



TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | <https://textjournal.scholasticahq.com/>

Independent Scholar

Kristian Patruno

Poems

Abstract

In these poems Kristian Patruno confessionally narrates autobiographical events which deal with the issues of extreme drug use, homelessness, and poor socio-economic conditions. “Coastal Drowning” narrates how swamped by myriad personal family and health issues a young (or any) person drowns in the extremities of circumstance. “Wildfire” narrates the extremities of heroin addiction and the complexities of a co-dependant relationship therein, while giving voice to the human cost of, and testament to, the will to survive drug addiction. “Slaughter House” also narrates extreme drug abuse occasioning homelessness and other extremities arising from such. Together these poems narrate in a confessional mode the extreme taboos of poverty and drug addiction. The power inherent in these poems underlines the power of poetry as testimony/witness to traumas such experiences purvey. They also give testament to the strength of human will to survive.

Biographical note:

Kristian Patruno is a poet who recognises the unceded lands of all Indigenous nations of the land colonisers call Australia. Patruno’s works have appeared in *Westerly*, *Rabbit*, *Southerly*, *Otoliths*, *Australian Poetry Journal* and *Cordite*. Additionally, Patruno’s visual poetry was exhibited in *POETRY* an exhibition of text-based works that bear a formal relationship to the space they occupy (George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne Australia). Patruno is currently completing an MA of Writing and Literature at Deakin University.

Keywords:

Confessional, poetry

Coastal Drowning

—*Port Macquarie 1986-92*—

Surfers rode dreams of being sponsored like Slater;
their girlfriends ornate shells a on beach | in surf-brand bikinis & shades.

A cinder-brown granny sunbaked, beyond lifesaving
flags | drooping like her haversack-saggy-skin.

A hermit parked his caravan on Crown-land,
built a lookout around it | of ocean views.

He cut a track from it | down through
the broccoli canopied forests to *Shellie Beach*;

Where no dogs were allowed off lead,
so the council sought to evict him; like

All the raw beauty of the next beach
south—where nudists hung out.

On the headland beyond
a lighthouse | warned

of an Irish lad with a Celtic guitar
who I wagged school with.

We sung songs in a tidal cave |
viewed waves running closer to

high-tide | I charted a course of hard drugs;
knowing “explorers” had drowned in that cave—

from a colonial memorial on the headland above;
where I’d picnicked with an alcoholic step-uncle &

his failed, rhinestone singer girlfriend; who my
brother’s abusive dad pummelled me out to karaoke with.

My McDonald’s shift manger mum
swore at my junkfood grades; while

she wage-slaved for ~~happy~~ happier meals | than

our rental from a church-charity /

townhouse | backfenced by pissheads, revving
burnouts on tyreless rims of a Kawasaki.

Up the road, glue-sniffer punks
spraypainted their dog called, *Green Head Butt*.

A coastline of waves
drowned

explorers | scoring down town
in handshakes

with *the* dude, or dude who knew *the* dude,
selling me baggy's | stashed down socks & pants—

ever aware of cops searching hot-
rods parked round the kebab shop &

Main Street GPO:
two bullet holes in its glass | facing

the Tourist Information Centre
that never spoke of tidal caves & the drowned

preferring colonial histories |
of town's free settlers as apposed to

blind convicts | leg-ironed
& set dancing

to amuse the colony Commandant;
like dolphins jumping hoops for *King Neptune-*

Aquatic Park | that'd
stood by the breakwall

till toppled | like town's annual record of
highest single-mum rates in the State;

while my sister bought home feral cats,
& catholics condemned condoms /

my first holy communion with
the inferno flames

of a redheaded Britt
touring the Commonwealth

of our bodies;
Her snow white tits like *Fantasy*

Glades | attraction park
built by a local dwarf, crushed by the giant

premiums of public liability insurance;
paid to protect from bankrupting-

injuries, like razor blades
bubble-gum-stuck onto waterslides

of the now defunct *Peppermint Park*.
All that blood in the water |

like sharks
circling the island I canoed, with

that kid who died of cancer
that kid who died of cancer.

That kid who died,

run over by her school bus
near the old well, where tourists tossed

coins in. Keating's recession /
at the dole office with mum;

a man picked his nose with every digit for food
while my stepdad fingered a new bird interstate.

Mum's motelier new-boyfriend served me
love as burnt fish-fingers & a storeroom's folding bed;

whereon I dreamt of eyes so dialled
on Datura | two locals went permanently blind.

I woke up & stole some tourist's
Reeboks to get high in my Volleys,

as torn & worn thin as anorexic
Vanessa. A school chum of my bulimic sister

who mum took in | as a daughter
off the streets of hooking-

cousins | shooting smack in Sydney
to escape molestations of her dad.

Vanessa bought home holidaying
Maroubra boys, who loved

porn flicks | ever flicking
surfy fringes from their faces, to better leer at

classes of school girls undergoing examinations
on the backseat of their Kingswood.

Until local surfies had had enough of
being dropped in on | so

at a beach party | in front of the round firepit
of bong cones

bottles were chucked
at the Kingswood—shattering

home the mob's violence | mid
screams of "*Fuck the fuck off!*"

Cops charged in
black army boots | shining

torches that doubled as battens | beating
light in my wasteoid face.

The kid beside me (first answering their questions)
taught me 'don't give your real name'.

He died a year later when the car he stole crashed a tree | around
the same time I stole street signs from a forest /

popped travel-sick pills & hallucinated
my ancestors | disappearing

—like family truths of the girl who never knew
her father suicided in the car of her garage.

Outside town's historic cemetery, a
garden of marigolds | pruned to spell town's name;

but no letters marked the grave I sat on
toking spliffs with Matt;

who gave me magic mushies
to see corals in a poorman's aquarium.

We'd bunked the school carnival /
forgetting I was sports-vice captain:

because I could run;
I could run alright.

I just couldn't
wms

Wildfire *{for Yvette}*

Sometimes fire is so beautiful it draws you
to touch it | as if you'd not burn.

Like I touched you | after your puppeteer
apprenticeship fell through.

But you still strung me along
to my first hit of | Smack—

At a derelict build site | You
hid our flame | under a spoon | until

You'd fucked three chicks |
scratched me crabs & your itch

For dealers: The Dream Killers
drummer | who sold us hits | &

That GP (Dr. Death) who
scrawled scripts | nodding off—

Discarded needles | ashtrayed on his desk;
patients in ripped chairs by the door.

At another clinic | a tranny couldn't hide a man |
her bad wig of a plan | for fleeing reality—

Like we'd planned | to visit your potter | parents
smashed | on a distant coast—since

You pawned that 21st gift (they'd given).
You swore you never would | like

That hooker swore she'd never trick | & that
girl, who stole the share-house rent, swore too.

Even I, in your pyjama striped hippy-
pants | my cock fell out | pawned all | to cash

At the dodgy dealer chicken shop |
that sold salmonella | claimed 13 lives—

All those chicken boney kids
puckered-up for another kiss | of

Matches struck so strikingly
—I couldn't help but touch.

Matches | your friend hung himself on | &
Dwayne leapt in front of a train to quit himself

Of | Balloons 9yr olds dealt | in
a Tarago by Cabramatta station;

Too young for cops to bust | despite
their badge-hearts longing to cuff

Whatever dealer-fuck | shot-up
those kiddies' childhoods.

Like a puppeteer strung along that
boy | who'd hitched weed from east to west coast,

But'd never seen stones as heavy as those
ringing the 'fuck-me' flames of your

Eyes | forked tongues | licking out at me
to touch: like sex addiction | to finger

Pyromania | In an abandoned | fire-
station—your squat | Where you dreamt

Your hocked photography equipment | would
someday shoot your city better | than

Needles | If you survived those needles,
survived those needles | & *those* needles;

Then remember the promise we made |
peaking over the locked fences of others:

That our hopes would someday
find a yard to live in.

For where fires razed forests | see
rising up | from the blackest black ashes;

New life | greens
a lawn!

Slaughter House

There was a punk band rehearsing upstairs in the lounge
and a meth lab cooking down stairs.

The parents away in Europe had left
the house to their methadone clinic daughter.

She'd filled their suburban castle with needles and all-night junkies;
ammonia from a flask steamed off amphetamines in the backyard.

All those hours chasing flu pills to boil up to meth,
to run out

into cow paddocks in the morning, collecting magic mushrooms
and nearly a bullet

from just-released crims who'd a car load of stolen cigarettes
from their b&e last night.

One'd rolled the streets with Sheldon, so didn't shoot—
as long as we left their shrooms /

hung with them at Highgate Hill | at a flat
loaded with stolen goods.

The cops stormed the frontdoor,
They fled out the back /

Cops shook 'em down like a K-9
officer | the other night pulled four of us over

in our three seater ute, where I hid under a jacket on the floor.
A box of fits spiked under me, the cop's torch needling over me.

Perhaps it was his exhausted heart that saved me for my bright future
of waking, wishing I was dead instead of suffering another tonne-weight day of addiction

trying to sell meth, to fund getting
from Brisbane to W.A. to rip off a dope crop,

so mixed up and running jet fuelled / ditching home
to sleep streets from esplanade palms of the tropics to

dead tree stands of BarrenBox swamp;
in Griffith, where I sweated irrigation ditches

—channeled from the Murrumbidgee's arm
of the Snowy River's ~~damming~~ damning—

for a district of vine growers and orchidists profiting
from schemes of the Federal Government and Robert Trimbole,

who murdered, on hiring
hitmen from Melbourne, to ensure mafioso

dope crops / to stake himself
a baron in the heroin trade.

There, a hooker friend of mine gave me head for
free (on fleeing her Kings Cross hubby

with a kid) because I was her age,
too young

to fight Dibbo, the neck tattooed con
who'd skipped parole interstate to live

on the same muddy showground-cum-campsite as me:
where Turkish onion pickers seasonally resided.

My communal fire-place attracted
bikers, and a reformed Satanist, who'd looked in a mirror reciting prayers backward,

and swore he was done with chicken blood rituals, despite the red flames tattooed up his arm,
and his caravan of hungry kids, living closest trailer to the pub /

nearest side of camp to Dibbo—drinking rum and black
-eyeing me for stealing his girl, when I'd complained that he'd stolen mine.

Later the Turks confronted him for being pissed, as
entering the womens' toilets (& laughing at hijabs).

Twenty devout husbands, seeking vengeance for
Allah, chased him with battens

across a field. Where the night before a scream was heard

by the river. After the police copped my stoned friend for drink driving,

I watched a deal go down: four cars / doors synchronously opened /
one passenger from each crossed to doors of another / a diagonal linedance / re-crisscrossing.

The detective's car, and two others, drove straight to town,
while the panel beaten forth bent for the highway.

But I hadn't slept
for 3 days on a pill I was given—

all the firewood disappeared as I collected it.
Also my girlfriend of six months.

Hungry together, we'd been fed
by a Torres Strait Islander who'd smuggled us into his uni dorm

explaining his land left no one wanting—
he'd an ear to the door to avoid campus cops.

In his charity we breakfasted, then left
to get Youth Homeless benefits. But they didn't pay me

for months. Returning from the Salvation Army with bread,
I heard some drunk rampaging our camp,

beneath the shear cliff of Townsville's Castle Hill—
with its huge stickman-saint graffitied over the city

like a Hollywood sign landmarking
where we, thin figured kids, marked rocks as our homes.

So we re-entered the city to sleep, atop a concrete substation,
seven feet above the street, fifteen storeys below the Hilton;

whose patrons' tropical views we spoilt,
curled and freezing beneath its shadow,

in onshore gusts of no blanket /
no parents, no food, no money,

no smokes. We picked up butts from the mall and re-rolled them into dreams:
that our life was a big adventure we'd one day tell our kids about.

For if you've ever gone bush,
you'll either turn butcher, or vegetarian—remembering the knife /

warm sheep between knees / blood splaying its throat /
snap its neck back / hack its spine as it kicks—thrashing / head-severed from life.

For off my head literally meant bodily hooked in a slaughter house
(of delirium, auditory hallucinations, and paranoia) where

I was strung-up for nights;
a plank of four-by-two ready to strike attackers,

knowing the hills were live with them;
everyone I knew—in on it!

But if I just manage to club the first / although the horde will still slay
me / at least I'll have proved I can stand.

So to have something to re-stand from, I stood
waiting for the onslaught that never came—

It came later, when I was too head splayed (agoraphobic and anxious)
to look anyone in the eye, or order thoughts straight to speak.

While school friends threw graduation BBQ's
(from weed to party drugs)

I graduated the streets vegetarian
having witnessed how butchers sell the eyes of lambs.