

## Frank Freeman's Dancing School

CLIFF YATES was born in Birmingham in 1952. He won both the Aldeburgh first collection prize and the Poetry Business book & pamphlet competition for *Henry's Clock* (Smith/Doorstop). During his time as Poetry Society poet-in-residence he wrote *Jumpstart Poetry in the Secondary School*. He teaches at Maharishi School, where his students are famous for winning poetry competitions, and runs courses and workshops in Britain and abroad. He received a 2003 Arts Council England Writer's Award.

Also by Cliff Yates

POETRY

*14 Ways of Listening to the Archers* (Smith/Doorstop, 1994, 2004)

*Henry's Clock* (Smith/Doorstop, 1999)

*Emergency Rations* (Smith/Doorstop, 2004)

TEACHING

*Jumpstart Poetry in the Secondary School* (Poetry Society, 1999)

AS EDITOR

*Oranges: Poems from Maharishi School* (Maharishi School Press,  
2001)

# Frank Freeman's Dancing School

CLIFF YATES



LONDON

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING  
Fourth Floor, 2 Tavistock Place, Bloomsbury, London WC1H 9RA United Kingdom

All rights reserved

© Cliff Yates 2009

The right of Cliff Yates to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Salt Publishing.

Salt Publishing 2009

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by MPG Books Group

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

*This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.*

ISBN 978 1 84471 503 9 paperback

Salt Publishing Ltd gratefully acknowledges  
the financial assistance of Arts Council England



1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

## Contents

EMERGENCY RATIONS	1
Lighthouse	3
Locked In	4
Thank You for the Postcard I Read It	5
Emergency Rations are Tasting Better and Better	6
Fishing	8
He Squeezes Tennis Balls to Strengthen his Hands	9
On the Third Day	10
Leaves are Just Thin Wood	11
Summers	12
The Morning they Set Off it was Snowing	13
Daglingworth Blues	14
There are Mountains but I Can't See Them	15
Cross Country	16
Day Breaks as a Petrol Station	17
L'Hermitage and a Bird	18
Hôtel de l'Angleterre	19
Shoes	20
Would You Listen to the Safety Instructions Please	21
At the Smell of the Old Dog	22
Proportion	23
Apple Trees in a Gale	24
Baldwin Road	25
FRANK FREEMAN'S DANCING SCHOOL	27
New White Bike	29
Hair	30
Yes	31

Fun	32
Borneo	33
Your Limbs Bound and Mouth Full of Cloth	34
In the Mountains of Truth You Will Never Climb in Vain	35
Picking Up Speed	36
Kidderminster-on-Sea	37
Climbing the Tree to Pick Fruit he Fell and Lost	38
Wake Up	39
The Ruler of Planet X	40
Return	42
When She Got Back After Her Funeral	43
Gower Road	44
Mid-Gallop	45
10 Easy Pieces for Piano	46
Vienna	48
Guitarist	49
On Police Records	50
Rock Cross	51
Noise	52
Fireside Bookshop	53
Knowledge of this Sort Helps Keep Society Together	54
Still Alive	55
Satsang with Paul	56
The Muleteer in the Orange Shirt	57
Shape	58
Chinese New Year	59
The Poem	60
On the Street in Bratislava	61
Boggle Hole	62
Mirror	63

Fever	64
The Science of Predictive Astrology	65
Fall	66
I Am a Crab	67
Oxygen Tent	68
Snow	69
Chez Marianne	70



## Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are due to the following, where some of these poems first appeared: *Cake Magazine*, *Gists and Piths*, *Great Works*, *Neon Highway*, *The North*, *Orbis*, *Pages*, *Smiths Knoll*, *Stand*, *The Slab*, *Sunk Island Review*, *Tears in the Fence*, *The Rialto*, *Writers' Awards 2003* (London: Arts Council England, 2003), 'Emergency Rations' was published by Smith/Doorstop in 2004. Many of these poems have undergone revision and differ from those versions originally published.

I am grateful for an Arts Council England Writer's Award (2003).



# Emergency Rations



## Lighthouse

The lighthouse flickers at the end of the pier.  
We watch it in our red pyjamas.  
Actually neither of us are wearing red pyjamas  
you're wearing my blue shirt.

The lighthouse flickers at the end of the pier.  
It's the only thing we can be sure of.  
Everything's uncertain  
since you set alight my record collection.

I'm trying to work out an appropriate reaction,  
rearranging things in my head to eliminate  
all memory of the record collection.  
The lighthouse flickers on and off

actually it doesn't, you point out, it just appears to.  
You look amazing in my blue shirt.  
I haven't words to describe how good you look  
in the light from the lighthouse. Now you're here

now you're not. Maybe I should burn  
something of yours, you suggest.  
Your voice leaves me in the dark.  
It doesn't sound like you when I can't see you.

## Locked In

If there was a skylight I could see the stars  
if there were no clouds.  
If there was a window I'd smash it . . .

Hopeless. Switch the lights back on,  
kick aside the cushions, spend ten minutes  
with Colin's darts and the *Lock Up Your Daughters* poster.  
Don't touch Derek's computer.

Spare light bulb in the microwave,  
turn off the lights—red, blue, yellow.  
Remember the trick with the dill pickle,  
the kebab skewer and the mains socket. The fridge hums

then stops. Prop the door open for company  
and have an inconclusive game of football  
with Celia's inflatable globe  
then break into Margaret's locker with a biro,

find the tea money in the Coffee Mate tin,  
count it twice, put it back  
and write out a new washing-up rota  
for the next six months in her handwriting

leaving myself out. Play with the idea  
of the fire extinguisher. At 5 a.m.,  
feet up on the table,  
close my eyes, wait for the caretaker.

## Thank You for the Postcard I Read It

A bat in the bedroom we opened the curtains and windows  
the sound of its wings it flew in spasms.

I can't believe the address we are staying on Horse Road.  
There are donkeys on the hill they lowered their eyes

jerking their tails to discourage the flies.  
The abbey's stone windows open the sky.

On the beach we found ammonites in black stone  
two boys with fishing rods cast again and again.

Four days of sunshine then in Scarborough it rained.  
We didn't go into the t-t-t-tower of t-t-t-t-terror

but watched two girls run out squealing and pale  
chased by a boy in bandages with a chainsaw.

The castle had guides like mobile phones but bigger  
you could touch the repeat button and make it stutter

we had Winston Churchill say bomb-bomb-bomb-bomb  
and a woman from the BBC say Dicky Dickinson Dicky-Dick-Dick.

King John lived on the hill he built living quarters  
he wasn't the villain of the films it was Richard his brother.

I said you've still got your earrings on  
she said I know it's part of the plan.

## Emergency Rations are Tasting Better and Better

It's eleven in the morning, sun coming through,  
next door's lawnmower doing a lawnmower impression.

*The dried apricots were a treat, with our backs  
to the wind, smoking our pipes while the huskies slept.*

Maybe the telephone will ring, or I'll write a poem  
in which every line will sound like the last line.

*This is paradise were we not intent on starving.*

I turn on the radio, turn it off again,  
find the pencil sharpener and sharpen both pencils.

*Poor Smith is missing his mother, makes pot  
after pot of tea, melting snow by the bucketful  
and is careful with our precious matches.*

Maybe I'll write a novel, a short one.

*He gave the last of his chocolate to Hughes  
who gobbled it and fell straight to sleep  
while the kettle whistled and the huskies whined.*

The postman's been. We didn't have any letters.

*Today I chewed tea, it was surprisingly bitter.*

We've been in this house eight years  
and still haven't painted the woodwork.

*My beard has been frozen for days.*

I think I'll go out and buy a newspaper

*Most of all I'd like to shave, to smell soap  
and the touch of a warm towel, to hear the radio  
through the bathroom door*

find out what's happening in the world.

## Fishing

*Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of land.*

— HERMAN MELVILLE

I cast like he shows me but his new reel  
breaks from the rod, flies like a potato  
and plops into the murk of Hurcott Pool.  
We lean, elbows on wall, squinting at the water.

He snatches the rod, takes hold of the line,  
leans out and pulls hand over hand you can  
barely hear a ripple. Until with a splash it appears,  
a pendulum in the sunshine, a prize, inches  
away from us.

We improvise depth charges from fireworks,  
drop them into the pool, anticipate  
the muted bang, bubbles, a thousand dead  
fish shimmering on the surface.

History. Mr Mort is shouting at him  
for firing pellets at Andy Gunn.  
He stands slowly. Six foot two  
he's been shaving since the first year.

Two years later he moved to Australia.

## He Squeezes Tennis Balls to Strengthen his Hands

He's playing the double bass in his room.  
He plays it like a cartoon.  
Notes climb down and up the stairs.  
The ceiling reverberates.

A problem only comes into focus  
when you think about it.  
I like what's out of focus, the figure  
in the background, off-centre  
or even out the picture but you know she's there  
(and not necessarily because you were).

Branches grow out of her head like antlers  
reaching for the light that breaks through the trees.  
You didn't notice the trees?

He squeezes tennis balls to strengthen his hands.  
There are tennis balls all over the house  
you have to be careful on the stairs  
especially in the dark.

(Noises from the shed.)

Anyone who goes to the trouble  
of stealing our lawnmower can have it.  
At a certain time of the night you're past caring.  
I lie there waiting for that moment.

## On the Third Day

For my twenty-first we did the Mumbles Run  
a pint in every pub on the Mumbles Road  
between Blackpill and Limeslade. Brains  
is the local brew. We said it's easy to see why.

*The limp evening drizzled over the city  
sodden paper settled on the pavements.  
No one was pretending apart from the statues  
and we didn't recognise the statues.*

Graham showed me, on an earlier occasion  
the art of drinking beer. You don't swallow  
so much, you pour it down. If you have to swallow  
take really big gulps, much bigger than you think

*The station was nearly empty, the last train  
had left and he was on the platform opposite  
crouched over but unable to call out  
hesitating before that moment . . .*

don't worry you won't drown. I could down a pint  
in NINE gulps, Graham in FIVE and Tony in ONE

*his heart beating inside a stranger's chest  
his eyes gazing out from a stranger's face.  
It was probably too late to save him  
a dog barked in the distance.*

Some people came late and joined us half-way.  
I didn't realise you could do that.

## Leaves are Just Thin Wood

No, I don't read French.  
Do you have a translation?  
I'm from Birmingham.  
Let's go for a walk in the woods. It's raining.

Bring the billiard table.  
I have the balls in my trouser pockets.  
Can you manage?  
Here, let me hold the door.

Yes I agree, the rain. Did I mention  
the importance of parks in the black country?  
It's not that interesting. Mind  
the rosa rugosas, their thorns,  
and the climber with the orange hips.

All the other woods are memories  
preparing us for this one.

If I tell anyone she'll kill me.  
No, really—a dart through the forehead.  
Look at my hands—people call it stigmata  
but really it's darts.

We quarrelled in the autumn.  
We quarrelled about the milk.  
In the morning she left, took the bed with her.

## Summers

We snorkelled every evening  
for four years I had a tanned back.  
You can't eat out in Mexico.

Two men in a suit not the same suit.  
The second suit hands over the money  
as if you'd been doing it all your life.

I gave it to the pretty one, who smiled.  
Excuse me did you order this? No  
we only drink water do you have water?

Write this down do you have paper?  
Thank you for allowing me to do this.  
Hope you like the view we left in your kitchen.

Your dog brought us a present a blanket.  
We threaded burnt rope through the eyelets.  
Spent matches among the gravel.

Leave us your keys we'll look after them.  
It was nothing but thank you for thanking us  
next year we'll do it again.

## The Morning they Set Off it was Snowing

My brother's on his own at the table next to ours  
tucking into chicken and cheese.

*There were no birds in the sky, no ships in the harbour  
apart from theirs the radios were silent.*

He's okay he says he can see everyone  
from here. The perfect host, more  
relaxed now it's over. Two pints of beer  
eat as much as you want it'll only go to waste.

*I peeled an onion and the centre was brown  
as a rotten apple and as sweet.  
The horses trembled and sweated in the paddock  
and the butter melting in spite of the temperature.*

*It was unbelievably cold. Jenkins was shivering  
and there is no one more used to it.  
The villagers lined the road but no one spoke.  
The cattle stood like painted cattle.*

On the way home, me and Ruth go for a walk past  
the old house with the chickens and cows.  
Dad, she says and treads in a cow pat, scuffs it off  
on the grass. It's where we came last time  
but I don't tell her I wait for her to notice.

## Daglingworth Blues

The Vietnamese pot-bellied pig looks up  
but doesn't see, eyes hidden in folds of flesh  
and can't be bothered with the apple we've thrown  
as two motorbikes throttle past and, in the light  
from the living room, the bats are out over David's lawn.

The book itself on the blockboard coffee table:  
*Gas and Oil Opportunities in Libya.*  
Black oozes from its pages, stains the new  
rush carpet, heads for the door and Daglingworth  
as tankers set out from Al-Khama,  
the U.N. floods Montenegro with Deutschmarks  
and somewhere in Zimbabwe the sound of glass.

The Vietnamese pot-bellied pig stares at its skin  
its meat tough as carpet. The bees are asleep  
not that we notice dismantling their hive  
in the sleeping wood while in the neighbouring field  
a fox leaves behind the day-old lamb's two hind legs.

## There are Mountains but I Can't See Them

It's dark pass me a spike Mike, drive it in  
by my foot, give me something to stand on tonight  
we'll sleep like the dead Mike thankful  
under whirling stars. Smith isn't looking  
too good you have to keep an eye  
on him like I do you. Is this clear? The mountain is  
not clear it's under our feet but isn't this moving train.

Mike are you still there?  
All that winter we dreamed strawberries.  
Four months no sunlight, air colder than the freezer  
when powdered eggs of all things saved us.

Tell us a joke Mike, one about the chickens.  
Have a telephone ring, engineer  
an interruption during the telling.  
Have the door handle turn your cigarette  
light of its own accord. Tell it tonight  
at the foot of the mountain.

*Time passed slowly in the forest  
then we got up to go for a drink.  
I forget the name of the pub.  
At no point did I remember it.*