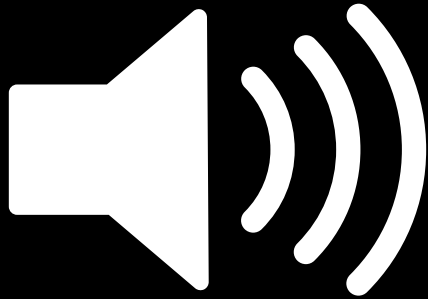


Unmute



**A collection of poetry by
Arts & Minds members**

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Introduction

Coronavirus lockdown created a new challenge for Arts & Minds and Arts Together in how to continue to connect with and support our members. Thanks to funding from Leeds Inspired and Arts Together, we were able to offer creative writing workshops led by the very talented Andy Craven- Griffiths. Members were able to create together virtually on Zoom, and this anthology is the product of that special time together.

Linda Boyles

Arts & Minds Network Development Manager

It was my great pleasure to run this Kindness Writing Workshop series. For six weeks, we met for an hour on Zoom, said our hellos and began. Each week involved a wellbeing practice such as writing gratitudes or writing kind messages to somebody, and then some creative writing craft skills such as rhyming or making similes and metaphors, building towards a first draft of a piece of writing by the end of the hour. I began to look forward to Mondays, to seeing everyone's face on Zoom, and to the openness and bravery of everyone contributing, sharing, and trying things out that were new to many, and familiar but rusty for a few. The sessions became little oases for me during lockdown, and I believe others felt similarly. The sharing at the end of the project blew me away, and the quality and variety of the writing was brilliant, as you will see here. I hope people enjoy it as much as I have.

Andy Craven-Griffiths

Poet and Facilitator of Kindness Writing Workshops

Unmute

By **Vic Leeson**

Sensation of shiver over shared tales of others
The baccy-based halitosis of the beer puller
Smell of urine blocks and tobacco smog
The welcome blunt force of a body-heat fug
Coffee lovingly held, gently dripped by another
The pleasure of a positive to the “Parmesan?” offer
Crowded sports stadiums & the hypnotic swell of a crowd
The innocent shrieks and laughter of a children’s playground
Dripping swimsuit emitting chlorinated odour
The breast-leavened harrumph of nearby waiting shopper
Apologetic side-step of an accidental human bump
And the chitter-chatter of a café’s hum
Walk-by inhalation courtesy of the nicotine addicts
Petrol-ridden odour of sitting in traffic
Fingertip-graze of coins given in change
Collective ceiling-sweat drip of a crowded gig
Reassuring arm-squeeze in a moment of distress
The chink of a beer-swilled, spittle-filled glass

Olfactory intrusion of another’s broken wind
Taste of the toxic, late-night kebab, heroically binned
Hand-gestured thank you from a fellow driver
Head-back-laughter detailing the dentistry inside them
Brush of an eyelash from a flushing cheek
Leaning in so close so I *feel* your speech
Things I never knew I needed.
Yet, I would sacrifice to have you
Hold me more than once, twice
Remembering with tenderness, hugs
Your hugs, I miss.

Ode to Olga

By **Alice Gilmour**

I'll reverse engineer NASA's fast plants and plant them in your garden, so it doesn't get unruly so quickly.

I will move out the noisy young family next door with their washing machine on all night, to a big house up near the park, and I'll move in your nice friend from the access bus so you can chat over the fence.

I'll develop a new strain of tea that contains omega three oils to help your creaking joints from years of hard Bradford factory work.

I'll triple the salaries of the local drop-in health workers, and extend their visit times by a factor of a hundred, so they can stay for as long as you want.

I will find you a breed of dog that doesn't need to go on walks, but will just sit adoringly by your swollen feet.

I'll shrink your house by five centimetres a year so there's less to clean.

But after dropping off your shopping, I turn and wave,

Turn back to my busy life,

Ten minutes away from you.

Coronavirus 2020

By **Diane Lofthouse**

A new threat has entered our world,
A deadly threat to one and all.
It can't be seen, or smelt, or touched,
An invisible threat and many will fall.

We take for granted the breath in our lungs,
The ease of breathing, unnoticed and calm.
But the deadly destroyer says 'just you wait' for,
Once I get started, there'll be such alarm.

The great destroyer takes one by one,
And the world cries out in grief.
As it gets stronger it sucks out your breath,
Slowly and surely, until death's a relief.

We do what we can to save and to soothe,
But it's a harrowing job no-one would choose.
Family denied access, alone with their tears,
Surrogate loved ones allay all their fears.

Some die alone with no-one around.
Salty tears on their cheeks, shed with no sound.
The lucky ones have a hand to hold,
As their breath is gone and they become cold.

God takes their hand and leads them home.
From now on they'll not be alone.
We say goodbye and take our leave,
Then onto the next, their fears to relieve,
Then onto the next, with a different need,
Then onto the next, and the next, they plead.

Does it matter?

By **Julie Jones**

Does it matter if I sleep in bed?
All day long well at least I'm not dead
What is there to get up for?
I can't go to the pub or cinema anymore!

Does it matter if people are rude?
As long as I still get my food
It's funny to be at war when we don't see the soldiers
As time marches on the year is getting older.

This lock down is depressing it makes me sad
The people I live with drive me mad
Still my online groups they keep me sane
Until we can meet again.

Thank god for technology the social media age
Even though the politicians aren't on the same page
It keeps us connected it keeps us together
This new normal feels like forever.

When it's all over a distant memory
What are the events that I'll still see
Will I have a new gratitude for all that I've lost?
When it returns what will be the cost.

Does it matter as long as we're still here?
To fight again another year
Even though this situation now is dire
Britain like a phoenix will arise from the fire.

It's the ordinary people who have the most worth
Not the rich who think they own the earth
The teachers, NHS, all keyworkers too
You are the true heroes and we salute you.

How Many Ways?

By **Ruth De Lissandri**

How many ways can I tell you? I don't believe I can,
Instead, I'll see and acknowledge you, come here and take my hand.
It doesn't have to cost the Earth, the moon or even the stars,
I see past the ingrained dirt, missing teeth, all your perfect flaws.
Where do I start, I ask you? I can't believe I can,
Close your eyes, I see and hear you, trust me, come take my hand.

Just as dawn is breaking, dewdrops sparkling in the morning light,
A nod of the head from the postie, spirits lifting to dizzying heights.
Late for work, a short cut of sorts, a place I'd normally not venture,
One of those narrow, dark back streets, A-Z doesn't even mention.
But, one I took to walking past, each and every single day,
It was those eyes of yours, they haunted me, I couldn't stay away.

At first, a shy smile I managed to muster, soon become an enormous grin,
And, of course I bought two coffees, nothing to do with me – blame admin.
It just so happened I bought an extra bagel, and couldn't possibly eat two,
Arm outstretched, you thanked me, humouring efforts - totally see-through.
Gradually, you began to confide in me, eyes alight - of all you had achieved,
A shoulder nudge, gently encouraging, you could be all that you believed.

I'm sorry if, it was too soon, I just wanted them all to see,
A chance for you to shine your light, to show who you could be.

What, this old thing? I was going to bin? – the minor fact that it's a man's?
I can guarantee, looks better on you than me – all part of my cunning plan.
Reluctantly, or was it hesitantly? you took it – unsurprisingly the perfect fit,
For me, it was these little things, if I could help, just even the tiniest bit.
But, when one day, I found you battered and bruised, cowering out of sight,
I couldn't believe it was because of my acts, that this had led to a fight.

Once over the shock, eyes brimming with tears, I dragged you to A&E,
Surely anyone with an ounce of compassion, could see what I could see.
The emerging voice – confident, even defiant – was definitely mine I heard,
A doctor raced over, or was it security? Of that, my memories are blurred.
A rebel of sorts they saw me as, not my usual polite, apologetic Miss,
When I passionately believe in anything – well, I'm sure, you get the gist?

Patched up and clean, it was those eyes, slate-like grey with yellow flecks,
Those were the eyes that beckoned me. It was clear that I was the wreck.
Time to say goodbye, as you spread your wings, my dependence clear,
It was me that needed you now. The letting you go - my greatest fear.
I had every faith you would find your way, wherever that might be,
I'd achieved what I'd set out to, with heavy heart, time to set you free.

How many ways can I tell you? I do believe I can,
In the many ways I showed you, when you smiled and took my hand.
To show you're worth more than the Earth, the moon or even the stars,
For you to see the real you, in all your splendid, glorious, bejewelled flaws.
A new start, you turned and asked me? I do believe we can,
Together believing in ourselves, we let go of entwined hands.

Jack

By **Vicky Thomson**

If you were a French dog, you might be called Jaques
I imagine you wearing a sweet cravat
Though you weren't upper crust, thrust
Into rescue as a pup
With kennel cough, life started out tough
Though a hint of Patterdale was spotted
By a woman down the road
She had one, was besotted
He looked a bit like you, she said
One thing was true
You were terrier
Through and through.

'Teatime' was fun, the call
Became a starting gun
'Go' a bobsleigh hurtling down the stairs
Tears into the kitchen, too late
To apply the brakes
Flies past the plate
When the chomping begins, it is a serious mission
Head down, don't come near, tunnel vision
...unless ...your ears prick up
Perhaps a knock at the door?

Before pedalling your legs
While you dream about running
And let out a big fat snore.

I think of the rainy days in Autumn, November
Wading through slushy orange and brown leaves, I remember
Earthy smells and damp fur, the bath you detest
How you went rigid in protest.

Too impatient to towel-dry
Jumping on the bed
Managing to slip away
And shake instead.

Though, you did look great in your Sunday best
Your collar, studded and pillar box red
Like a guy all wrapped up for the prom in a tux
With your black fur coat and white vest
Joie de vivre you had in spades
And as for philosophical debates – do dogs have souls?
I can happily wade – you were my soulmate
For if I have, then you DO TOO
And I am blessed, for knowing you.

And If you were still here
I'd let you sleep under the covers
I would hide the tastiest treat under the mat
And read you bedtime stories about cats.

White Coats

By **Diane Lofthouse**

White coats around me,
What's going to happen?
I'm scared and anxious, nervous and excited.
Mouths moving, but no sound;
Hands trying to explain and calm my nerves.
A flick of a switch, a twitch of my head,
A smile on their faces, or is it worry?
A strange feeling surrounds me.
A tremor in my ears sends shudders through my body.
It gets louder as the knob is turned,
My future in their hands!
I hear a noise!
I hear a voice!
I can't make it out yet, but it's a sound!
A few more adjustments,
And the touch of their hands on my head.
I shout out in pain,
Then cry as I hear my own voice for the very first time.
I laugh and hear them laughing too.
It's worked, it's worked, I can hear!
Alleluia!

Phase

By **Sarah Shaw**

Waiting to join the race
Waiting to mend the lace
Waiting to keep face
Until I am full.

Waiting to close an embrace
Waiting in queues of haste
Waiting for a taste
Of the creative pull.

Waiting to find space
Waiting to gain pace
Waiting for a maze
To unravel the wool.

Waiting in pain
Seems such a shame
To have paths in my veins
Yet my blood is a bull.

Childhood

By **Irene Lofthouse**

A baby sprung in Spring
Umbilical cord a tight necklace
Glistening red between
Flickering firelight shadows
Survives.
Green eyes blink in
The shallow sanctuary
Under the table.

A girl amongst boys
In a dysfunctional family
Where parents don't talk
Are absent, apart; blank
Years gape in her tapestry,
Like holes never to be filled
By colour and warmth of wool.

Transported in summer like
Convicts sentenced to
Hard labour, Victorian discipline
Rules, the belt used to tame
These heathen children
No love lost on them,
Green eyes see pity, hatred
From good upstanding Christians.

Keep schtum, say nothing,
Mantras plaited each morning
Until there is no-one to
Plait only an empty house
At the end of school;
Later smashing crockery
Echoes around the sanctuary
Beneath the bunk-beds.

She smiles in early photos
This green-eyed girl,
Sitting with a doll that
Disappeared, the one she
Told stories to. Did the doll
Take her too, or leave her to
Weave stories stitching survival
In shallow sanctuaries?

SKY BITE

By **Linda Boyles**

It rises.
Sliding slowly
Gliding gracefully
Floating into the world
Brushing against the hill's lip
Slipping sensuously into the embrace of the silky sky.

It teases.
Revealing itself
Sliver by sliver
Buttery flesh
The sweep of a shoulder
The mound of a hip.

It mystifies.
Window into space
A bite in the universe
Paper cut perfection
Crisp and sharp
Light sliced into darkness.

It balances.
Curve on curve
Controlled and composed
Pendulum of light
Poised on the cusp
Pregnant pause at ascent.

It glows.
Waxy honey
Nighttime sun
Buttercup gold
Glowing beneath the earth's chin
An assault of amber against a velvet sky.

It watches.
Cratered lunar eye
Creeping into crevices
Illuminating lovers
Bathing darkness in its glow
Casting magic and mystery in its shadows.

It rises.
It teases.
It mystifies.
It balances.
It glows.
It watches.
It rises.



Unmute is an Arts & Minds publication

Arts & Minds is a network of people in Leeds who are interested in creativity and mental health. We include carers, health workers, artists, performers, students, people who have used mental health services and OTs. We want to get people talking about how the arts can help mental wellbeing.

If you want to know more please contact us using the details below. You are welcome at any of our events or workshops, if you are a member or not. You can join Arts & Minds for free at: www.artsandmindsnetwork.org.uk/join-us

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