

## **Video: Once this was a poet**

Written by John Eager

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This, the last ever performance of Brenda Read-Brown's play about her relationship with guerilla poet Pete Brown, will be performed at the Market Theatre tomorrow (Wednesday) evening at 6:30.

Performed by TADS (Tewkesbury Amateur Dramatics Society) Brenda's play, 'Once this was a Poet', received glowing critical reviews after last year's performance at the Cheltenham Literature Festival:

"A stunningly wonderful theatrical experience! This play was all the things drama should be - insightful, challenging, moving and very funny. It was very beautiful and life affirming."  
Cheltenham's Arts Development Officer, Paul McKee.

[Video extracts from the play performed at Cheltenham Literature Festival.](#)

Brenda and TADS have decided to donate half of the profits made with this play to FOCUS, the cancer support charity at Cheltenham General Hospital.

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It's appropriate that this last performance of 'Once this was a Poet' should be held in Ledbury as its subject, Pete Brown, spent most of the 1980s living in the town, picking hops and apples, thinking up mad money-spinning ventures, socializing with Ledbury's more colourful characters, unashamedly womanizing and propping up bars with a wit and humour second to none.

I remember the politically incorrect Pete Brown as the stand-up comic in the Seven Stars shooting indecipherable jokes like warning shots over a crowd of punkheads – “Racism, Sexism and Disabilities all in one Joke!” could well have been his mantra. Throw the man a taboo, but don't tell him to shut it. I've rarely seen an audience so hostile to a mic'ed-up performer; they hated him and tried, unsuccessfully, to shout him down. The noise and the tension that were ratcheted up in his short solo support slot were incredible. The band (The Shimmering) displaced him; palpable relief flowed through the audience; guitars champed and rained down on any ten foot high words that remained.

After a couple of stand-up gigs the seed was planted in Pete. Always a writer, he now became the performance poet, using his wit and rhyme to amuse, titillate and confound pub and poetry audiences alike. He started the guerilla poets, who would descend unannounced on public houses like word demons - “I only came in for a bloody drink!” was the standard retort. The poetry pub crawl was established.

In 1999 Pete won the massive National Grand Slam Championship of Great Britain at Cheltenham, a victorious tsunami that left a hundred poets plus floundering in his wake. His next stop was Glastonbury Festival. Pete had arrived and found his calling. He'd always loved a festival, and being a star performer was the perfect back-rub for his engorged ego. But he never gave up his caravan in the orchard; his tree pruning labour; his pint and spliff; his well-grounded reality.

'Once this was a poet' is the story of Pete meeting and loving Brenda. It is the story of his last year. No point in spoilers, but if you want to laugh and cry in equal measure then this is the gig for you. And if you want to remember Pete... well, you'll never forget him, will you?