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Live encounters

YOUNG POETS & WRITERS

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EILEEN CASEY
Having a BLAST
*Bringing Live Arts
to Secondary School Teachers*

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



Sunset, Nong Khiaw, Laos, photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Live Encounters Magazine (2010), Live Encounters Poetry & Writing (2016), Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers (2019) and now, Live Encounters Books (August 2020).

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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Originally from the Midlands, based in South Dublin, Casey's poetry is widely published in anthologies by *Dedalus*, *New Island*, *Faber & Faber*, *The Nordic Irish Studies Journal*, *Jelly Bucket* (USA), *Orbis* (UK), *PigHog Press*, *Abridged*, *The Ulster Tatler Literary Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, among others. Poetry awards include: The Oliver Goldsmith International Poetry Prize, The Hannah Greally Award (Roscommon Libraries), and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship, among others. Runner up in Poetry Ireland, Trocaire Poetry Competition, 2018. Shortlisted in 2022 Irish Times National Poetry Award. Also received an Arts Council Agility Award, 2021 and a Heinrich Boll residency (Archill Island). She is a regular contributor to poetry journals and magazines. 'Bog Treasure' (Arlen House), her sixth poetry collection formed part of an exhibition 'The Strange Case of The Irish Elk' in collaboration with Canadian Sculptor, Curator, and Anthropologist Jeanne Cannizzo. Supported by an Arts Council Project Development Award, the exhibition went on show in Vancouver (BC) in September, 2021. 'Treasure', a short film featuring Casey's bog poetry and the photography of County Offaly Photographer Tina Claffey was commissioned by Offaly Arts, for Culture Night, 2021. 'Bogmen First and Last' (Fiery Arrow Press poetry) received a Creative Ireland Award, 2021. Casey's previous collections published by New Island, Arlen House, AltEnts, Rua Red Art Gallery.

EILEEN CASEY HAVING A BLAST *Bringing Live Arts to Secondary School Teachers*

It is indeed a little daunting being faced with a group of young teenagers. Generations apart in age from them, yet at core, my inner child just as lively and willing to be playful. I make no bones in saying that exploring the children's section in bookshops and toy stores is not beneath me. Theirs is a world of magical transformations, colour and curiosity. At this stage of my life I've no intention of going 'gentle into that good night' of 'jaded' sensibility. No, I'm happy to report, far from it. There's nothing I like better than creating from clay, paints, pieces of fabric, pipe-cleaners (brightly coloured) and much more. It's a mighty Empire this. Built from the bricks and mortar of childhood energies, the 'innocence' pre the Blakean 'experience' and then the combination of both. Balance.

But being faced with a group of young men and women who have little or no experience of poetry is a challenge. Fortunately, I have enough poetic passion to circle the globe. Years of writing and teaching equips me to meet this challenge plus my constant interest in how language works, how it can create its own special form of magic. Language makes magicians of each and everyone. But it's no harm preparing triggers and prompts, word games and puzzle solvers. Like the snake charmer with his basket, I want to lure poetic creatures from sleepy coverts, to uncoil out into a smooth, clean line. Regardless of age, gender, culture.

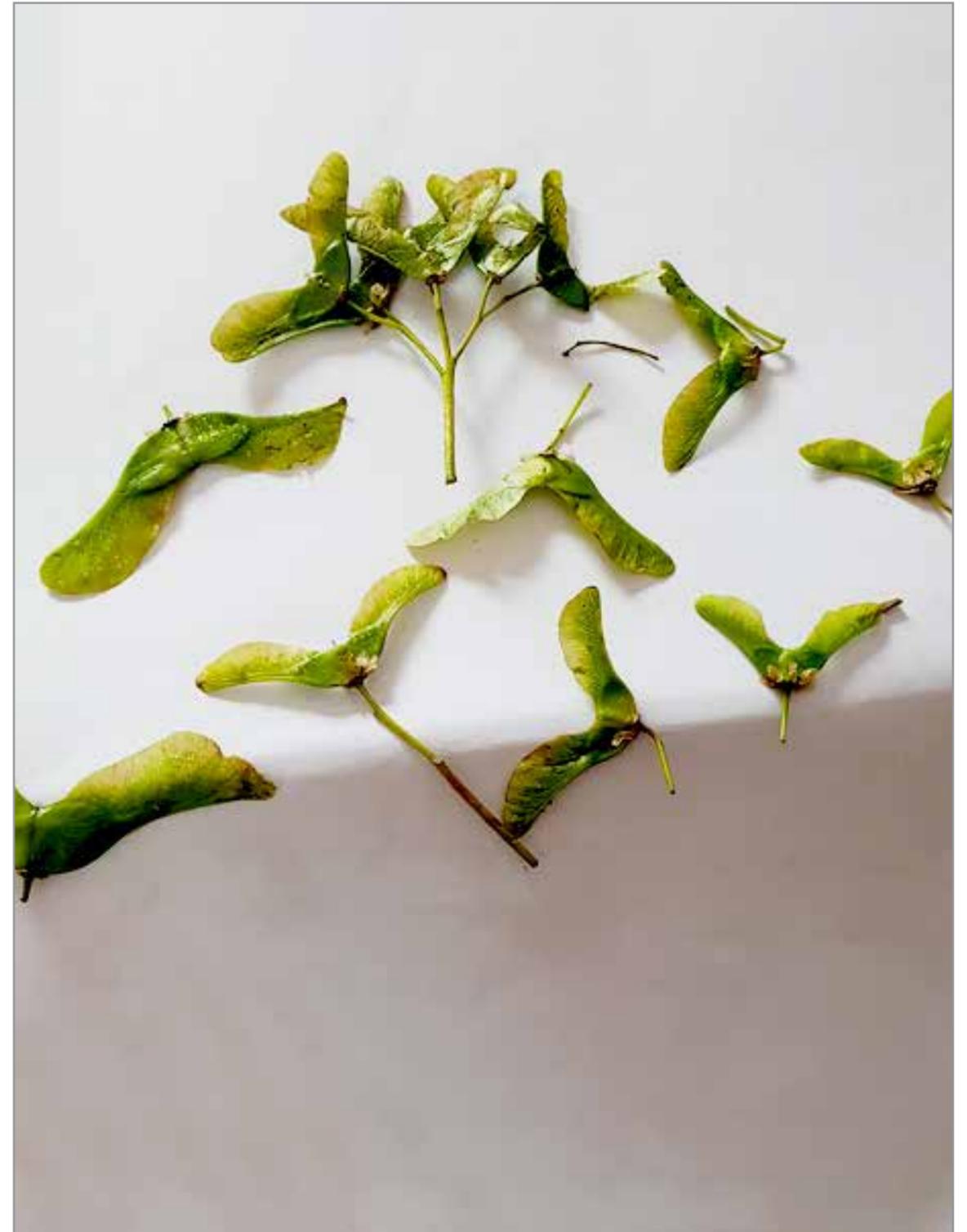
Eriú Community College is a brand-new educational establishment. Located in Dublin 15, it's named for the Goddess Eriú, from whom Ireland (Éire) gets her name. Over the following weeks, we read, wrote, collaborated and some of us even 'ate a star' and showed us how to. Structuring a poem is half the battle. Poetry Ireland's 'Written in the Stars' poetry day 2022 theme, ensured we took a close look at the heavens, at nebula star nurseries, shaping and naming constellations, playing 'what if' with our imaginations. But first things first.

Eileen Casey

In the words of Yeats; 'A symbol is indeed the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame'. One of the first activities we engaged in was to begin the creation of a personal crest, based on our name. Eileen, means 'Bringer of Light' so to symbolise this meaning, I created a crest which had candles to represent light. Also, a story unfolded; as is the way with all generators of narratives, drama and resolution. Myths, Legends and Fairy Tales being the overarching subject of our sessions, it was necessary to create a story themed around 'balance', a world where sunlight and darkness could co-exist. Therefore, in the great battle between these two female forces (yes, in my narrative, they were powerful females), a catalyst needed to be invented. During the first session, each student received a tree card and a bird card to feature in their own story. My tree was the Sycamore and my bird, the sparrow (the bird representing forgiveness). And so, an explanation for balance and the necessity for same came from such humble story beginnings. The Sycamore is closely associated with Egyptian myth and is said to represent a reaching out and a burrowing down. Deep roots delve as far as the underworld while healthy, leafy branches hold up the skies.

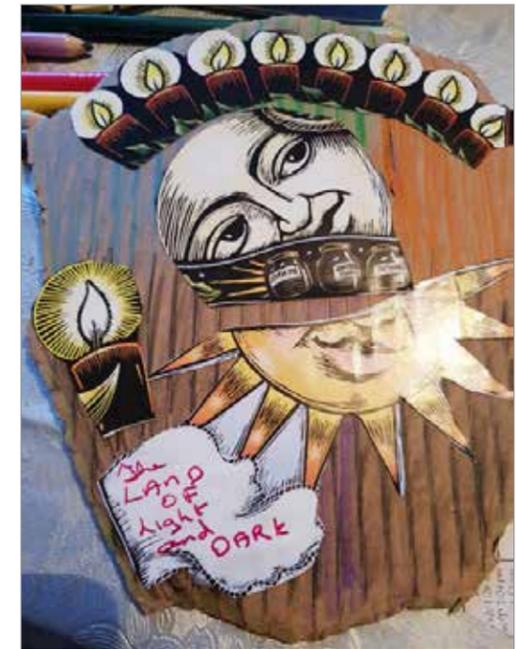
As luck would have it, during our sessions, the Sycamore shed its tiny helicopters all over our neighbourhoods. At home, I held some leaves to the light and photographed them. Translucence/luminosity became the words of that particular session. Sycamore leaves are glossy yet delicate. Shaped like hands, we looked at similarities between objects and shape and how this translates to poetry i.e. length of line, syllabic count, the long and the short of it. Hands drawn on a sheet of paper provided five lines but also an antler shaped poem and a particular poem too, the cinquain (2/4/6/8/2 syllables).

We looked at various forms; Haiku, taking snapshots through language. American poet Robert Frost once said that writing without form is like playing tennis with the nets down. Having a map is a way forward, a blueprint. But these young men and women were new to poetry writing and were recharging their poetry batteries, a very important part of the process. Technology is a good thing. We all agree on that. However, I couldn't help thinking back to myself at their age. My hunger for books and reading was insatiable. The sight of my own handwriting on a page gave me such pleasure. But it's a different age now I remind myself.



Sycamore tree seeds. Photograph by Eileen Casey.

Bringer of Light Crest. Photograph by Eileen Casey.



Everything wasn't rosy in my childhood education garden either. Wonderful nuts and bolts (for which I'm ever grateful) but no art. No creative time to play with colour, to capture a night sky or a new dawn. And here I was, in Eriú, in a beautiful state of the art creative space, complete with piano. Darren, the Art Teacher did Trojan work with the individual crests outside of the sessions. A huge amount of work went into them.

Word games proved popular. I looked to Old Norse and Old English poetry. Kennings. A figure of speech where two words are combined in order to form a poetic expression; Couch-potato (lazy person), tree-dweller (bird), book-worm (reader). Smaller groups were made and we kenninged to our hearts content, one side of the room having to guess what the particular kenning referred to. Different coloured dice also generated excitement i.e. roll the green dice, whatever number it fell on i.e. six...so, a six letter 'green' word...i.e. leaves. And so on, with red, blue, orange...indeed, any colour you wish. I just happen to have these coloured dice.

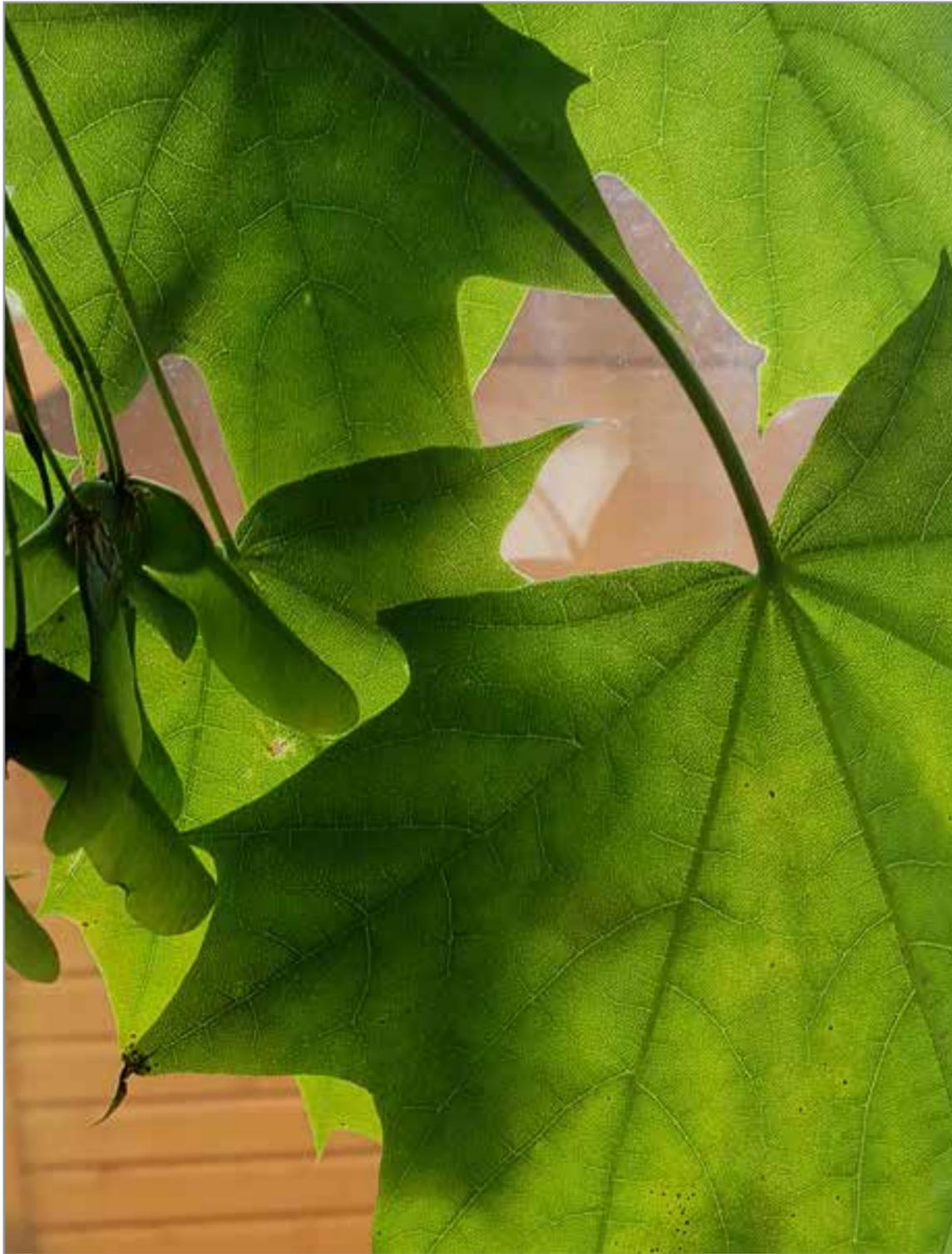
'Devilish Dilemmas' proved intriguing...making choices between one superpower or another (having a photographic memory v becoming invisible for a day). Having choice in the first place is liberating as is the ability to create whatever universe desired completely from language. That's a heady prospect. Above all, I wanted to go back to the traditional pen/paper, the connection between these ordinary tools and the thinking process. Flexing the writing muscle is every bit as important as feeding the creative mind. The fantastical is not possible without the humble pen/pencil, sheet of clean paper. Oh yes, text can be typed onto the screen but that's not such a great idea when writing poetry. The screen fools you into thinking the poem is complete. On a basic level, it's lovely to look at the drafting process, those crossed out words, small errors which prove gateways to discoveries. As Joyce noted, mistakes are the portals to new discoveries. 'Mistakes' while writing poetry are actually very crucial stepping stones. There's a few lovely photographs included here of handwritten work and yes, work crossed out...lovely.

Being mindful of nature is achievable. Seasons, weather, taking time out to 'chill' with trees, to watch a bird building its nest. I spoke about a sighting I'd had in my own neighbourhood recently, how a crow tested a twig, working it through his beak from beginning to end, making sure it was strong from beginning to end.

Everything is connected in this world, from the obvious to the bizarre. The world will never let us down, always giving us surprise, shock, delight, anger but never, ever boring. We talked about the arrival of swallows, their heroic journey across 10,000 miles from Africa. How sometimes they lose their way, that familiar landmarks that signposted their journey disappear, causing them distress. My husband John comes from Muckcross, County Killarney. He grew up in a converted stable on the Muckcross Estate and when our children were small, we spent our holidays there. Years later, when that house was being refurbished we visited again, seeing a dead swallow on the remnants of a tiled floor once so dear to us. She had lost her way because the 'map' of her surroundings had changed. We discussed maps, the reverence of place names, how maps orientate us and keep alive places and settings, mountains and rivers we visit. And that's it's always better to be specific rather than vague when using place names in a poem.

We looked at the heavens, mother earth and under the sea. Poseidon and mermaids. We invented a mermaid narrative, whereby Mermaid Pearl wanted to be a dragon and so, she stole the fiery colours from coral. Teacher Valerie, showed some gorgeous images of coral which brought the session alive. Coral and Nebula were strikingly similar. Ocean and sky. We wrote a poem about climate change and how our actions can sometimes cause damage but that we can still aspire to be something that seems unattainable ...just to achieve it in a sustainable, respectful way.

Part of the structure of the session was to demonstrate the value of women warriors, women from myth, legend and fairytale and 'ordinary' women alive today, contributing enormously to science, literature, medicine, sport and art. They are many. The world of animals and their place in narrative was explored. The story of the Cú bird (from Mexico) highlighted how vanity can be our downfall, the white horse that carried Oísin to Tir na Nóg. Werewolves, kelpies, dragons, unicorns, the backbone of the fantastical. Irish mythology, legend and fairy tale is both familiar and yet, unique. There are similarities and cultural differences in other such narratives but at their heart, there are common threads which unite us. My thanks to Eriú for their always warm welcome and to Darren, Valerie, Helen and Siubhan who made everything so pleasant and achievable. Thanks to Michael, headmaster of Eriú, there is much to be proud of.



IN A FIELD OF JOY

The Sycamore Tree stands tall and free
dancing in the wind.
Swaying side to side
in a blanket of green.
The Sycamore Tree.

Branches spiral through the leaves,
motioning a wave,
wind flows,
leaves fall,
gold.
Covering the ground,
Sycamore Tree.

This tall tree
now bare,
stands in the wind.
Sycamore Tree.

Sycamore leaves. Photograph by Eileen Casey.

INSPIRATION

I thought that I would never see a tree that's still as me.

A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed
against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day and lifts her leafy arms to pray.

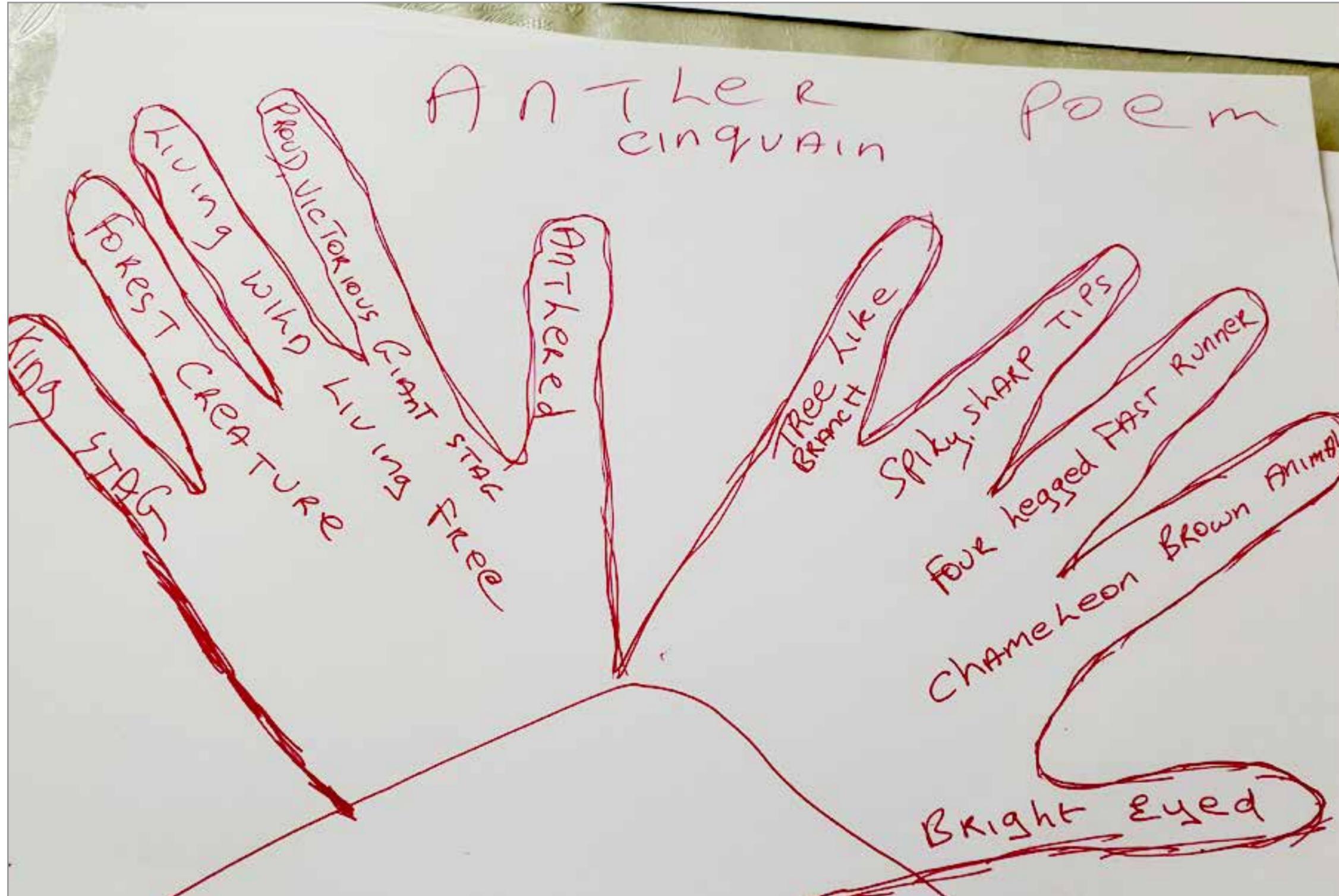
A tree that may in summer wear
a nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

PRESENCE

The name comes from British Isles.
Its puffy exterior but soft interior.
Large broad-leaved
tree grows very fast in the day
and dark, warm and cold, snow
and thunder, its beautiful round
shape gives it that perfect
touch, the camouflage
pattern makes it invisible
to some. Presence felt.



Photograph by Eileen Casey.

HAIKU

Starry stalky sway.
Grow. Strobe filter forest green.
Nature's vibrant tone.

PATTERNS

It grows, shows beauty of colour, pattern, leaf.
Of benefit to all.
Strength.
Even when leaves fall.
They always return.

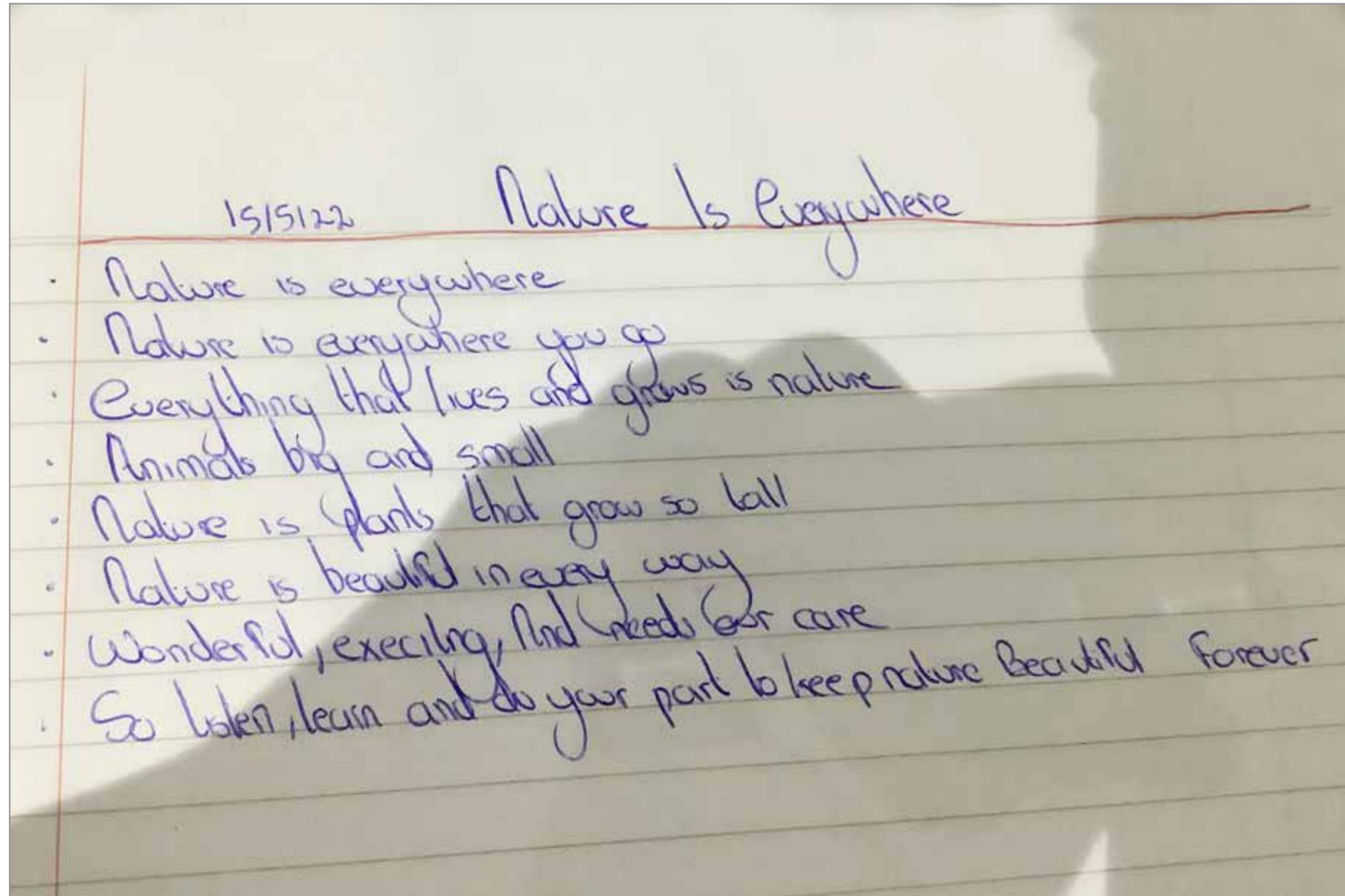
AGEING BEAUTY

Sycamore trees sit under the sunlight
And feed on the rain.
They glisten under the moonlight,
can help get your mood right.
Leaves come down in ringlets;
An easing on the soul.

The satisfaction it brings you
Completes you, makes you whole
The sycamore's life span
Makes it grow mighty and old

WARNING

There once stood the tree
Sycamore strong
Bright and bold
Green leaves on grass
Sweet gold. Aroma
With a taste of spring.



Photograph by Eileen Casey.

EARTH AND SKY

The tree with bright green leaves
Grows from youth to adulthood
Reveals its beautiful colour, pattern.
This tree brings life with every leaf,
A tree that represents strength.
Is generosity to earth and sky.

SHADES

Colours of autumn have fallen.
The ground is covered with shades of brown.
I am a sycamore most regal and proud.
My branches are so high I can touch a cloud.

I have contrast and balanced leaves that don't deceive.
Oh so spiny and spiky they are don't worry
they won't cause a scar.
My leaves are so peaceful calm and relaxing.

When the wind blows they act like they are dancing.
They are porous and translucent and are trés amusánt.
Nothing's better to listen to them crunch
when they are in a bunch.
It is like nature's paper.

Ta siad go halainn ar fad.
Feicfidh me go luath thú.

FADE OUT

As the time flies and autumn roams by
Sycamore trees grow and leaves fall.
In shades of gold, brown and red
they paint the floor.

Leaves coat the ground in a giant blanket and more.
As I look up to the sky I can see how this tree
stretch es out.
I can see how the different branches are bent to be.

When winter comes, it will be so draining,
Colour of leaves no longer remaining.



Photograph courtesy <https://pixabay.com/es/photos/sicomoro-hoja-mano-hoja-de-naranja-5758388/>.

APOCALYPSE

Big and beautiful, strong and healthy.
If we keep going the way we are
Mother Nature will not go far.

We are doing bad for the trees
but if we don't stop, we are done.
The world will end,
and no one left

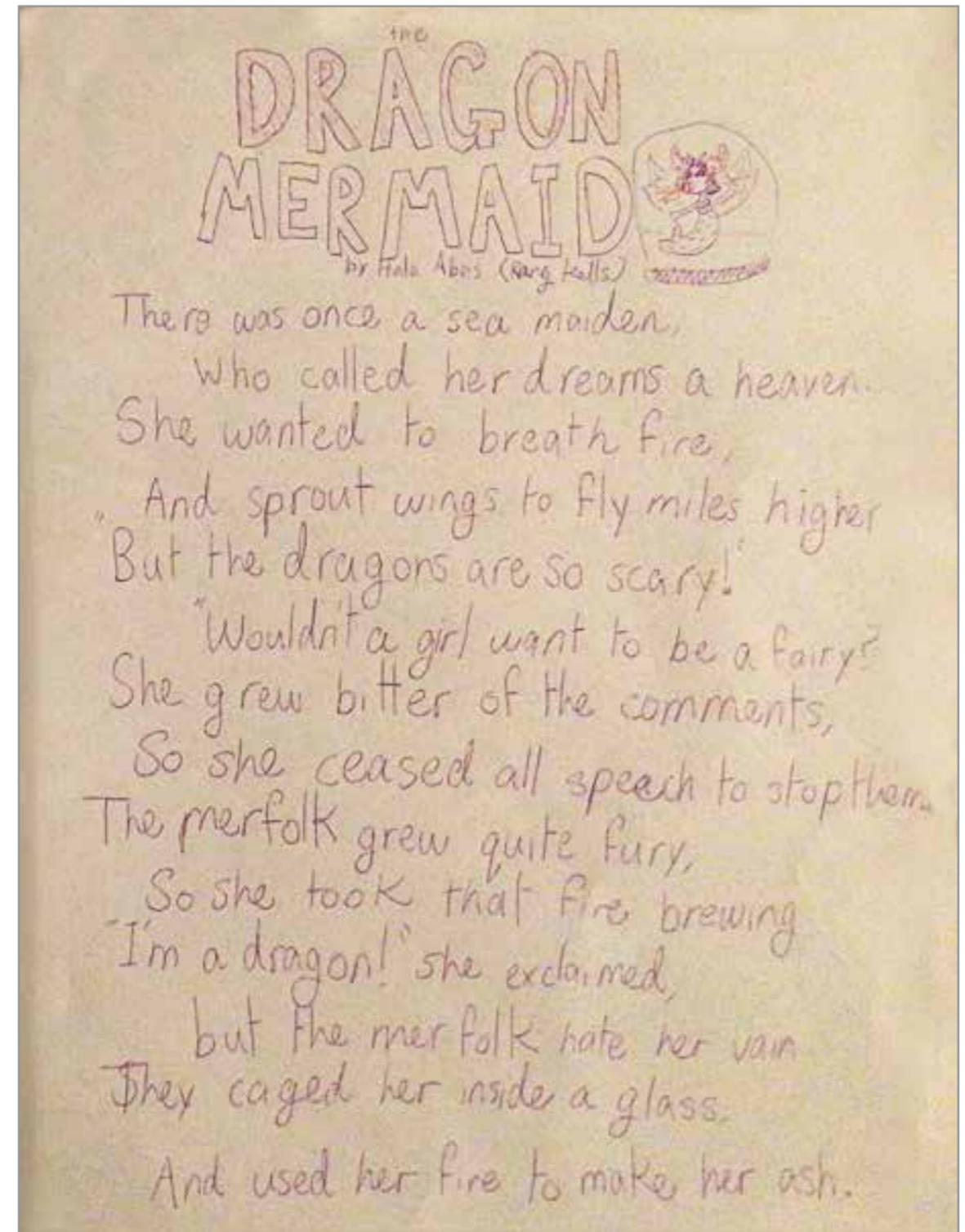
PROTECTION

Sycamore tree stretching ever taller
into the clouds
opening its arms around the world
'cause it's great strength
can protect us all.

DRAGON SELKIE AND PEARL'S SACRIFICE

Ten fathoms deep
 She longed to breathe fire
 So thieved colour from the velvet coral
 Vermilion, scarlet
 Drained coral to ash.

Poseidon bleached her greedy heart
 Beluga bubbled her until
 Coral hues restored again.

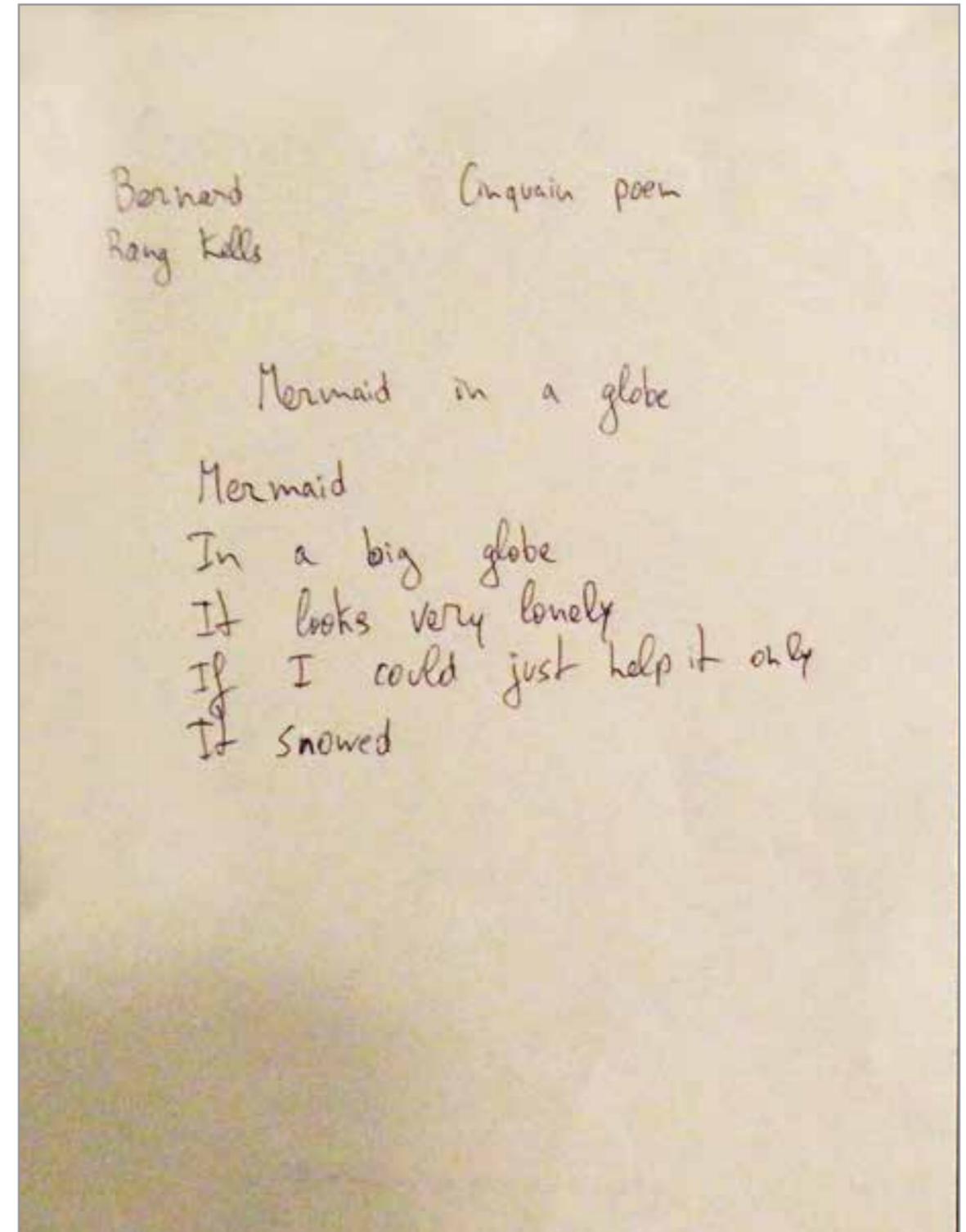


Photograph by Eileen Casey.

PEARL'S SACRIFICE

Innocent? – Guilty?

Twenty leagues down,
A quarrel over coral divides
Two sisters. Pearl, luminous
As stars, dimmed by siren songs;
Took the blame. Quenched
Coral fires. Condemned her
To shadow realms
Until the scales
Righted once again.



Bernard
Bang Kells

Cinquain poem

Mermaid in a globe

Mermaid

In a big globe
It looks very lonely
If I could just help it only
It snowed

Photograph by Eileen Casey.

STARS

Shooting across the night sky
Orbiting the cheesy moon
Twinkling like little fairies.
Stars.

The star is a cheese
It has a pair of knees.
It also lets out a sneeze
Whenever it goes near leaves.
You break the edgy corners
The world will end in torture.
We have to go and warn her.
That someone's going to eat her.

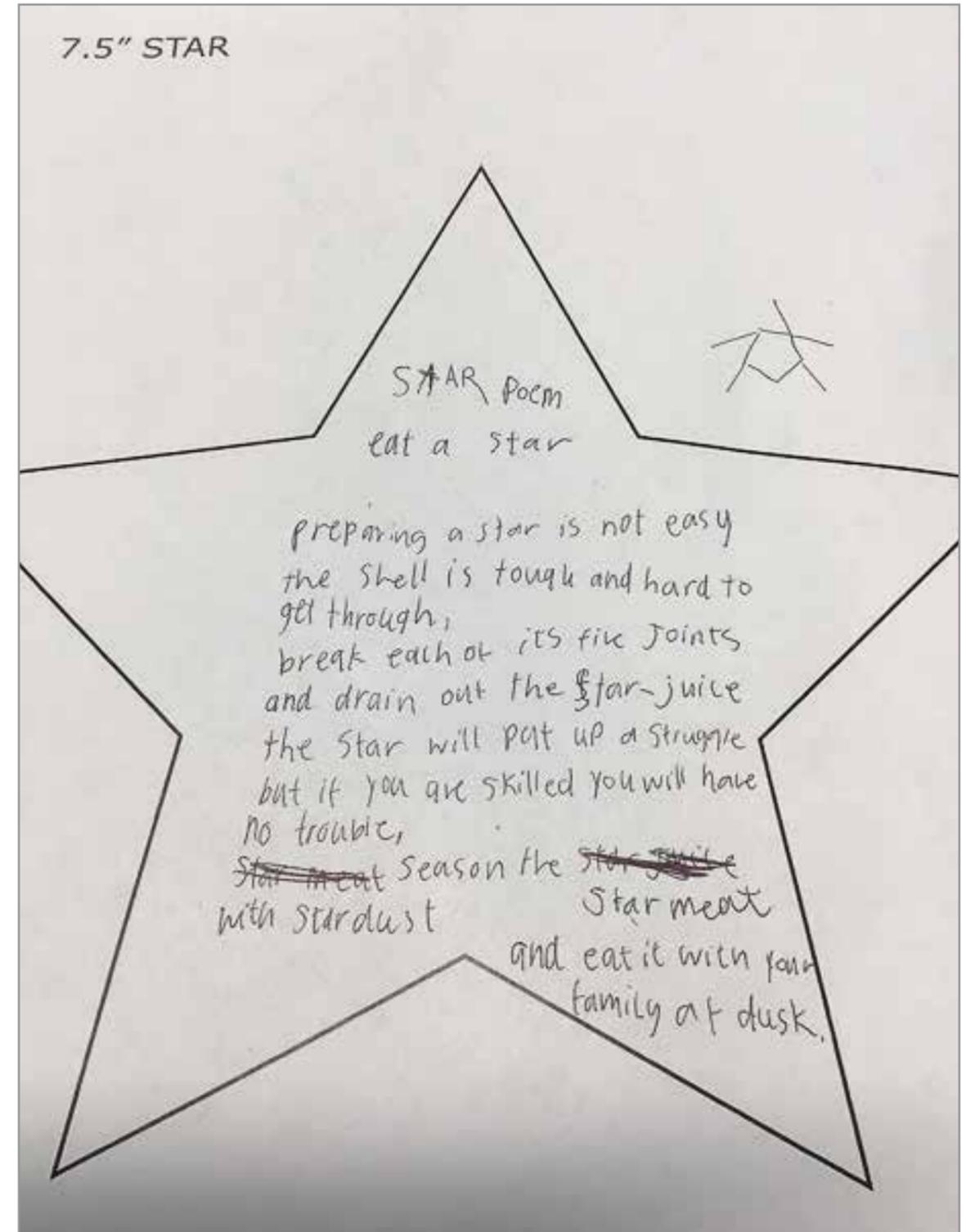
High in the sky
Looking like star pie
Shiny as tinsel
Twisting like a pencil
Orbiting the moon
Flying like a balloon
While writing this tune.

Greetings from up high
From the lanterns of the sky
As they dawn upon thee.
The effect of lavender tea
Nature's guide oh so high
But at last
Not everything lasts
What impacts these around
Will explode
Without a sound.

continued overleaf..

STARS

A star in the sky
 Waiting to die
 Like the love in my heart
 That feels like a lie.
 It rests all alone
 Waiting for a home.
 I can relate
 I just want a date.



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