



Fahrenheit and Centigrade: for L. and for Susan

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Informally adopted by Sheffield University in friendship with Professor Pamela Enderby (Community Rehabilitation) and under treatment at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital Sheffield with which the University is linked

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Received: 09-DEC-2017

Accepted: 13-DEC-2017

Published Online: 14-DEC-2017

Poet's note: This poem came about through exploring the theme of Transatlantic friendships; this one has spanned forty years.

You talk in Fahrenheit, I talk in Centigrade.
Our transatlantic talk not yet chatter
but not encumbered by numbers or numbness
but just how it's cold.

I'm not good with figures, you're not good with your hands
but together created this cable-under-the-ocean friendship
not yet perished by time or misunderstanding
or by something we have both spoken of
but not named.

It could have been Morse,
decoding the dit-dahs as they came in
like so many years ago, like our Dads knew
on the convoys and the shipping; it's still about saving lives.
It's a kind of Semaphore:
we can not see each other waving flags
and yet we do. It's what we do.

I teach you new vocabulary
like trudge, and gum boots, and blustery,
sensing with a finger in the wind how and what to say.

Cite this article as: Chalkley RV. Fahrenheit and Centigrade: for L. and for Susan. RHiME. 2017;4:68-9.

Not yet at the stage of asterisking
But that will come.
Exclamation marks -a joy for us-
In paragraphs we both now labour over.

We have corresponded over the Pond for nearly forty years.
Blue air mail envelopes came and went;
your stamps carefully chosen for my edification and delight
your black broad pen bringing Boston news and views
in a friendship still vibrant and commentaries on our lives.
Back then, my enthusiastic forays were on the typewriter,
a student portable with red and black ribbons,
my envelopes mangled and wrinkled; I never did do the envelopes first.
We met on a Lake District train. Student and Professor. Me off to College,
You to explore England and the English.

You and I are learning by email.
Our carefully crafted meaning
pecked out and shaped over hours and overnight,
when our writing was legible and not a new kind of test.

Inbox. Outbox.
Send and receive.
Forward. Archive.
But not delete.
Not yet anyway.

I somehow sense I won't.
