

It's a validation of the fact that the experience you are having is very hard. You write it, read it out, people respond, and you don't feel so isolated. One of the poets on the course then offered to be a mentor for me and with their help I'm now working towards publishing a collection in a few months' time.

What a journey! It's been the best therapy I've ever had and it's changed my relationship with my husband. I would come home from my course thinking my poems were rubbish but I would read what I'd written to him and he would cry and say, "I didn't know you felt like that – that's how I feel." For him to then come to the festival and be there as I read my poems was really empowering for both of us.

**I wanted the break that I had to help me find a way of being myself again. Did it do that?
Oh God yes, beyond my wildest dreams.**



Creative Writing

A pink pencil illustration with a white eraser at the top and a sharp lead tip at the bottom. The pencil is oriented horizontally and has the letters 'SW' written on its side.

Being in a caring role can really creep up on you. You don't realise that's what you've become and you can find out that you're no longer in the relationship you thought. When you realise that you're pissed off all the time, that's when you know there's been a total shift. I had got to a very low point.

My husband Keith has progressive MS so I was going through all my usual daily routine but now I was doing all of his stuff as well. That's what I mean about the caring role creeping up. You find that you are feeding them, maybe just a mouthful or two to start with but then it's all the time. Alongside that, as my children were growing up I was having to do more and more for them as Keith could do less and less.

Going away for a break wasn't an option. I would have been too concerned as Keith wouldn't have been able to do what was needed with the children. He can also fall a lot. But not only that, I didn't want to be on my own staring at a beach. I wanted to be in touch with myself and find my identity again.

Keith and I discussed how I could best use a grant and he encouraged me to do something with writing. It seemed to represent an opportunity for self-development – a chance to redefine myself which going away couldn't have achieved.

I think it was meant to be. I went online and there was a course running on six Sundays over six months. I would never have considered it without the grant but this fitted practically with life as we had friends who could help at weekends. I was also encouraged that the grant could even cover a taxi back from the course.

It meant that I could get home quickly and not be stressed about being away too long or rely too much on friends who had their own commitments. That's a little practical detail but that level of extra support was really significant for me.

To start with at the class I was really apologetic about what I'd written. The other people all seemed like established accomplished poets. But their responses were always very rewarding and that was massive for me. I was writing about my feelings about my situation and I found that I'd been given a voice for what I was going through. I had thought that this wasn't relevant but when I put it into a poem and people responded to it I found it had universality.

After a few months I was asked if I would read some of my poems in a festival. Suddenly I was in the public sphere reading what I had written and that added another dimension.