

MANCHESTER

PSORIASIS

SHOUT OUT®

The Poetry
Collection



I have psoriasis – I don't "suffer from" it
I live with psoriasis I'm not a "victim" of it
I am a psoriasis patient not a psoriasis sufferer

by Salford Psoriasis Support Group

Manchester Psoriasis Poetry Shout Out

Psoriasis is a chronic inflammatory skin disease which affects around 2 million people in the UK. Although characterised by red, scaling patches of skin, living with psoriasis can have a profound psychological and social impact. Individual's may feel 'on display' or that they have to approach life in a different way from other people.

As part of the Manchester Psoriasis Shout Out 2014 we asked people to share their experiences of psoriasis, living with a visible skin condition or feeling different. The result was this collection of poems.

Some are written by professional poets, others by complete novices. We believe all are thought provoking.

Thank you to the contributors who made this booklet possible.

The first Manchester Psoriasis Shout Out was held in April 2014 and aimed to raise awareness of the autoimmune condition psoriasis. For more information visit the Manchester Psoriasis Shout Out website: **www.psoriasisshoutout.co.uk**

All poems are owned by individual authors.

We are the Psoriasis Warriors

Char March

I am capable of making my skin erupt
volcanoes of plaques that spout pain,
my scalp is a fabulous hat of itch,
my testicles great balls of fire!

You live in a cold world of perfection
your hands smooth, your legs polished,
when you swim no-one runs shrieking
from the pool, you turn no heads.

I buzz with steroids, clothe myself
in the stink of coal tar, I am guttate,
pustular, flexular – they try to stun me
to normality with their UV rayguns

You complain of slightly the wrong
shade of honey blonde highlights,
while you cram me into a burka
to not offend your world's sight.

But I burst out, scarlet skin-armour
gleaming, splitting with pride,
raging with the heat of battling
this world that loves bland.

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Simon and the cat

Simon, author of "My Skin and I"

This is my owner, I am his cat.
He has psoriasis, what's wrong with that?

When we met I was homeless, just a stray.
We became firm friends on the very first day.

My looks didn't matter, he didn't care
He'd have taken me home if I had no hair.

I know that he's different, he hasn't got fur.
That doesn't stop him from making me purr.

He gives me fusses and keeps me well fed,
At night I like to snuggle up on the bed.

Whether he's itchy, scratching or sore
I'm always there to lend a friendly paw.

This is my owner, I am his cat.
He has psoriasis, what's wrong with that?

www.myskinandi.wordpress.com



Subtitling Psoriasis

Andy N.

Red raw like rust
You tell me its always been there
Since childhood
And the collapse
Of your second marriage,
Digging into your back
And your arms
Even when you are asleep
Edged in white beaches
Across a nest of clotted blood
Boiling in flames
Without words
Floating in sleeplessness nights
In a morse code of scratching
Subtitling signposts for gates.

www.andyn.org.uk



Tiger Stripes

Sarah Grace Logan

I was the first in class to get my tiger stripes. I grew
in spurts; nothing for months,
then an inch, two, three.

Some girls had no stripes at all,
just a whisper
of jungle about their waists.

I was lucky: they fanned the sides of my belly,
framing my navel in predator shades;
arrowing down towards my crotch.

They warmed my hips and thighs
like an embrace: go-faster stripes
that set everyone cheering when I won

the 500 metres in my little P.E. shorts
(two inches shorter than school regulations).
Stripes clung to my upper arms;

cupped my breasts like a bra;
and hugged my bum like underpants.
The more I grew

and stretched out my weary child flesh,
the more stripes I grew:
skin to be proud of.

sarahgracelogan.wordpress.com



SKIN RANT

Char March

I am trapped inside this thing, sealed into this cling-film-onesie that seethes with itch, I am the need to scratch – this – my largest organ. Flayed I would cover two of these table tops, and that is what I want – to be rid of this exterior self – to peel myself off me and step out, chuck this flopping suit of me into the wash till it is itch-free, plaque-free, sore-free, while I slosh into the swimming pool without a blowing of whistles, a Would you mind coming only at 7am when there are no children around. While my skin is in the wash cycle, it'll be fun to see my veins and arteries, my capillary roadmaps, quite how much fat I carry in my saddlebags, my belly bulge, my backside – cream and yellow it will be exposed to view, I could dig into it, shed pounds pounds in minutes. Why reclaim my skin-suit from the launderette? I want to rob all of the Lancome, all of the L'Oreal models, they can have my skin from now on, I theirs, they can try their night cream deep moisturisers anti-wrinkle serums bathe in goat's milk daub themselves with Dead Sea Mud inject themselves with steroids rub on the latest in a zillion ThisReallyWorks InstantResults TestedInALaboratory lotions and potions and ointments that guarantee to rub in easily, to bring back hair, to get rid of hair, to give an even tan, to protect from sun-damage, to not be greasy, to nourish, to make them flourish, to give them a healthy glow, to not stain their clothes, to not tell lies. To not tell lies. Just to bring me, bring me, bring me – back to myself. Inside a skin that loves me.

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More than a seven year itch

P A Livsey

I'd cradled and capped
your innocence –
like a rash you were
all over me with pretence –

We'd scaled the heights
threw caution to wallow –
until that itch in year seven –
you hollow swallow –

Now I'm a walking tree
with nothing to alleviate –
my bear of an itch –
I was learning to hate

this infectious stress
till maps etched on skin
left me immune –
and – then I gave in.

Psoriasis – win win

p.atkinson63@googlemail.com



Untouchable

Keith Hutson

Adolescent and obsessed,
our raison d'être: riding fast
on shining bikes, knocking spots
off stopwatches, and Rob,
despite his skin – a wrap of patches,
splits – was God, but better:

God made flesh, one of us; God
pitched up as pal: head down,
always in front, showing how it's done,
how speed can be distilled
from suffering. The Ace of Pain.
Untouchable. God on his way

to greater things ... But, gradually,
God faded, disappeared –
not like his disciples, lost to women,
jobs and drink – Rob just retreated;
hidden; secret; melted into myth,
what might have been.

Chronic, that lad's lack of confidence!
His problem, he wants the lot –
the talent and the looks! This
from his disappointed dad, veteran
pedal-pusher with a baby-face
as vapid as a saddle bag.

But another clubman, time to kill,
recalls the boy who, on a bike,
was beautiful; remembers hurt
lashed out by losers: Acne Champ!
Acid Attack! Don't smile,
your face might crack!



So he decides to look things up:
Psoriasis: even the condition
sounds like wheels dissecting wind.
Treatments now available...
So many! Does Rob know?
Turned out he didn't, nor his family.

Now I could write lies:
remedy applied, complete
and total cure; came back
and won the National Championships
at first attempt; his girlfriend
models for Dior . . .

The facts? He has a serious condition,
tough at times, but managed
well, with expert help;
he didn't win at one attempt,
but three; he's married,
and she's modelling for Burberry.

keith.j.hutson@gmail.com



The Idiom Of Skin

Char March

Idiom – from the Latin Idioma meaning 'special property'

Your skin has special properties,
it reproduces itself extra quickly;
it is mirror to your mind, to upset;
it is chameleon – light where it should be dark,
inflamed where it should be calm, dark where
it should be light, hirsute where bald is usual,
bald where hair is more common...
Your skin is a constant itch, an agitation,
an allergy, a reaction, a want-to-hide-it-away.

That is why we are here. We want to help.

We try to remove the banana skins of life for you.
We're in this for the long-haul – every step of the way with you.
We want you to relax here, not jump out of your skin.
We want to get under your skin – in the nicest possible way.
Sometimes we'll soak you to the skin with creams and lotions.
We've got a thick skin, so you can tell us if things aren't working.
It's no skin off our noses if we don't get it right straight away,
we want you to get well fully, not just by the skin of your teeth.
If this method we're offering doesn't work, don't worry,
there's more than one way to skin a cat!
We want you to be able to work, play and laugh out of your skin!
We want you to save your own skin
– and we're here to help you do just that

Written by Char March – to encourage patients to trust the
staff at the Dermatology Department, to help them with their
research, and to keep persevering with different treatments till
something helps them.

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Inescapable companion

Vaila Smith

Constant but ever-changing, you've always been there.
My controller, arbitrator, bully and excuse.
Forced confrontations with hands behind my back.
I feel your persistence, your resolve,
your whims, and your sledgehammers.

To break free, I cut myself open from inside
then climb out; discarding my casing.
Pared down to the marrow, removed from time,
I wait on a detail to re-join, reconnect.
It passes. I wait for another.

Reattached, we face the moments together;
handle the eruptions or more likely, accept.
Climbing hillsides together
we roll down, waiting our turn to overtake.
You decide the performance, the reaction's all mine.



Arthritis

Tom Ward

Ooh me leg! Aah the pain
I'll ask the nurse for a tablet again
Not till ten is another one due
It's only half eight what can I do?
I thought crying might make it go
So I cried for ten minutes but the answer was no
I tried forty Maltesers one after the other
That didn't work but I'll just have another
Well I've picked me nose and combed me hair
Whatever I do the pain is still there

Psoriatic arthritis is a particular pattern of arthritis often seen in association with psoriasis.



Our skin is a tightrope walk

Char March

We balance on the brain-skin axis;
our immune systems teeter
in this wind-blown, skin-drying place.
We clutch the balance-pole of self-esteem
a wobbling and unreliable support
that dips and tips us, slips
from our grasp when, for instance,
love looms its possibility.
For who would want to caress us
when we need to hide our hands
in gloves, sheath our bodies
in creams, smear ourselves shut
from the ricocheting horror
of mothers hauling their young
from the swimming pool
when we try to take a dip.
Triggered by stress, exacerbated
by anxiety, revved up by rejection;
we've all known this for years.
Our skin splits and bleeds, breeds
plaques and inflammations, sheds
itself in extravagant profusion.
We wear our hearts on our sleeves:
our skin weeps for us.

© Char March

www.charmarch.co.uk



Dispersing Psoriasis

Andy N.

Dispersing her breath
Pinned over her back
She descended
Over the edge of our bed
With a dustpan and brush
Chained to a swing
Amputating the fear
Over out stretched walls
Misrepresented inward
Brushing the old skin away
Red as blushing cheeks
In a slow throbbled ebb
Screaming get out of your face
Over the briefest of pauses.

www.andyn.org.uk



Sometimes it gets me down

Russ Cowper

Its tough
it hurts
its embarrassing
sometimes it gets me down
but I get away with it
because I act the clown
its sore
it itches
my hands are a mess
sometimes it gets me down
but I keep smiling
I joke and fool around.
Its messy
its flaky
People avoid you
sometimes it gets me down
but I always have the dermatologist
Salford's the best in town.
its moisturise
its moisturise
Moisturise some more
sometimes it gets me down
trying to be happy
4 pints in the Crown.
A cure
relief
a days respite
sometimes it gets me down.
knowing others suffer
keep my feet on the ground.



headrot and other signs of ageing
copland smith 2009

I go to the doctor. My head is rotting.
He looks at it. Digs into it. Takes samples.
He says he can do nothing.
I would try to make it better if I could
but curing it is out. It's not that simple.
I'll ease the rot for a while, but it's there for good.

I go to hospital. My finger's bent.
They tell me it's Dupuytren's concontracture.
From consultant to consultant, I'm sent.
They'll return normality with an op, pain, scars.
Is normal worth getting back to?
I need straight fingers to play my guitars.

I tell my friends about glucosamine
without which my joints would surely freeze.
They'll never be as good as they have been
but, hey, I've reached my sixties now.
Sometimes it's hip, but mostly it's my knees,
my neck, my back. I keep moving, somehow.

What have I gained with age? Wisdom. Yeah, right.
I guess there's something you gain from knowing
that you're hurtling towards an endless night
and accepting it. Hurtling. I'll amend
that: inching, bent double, my rotten scalp glowing,
all fingers bent, problems almost at an end.



Psorisoaurus

Pippa Farina

Pip is my Psorisoaurus.

Pip is stubborn and irritating
antisocial and embarrassing.

But Pip doesn't know this.

Pip just is.

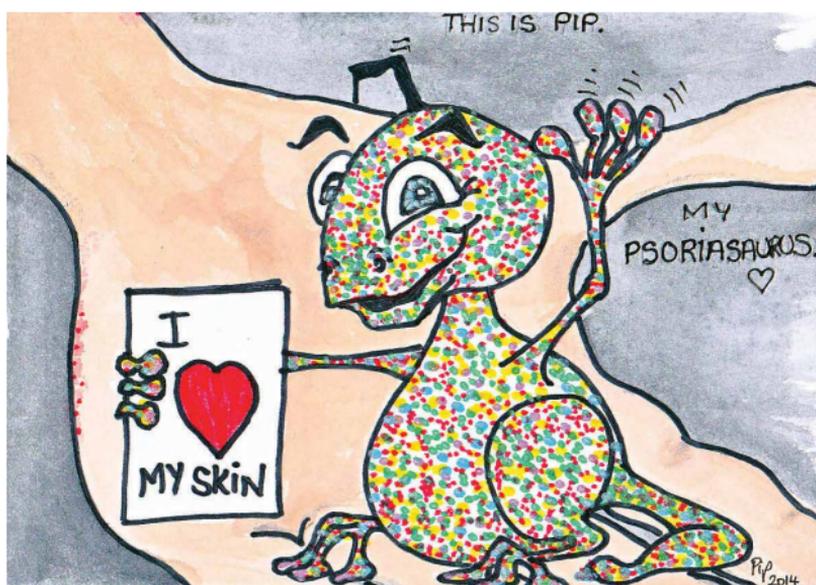
So there's no point getting angry

Pip doesn't know what anger is.

So, I accept Pip, scales and all.

We've been together a long time

and I've noticed that the more I treat Pip with care and respect,
the better Pip becomes.





www.psoriasisshoutout.co.uk