

Seasoned

He cannot bend to tie his shoe.
I stoop to make the knot
that takes me back
to when he carried fully grown men
down stairs in the middle of the night

found them in floods or snowdrifts
hauled them up cliffs on stretchers
pulled them out of sheughs and bogs
all in a day's work

he held mothers' hands in ambulances
gave the kiss of life
in porches, on roadsides
delivered babies in toilets
of country bars long after closing.

At home he bathed us on a Saturday night
bent over the tub, sleeves rolled up
arms covered in suds
told stories of him as a boy
when once he cycled twenty miles to run a race
and won, then cycled twenty home.

His back, a solid Irish oak,
bent, moved, straightened
to each particular need.
Now its knots tell the years
of a thousand people who leant on him
shoulders that carried other people's lives
as well as his own.

He cannot bend to lace his shoe
and I have learned to make the loop.

Elaine Gaston**Elaine Gaston says:**

'-when I start to write a poem quite often I write down what happened, what I felt about it and I write a whole list of different visual images, I think visual images are really important in a poem.'

Suggestions for work on SEASONED by ELAINE GASTON**TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION**

Elaine Gaston's poem is partly about the sense of role reversal she felt as a daughter when she suddenly had to look after her father as he recuperated after an operation - whereas he once tied her laces when she was young, she now finds she has to tie her father's laces. In groups, read the poem and discuss the idea of changing roles within a family. Perhaps some pupils have elderly grandparents, great-aunts or -uncles. How does age and aging change the nature of relationships within families? And what about youth - do any pupils have very young brothers and sisters and if so what effect does this circumstance have on the family unit? As you grow older, does your role within your family change? If so, how and in what ways?

Points to consider:

1. The poet's father was a country doctor or GP. List the evidence from the poem that would support this fact.

