimes personal, but always relevant poems, at the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance 2012 Annual General Meeting was warmly received. The AGM was a celebration of the SIAA's 10th anniversary and Jo was able to speak to the audience about the complexities of the mental health system, her own experiences, and the power of independent advocacy. This collection is a continuation of celebrating independent advocacy, its value and potential impact. It provides the reader with a view of how advocacy can make an individual feel empowered, in control, respected and listened to.

The poems give a valuable insight into the world of advocacy and the impact of including independent advocacy as a right in Scotland's 2003 Mental Health Act. Jo explores the impact of collective working and campaigning and broader issues around disability and equality. This collection encapsulates the achievements of the Scottish Advocacy movement over the last 25 years and it celebrates the achievements of a wide range of people who have strived to make independent advocacy the vibrant, responsive, forward looking movement it is.

Shaben Begum MBE  
SIAA Director

# In My Name

A World Citizen's Wish List  
on the opening day of the Scottish Parliament

- J** Justice, equality and respect for all
- O** Our common humanity to be more important than our differences
- A** A fair distribution of the Earth's resources
- N** No more violence
- N** No more deceit
- A** A future for our children

# Power To The People

We formed alliances,  
began to advocate for change.

It took forever, takes forever,  
sometimes we are angry  
by the obstacles we face.

But never will we let the dream  
we hold so dear become just that.

For we have fought so long,  
become so strong,  
voiced our vision clearly

and they're listening now  
to what we want.

The ground is shifting slowly  
and the revolution's here to stay.

*Power to the People* is our song  
for in the struggle to be equal  
we belong.

# Advocacy NOW!

In the future  
when it's fashionable to listen  
Everyone will have a voice –  
the disadvantaged, disillusioned  
All will have a voice

Not just to say what's wrong  
or could be better,  
but to celebrate what's good right now

In the future  
people won't be threatened by dissent.  
We'll welcome opposition to the status quo

In the future  
when all voices speak as one,  
we'll challenge the hegemony.  
We'll seek the truth that speaks its name  
regardless of authority or strength in numbers

In the future  
we'll drown out the volume,  
separate the essence from the noise

In the present  
we'll keep fighting for a future  
in which ALL shall have a voice



# Come All Ye Disabled

Disabled, proud, at one with who we are

Exquisitely unique  
and far too beautiful to hide our light from view

We're asking you to see us, put your prejudice on hold  
We've so much more to offer  
than a conduit for pity or the lazy lies you're sold

We've grown into a movement  
and we cannot be ignored  
We're a people steeped in progress  
Though we're squeezed into the margins of your mind  
we won't remain invisible, we won't be left behind

We've a history of resistance and a legacy to forge  
Such strides we've made already, yet more victories to score  
We're hanging to the rafters, and we're banging down the  
door  
You're going to let us in, we won't be sidelined anymore!

# Committed

To commemorate the passing of the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 which included the right of access to independent advocacy for all persons with a mental disorder

Stripped of pride and dignity  
we've struggled for this day  
The law to mandate patient power,  
our right to have a say

A long time in the coming  
Too soon to count the cost  
of sanity held ransom  
and the lives of friends we've lost

Tired of being overlooked  
Sick of being mad  
We're standing up for reason  
and the rights we've never had

The power of lock and key  
they've wielded, drugs and ECT,  
must now be balanced  
with the check of reciprocity

The principles enshrined in law  
our welfare to protect,  
and those to come who're subject to  
the judgement of this Act

We've advocated wisely,  
we're victors to the cause  
We've stood up to insanity  
and now WE'VE GOT A VOICE!

# Consultation and Involvement

We asked them to contribute  
and they cared enough  
to tell us what they thought.

They sought the simplest things:  
a place to be that held their dignity,  
support of self and family,  
fulfilling things to do,  
respect and being listened to.

We took their big ideas on board,  
took small steps forward to achieve  
what seemed impossible to us.  
Budget cuts, practical logistics,  
cultural resistance,  
all the barriers we faced along the way.

And then one day,  
a revolution happened in our thinking:  
let's take the consultation further,  
ask the people *how* they think we can  
achieve the changes that they want to see.

The answer came like manna from the gods.

They said:

“Involve us, Don’t just listen.  
Let us be the architects, the builders  
and the artists of our vision.  
Give us tools, resources,  
and the hope to realise our ambition.  
Don’t just talk to us,  
walk *with* us the road that leads to change”

We found that soon  
the labels *service users* and *providers*  
were redundant.  
We were partners now,  
working in pursuit of common goals.

# Respect

## *Respect*

Such a little word  
two syllables  
replete with meaning,  
infinite of possibility

I take the time to listen,  
get to know you,  
understand the shoes you walk in,  
all the miles you've travelled,  
the companions  
and the stumbling blocks  
you've met along the way

You take the time to tell me  
all the colours of your journey,  
how the meeting place of cultures  
didn't happen overnight

I am richer, wiser for your story  
so I listen with respect,  
come to know you as a friend,  
share with you my story  
till we grow  
in understanding of each other

Soon that little word *respect*  
becomes a way of life

# Wellbeing

## *Wellbeing*

What does it mean to you?

I guess

like me, you want a home to call your own,  
a garden full of friends to share it with,  
a street that's paved with riches of the soul

I guess

you want fulfilling work to do,  
leisure time to spend with loved ones,  
opportunities to push the boundaries of your world

I guess

like me, you need to feel accepted,  
recognised and valued as you are

I guess that near or far,

you need to feel that you belong

All this guessing

gets me wondering if it's time to ask you:

Am I right or wrong?

# Oor Mad History

We've archived the story  
for those to come  
who'll look back on achievements  
of those early pioneers  
whose efforts grew into a movement  
that continues to this day,  
and on and on into the future,  
shaping services, affirming our identity  
as experts by experience

Our history  
is written in the pages we've collected,  
in the words of those who played a part;  
recorded through their voices; depicted in their art  
It cannot be erased because it burns within our  
hearts

And if a time should come  
when hope runs dry in people power,  
we'll look back on our history  
and be inspired by what we've done

This is a story of courage and drive,  
though its roots are in the past  
its legacy is live

We've reclaimed the glory,  
the struggle to be free,  
we've taken up our places,  
This is OOR MAD HISTORY!



# Deaf Ears?

It's not impairment that disables me  
but lack of fair adjustment and support

It's not a miracle can cure me  
but a radical review of attitude and thought

# A Place of our Own

Under a banner called LGBT  
You'll find every colour, opinion and creed

Infinitesimal identities, each one unique  
Not packaged in boxes or counted as cliques

Multiple, assorted, diverse in our names  
Yet under one banner and proud all the same

# Last Word to the Poet

I'm sitting with a book of unknown poets  
Survivors of madness

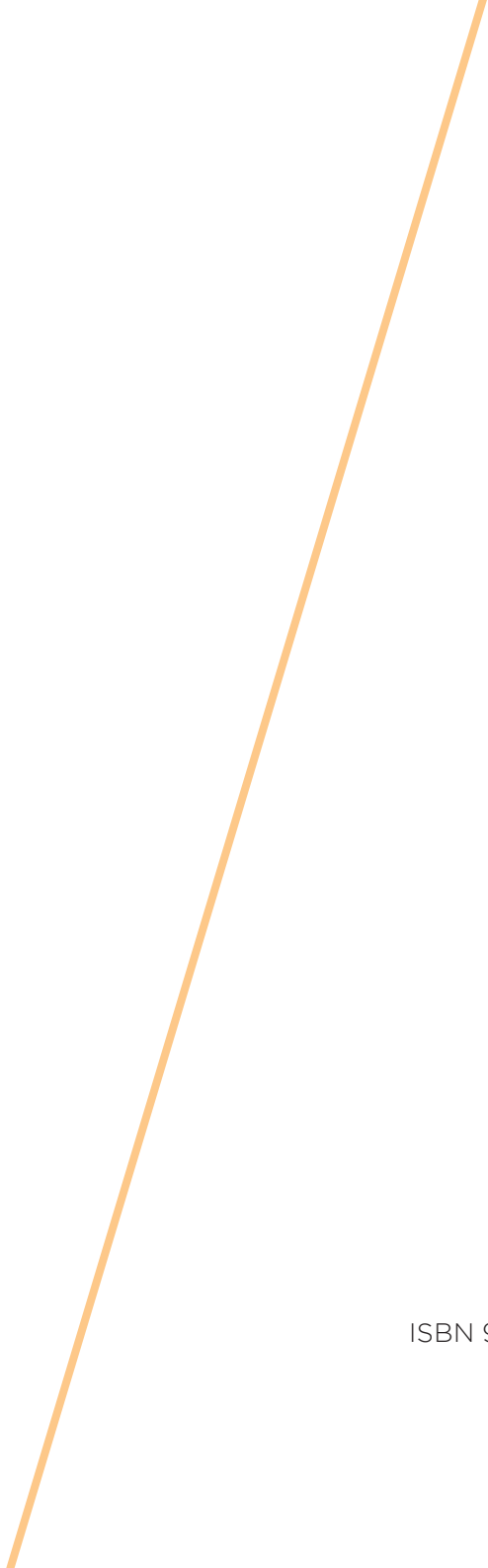
Their clarity of thought leaves me breathless  
Modern day seers  
in a world that badly needs their wisdom

Every poem grips me,  
so unusual for an anthology  
And I wonder is it because I am mad  
Has wisdom infected me?

Volcano of emotions channelled into verse  
I devour the pages wanting more and more  
  
till a poet called Bushy Kelly reminds me:

*Remember the silence  
At the end of a roar*





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