

WRITING HAPPINESS

An anthology of new writing from
D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent
writers, including writers with
long-term physical and mental illness

Supported by Arts Council England and
Spread the Word
2022

Edited by Rachel Lewis &
Elspeth Wilson

CONTENTS

2 Acknowledgements

3 Foreword

4 bored of scared

5 Elspeth Wilson

- In the heat of a sun too seldom felt

6 Arden Fitzroy

- Hiss
- Folk Tales
- Dandy of the End Times

10 Abiḡdún Abdul

- The Present Future
- Game of To-Do Lists

13 Bridie Kennerley

- Aune

15 Colly Metcalfe

- I love the sea

18 Maryam Ebrahim

- Where happiness lies
- What is "happiness"?
- Sunshine

23 Inigo Purcell

- The Tower in the Sky

26 Jess Stafford

- There Should Be Applause

28 Katie Moudry

- Grandson

29 Rachel Lewis

- Night Walks

30 Matt L. T. Smith

- Moments of Joy

31 Stephen Whitehead

- Birds of Paradise
- The Lathe

34 Yaz Nin

- At first I was afraid

36 Tope Onanuga

- Writing Happiness

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This anthology was made possible by a generous grant from Arts Council England. The grant funded both the development of this publication, and a workshop series with thirteen D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent writers, including writers with long term physical and mental illness, whose work is showcased in these pages.

We would also like to thank Spread the Word, London's leading writing development agency and our project partners, for their unstinting and invaluable support to bring this project to life.

Finally, we would like to thank our two brilliant guest tutors, Jamie Hale and Christy Ku, for running fantastic sessions as part of the writing happiness workshop course. Special thanks also to Jamie for their support and mentoring.

Lastly, we would like to thank the disabled writing community for the support and passion they have shown to this project and the idea behind it. You have helped us prioritise kindness and rest in our own work, and writing happiness would not be possible without your immense talent and commitment.

FOREWORD

Writing about happiness is not something D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent writers, including those with long term physical or mental illness, are often encouraged to do. This project was born out of a recognition that emerging writers are often encouraged to dig deep into their trauma, suffering or loss for creative inspiration. However, as writers living with disability and chronic illness ourselves, we have found talking, reading and writing about happiness and joy to be a restorative addition to our practice as well as a real creative challenge.

Through this project we wanted to create space for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent writers to explore happiness, from tranquility to joy, in all its nuance and complexity. We also wanted to showcase work from under-represented writers, and help make sure that their stories reach new audiences.

It has been an enormous professional privilege to work with this group of thirteen D/deaf disabled and neurodivergent writers over six weeks to produce both a wonderful showcase event, and this writing happiness anthology. Their voices are all distinct, powerful and vital. We hope you enjoy their work and that you follow their subsequent careers closely - we certainly will be.

The pieces shared in these pages will take you on a journey of discovery through happiness in its many and various guises, from ecstasy to wonder to renewed hope to quiet vindication and so much more. You will have to read on to find out.

We hope that the work here brings happiness to you. If you're interested in writing happiness and would like to stay updated on future projects, you can follow us on social media @disabledjoy.

If you'd like to get in touch with the editors or any of the writers featured in this anthology, or if you'd like to work with us, please contact us at writinghappinessproject@gmail.com.

Rachel Lewis & Elspeth Wilson
Editors & course facilitators

BORED OF SCARED

Submitted anonymously.

Maybe you shake in the wind
feathers for ribs
because you're ready to fly.
The walls are not closing in;
they are wanting to waltz.
Spinning you
right 'round, baby, right 'round
like your Year 6 disco date.
Soon, they will improve their moves. They
will not tread on your toes so much.
Maybe the claws scratching at your belly belong
to that dog from Disney's *Up*,
the home in your core is fixed with balloons, ready for take-off. You are off to soar
where they can't hurt you anymore. Where the nest of thorns clamping up
in your chest make home for a Robin in her Sunday best. When you breathe in
she flaps her wings.
When you breathe out,
she launches from your mouth.
Flirts with eagles in tree top bars,
tinges the air pink and orange,
shits on the shit ones who deserve it, and
flies off to red skies.
Middle Feathers Up.
Maybe it's more than okay. You're not tipping
on terror's tongue, or torn amongst its teeth;
you're on the cusp
of something sweet. You
are on the cusp
of something
wonderful.

ELSPETH WILSON

Elspeth Wilson is a writer and poet who is interested in exploring the limitations and possibilities of the body through writing, as well as writing about joy and happiness from a marginalised perspective which has led her to co-found the Writing Happiness project with Rachel Lewis. Her poems have been commended in Young Poets' Network challenges and her prose has been shortlisted for Canongate's Nan Shepherd prize and Penguin's Write Now Editorial programme. Elspeth is currently working on her debut collection and also regularly facilitates accessible creative workshops. When she isn't writing or reading, she can usually be found near the sea or spending time with her elderly dog. You can find her on Instagram [@elspethwrites](#) and on Twitter [@ellijwilson](#).

In the heat of a sun too seldom felt

(originally published in Nightingale and Sparrow)

Close your eyes and think of a time where you felt happy
—an invitation with no expectation of RSVP
to get away from this place. In the mind,
a time where I was exactly like other girls
flanked by two artworks of emotion and potential
to dance in the pattern of sprinklers and laugh
with the joy of the unobserved
to try to fit into each others' bikinis and lose all our air in laughter and tightness
to eat cherries and spit the stones at
each others' breasts
to catch something fleeting
on the beat of a sun setting, heat draining
away from burnt legs like stones
weighing us down, bringing us back
as the evening cooled and the oozing shadows meant
it was time to cloak ourselves again.

ARDEN FITZROY

Arden Fitzroy is a writer-poet, actor and producer, who believes in experimentation and blurring the boundaries of genre, gender and art forms. Their writing has appeared or is forthcoming with Untitled Writing, Stone of Madness Press, the Royal Society of Literature, UCL Culture, Rejection Letters, The Final Girls and more. They have sat on judging panels for the British Fantasy Awards and are a frequent guest on pop culture podcasts. They were shortlisted for the London Writers Award in Poetry 2018, the Creative Future Writers' Awards 2020, the VAULT FIVE 2021, and the Streetcake Experimental Writing Prize 2021, and have opened for Saul Williams on the Roundhouse Main Stage. They have also written for short film, theatre, and audio. They are one of Creative Future's Next Up poets of 2022, in collaboration with The Poetry School. You can find Arden on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Hiss

said the little
goblin,

Hiss

Hiss

Excuse me

Hello.

Would you like this bowl of soup
I saved for you?

It's still warm.

Folk Tales

I've heard enough of fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, the race to a binary life
well-recorded,
death and legacy on stereo.

We are the something else
in the hidden track,

unafraid and immortal.

I've had enough of those same old stories,
passed down the same old channels.

Let's start again.

Dandy of the End Times

I remember when you and I would meet for a sporadic croissant.

You'd say that it's four hundred calories of nothing, and that a moment on the lips is forever on the hips and hips.

I wasn't really listening. I was enjoying our especial frisson, over our sporadic croissant.

This was in Paris, of course.

All the maître d's laughed when you asked for croissants in the evening, so we took a walk down the Pyramides, and you framed the night in your laughter—and your spellbinding nonchalance to our especial frisson over some sporadic croissant.

All those changes we made to folk songs.

Poor old Molly Malone. Rude bits made ruder, but we were young, drunk, stupid, young—it was last week—and I was there, finally, at 4AM in an Irish pub, your sunless dressed-in-black debutant, taking your spellbinding nonchalance over our especial frisson, thinking of our sporadic hangover croissant.

Something about the silence of the pre-dawn makes me want to smear some red lipstick on, roll some leather boots on, get my Errol Flynn on, because you know I have a *Master's in Disaster*, but

I'm no paint-by-numbers bastard and besides, I don't need to invoke this dapper glamour-ghoul aesthetic when I'm haunted by this want, this naughty renaissance, forever your obscure débutante, to whom you are spell-bindingly nonchalant—exorcise our especial frisson and stuff this sporadic croissant right in your red mouth.

Don't go looking for the portraits in my attic.
There are better tombs to kiss at Père Lachaise.
Maybe I played my hand too early but it's all dandy and
dandies in my amnesiac kingdom and it's me who snipped up all the cards.
None of this is meant to last, but
always remember those nights of freedom where we'll always have Paris— in a naughty
renaissance,
signed: your anti-villain debutant,
still under your spell-binding nonchalance
to some especial frisson
like a sporadic croissant,
four hundred calories of nothing and
vive la résistance.

ABÍÓDÚN ABDUL

After winning various poetry awards throughout childhood, Abíódún 'Abbéy' Abdul still has a passion for creative expression, in part leading her to become an English language lecturer and assessor across the globe. Now most of her expressive writing is creative non-fiction prose, and auto-ethnographical memoir in particular encompassing her schooling across three continents.

The Present Future

Today I am.

Today I am doing lots of self-reflection: an activity I feel grateful to have the time and space to do.

I'm residing in a home paid for (by the skin of my teeth) with the humble salary from the minimised job I managed to hold down through the pandemic.

I'm sitting at the table and chair already in this furnished flat that I could instantly settle into and start living, versus traipsing around Ikea trying to select bits and bobs.

I'm wearing a purple 'dirac' airy dress from my Somali friend further wrapped in a red 'kain sarung' from my Malaysian friend for more warmth, feeling lucky as a Yorùbá-Nigerian clothed in such international community.

I'm working on a computer honing typing skills developed through poetry collections, uni essays, work assignments, even creating teaching materials and assessments for my students, and more.

I'm drafting my narrative writing ranging from poetry inspired by Roald Dahl nonsense rhymes to memoir pieces inspired by Maya Angelou's life of global creativity, activism and love.

I'm interacting with online communities enticing me with dramatic theatre, thoughtful debate, inspirational fellow creatives, intelligent discourse, impromptu dance parties and virtual Christenings of newborns oceans away overloaded with cuteness.

I'm seeing all this through healthy eyes, hearing with healthy ears, processing through a healthy brain, supported by a healthy body, and today I know I am blessed.

Tomorrow I can be.

Tomorrow I can be the embodiment of hopes and dreams from past todays as well as this today now.

I can be face-full rather than faceless, unmask and let the covid-safe world see happy smiles and plump cheeks, communicating beyond a muffled voice behind surgical fabric as the pandemic gradually subsides.

I can be a homeowner, have a foray of differently themed rooms, decorated with keepsakes from trips across the world spanning 5 continents, but ultimately centred on Yorùbá vibes.

I can be close to more family in London, visiting relatives, attending weddings, seeing nieces and nephews grow as childhoods spiral into newfound tallness accompanying both academic and emotional intelligence.

I can visit more friends near in other cities and far in other countries (preferably sunnier) after the lockdown lifts properly, definitively, finally.

I can march for a new day of justice, pounding the roads, threading the streets, joining global voices chanting in unison 'Black Lives Matter', honouring loving fathers like George Floyd, Sheku Bayoh and Mark Duggan as well as devoted mothers like Dorothy "Cherry" Groce and Cynthia Jarrett, taken away by law un-enforcement.

I can create training spaces where others can hone their language and communication skills, facilitating more life opportunities, driving job prospects higher, bringing aspirations ever closer.

I can discuss the premise of an enthralling page-turner with interested readers, engaged editors and eager publishers whilst drafting the bones of its sequel a la J.K. Rowling, and tomorrow I'll see ever new horizons.

Yes, today I am, tomorrow I can be...and the present future will always be full of promise.

Game of To-Do Lists

My to-do-list is magical.

It starts off small, and as I do more things on it, rather than shrink, it mysteriously grows.

As it grows, it seemingly gets out of control, like a teenaged Game of Thrones dragon thrashing this way and that:

- writing stuff (creativity and admin), roar!
- teaching stuff (materials creation and admin), double roar!!
- hiking stuff (volunteer wrangling and admin), triple roar!!!

Admin is a fiery dragon virus that infects the fun side of everything...and also the elixir that seems to grow my to-do-list even more, breathing out lots of fires that I frantically run around trying to put out.

To get it into order, should I organise it alphabetically or categorically? By category is more practical. Put the writing dragon teeth together, the teaching dragon scales together, and the hiking dragon claws together.

Ah, more things being added still!

To get it into reorder, I need to put the categories to prioritise at the top.

Now the hiking dragon claws are on top (ah, admin hangnail), and the writing dragon teeth are below (ah, admin cavity).

Damn you admin virus!

I need a to-do-list manicurist & dentist to help fight these infections.

I need to contact them...I'll put it on the to-do-list...

d'oh!

BRIDIE KENNERLEY

Bridie Kennerley is a writer, poet and science communicator. Her writing often centres around nature and the environment, inspired by her scientific background and her life on and around Dartmoor in Devon.

Aune

I start up high, and calm, and still. The trees move gently between me and the wide grey sky as I tiptoe out from the heavy earth below. There's no rush here, no urgency to run and dance, so I take my time between warm pools. Soft layers of scum lie on my skin and insects land for a brief moment before flitting away. There is some slope, some pull towards the sea, but I hold myself steady and bask in the warmth of the dappled golden light.

As I leave my miniature valley, I am drawn again to the earth. Still myself, but following a thousand tiny paths through the loose ground. Spiking marsh grasses grow above, on the more solid clumps that I have not fully reached through. Sometimes feet move across this strange, barely there, part of me without noticing and slide down, ankles and knees hastily withdrawn. Others recognise me on sight, tread lightly across my bed without disruption, or respectfully go around.

And now I reach the tumbling granite steps and begin to fall, still small but leaping above to see the bare moor stretching away on both sides, dotted with gorse bushes and marker stones. Occasionally I slip under tunnels of bracken and, as I begin to form into something coherent, ancient slab bridges.

The valley is rising up on either side of me now and I run, fast and foaming white. The mists fall and rise, and I sing loud enough to reassure those lost amongst them. As I reach the path that crosses the hills, to my left I look for the perfect rings in the earth where once I watched the people who lived there.

But as I pick up speed and strength, suddenly - a breath taken. I am still again, and deep. For the first time since I rose from the earth, there is too much of me to see the land below. Concrete stretches across the valley, holds me in. But, slowly, I pull myself towards the edge, slide over and drop.

Straight down into the river bed below, next to the tiny building that supervises that looming dam. Free again, I pick up speed and fly down along the path. Here and there, deep places let me rest for a moment and here people swim. I have carried the iron down, dyeing myself a red brown, and they can taste blood in their mouths, but I am cool and quench their body's thirst in the heat.

Here glittering turquoise damselflies skip across my skin, soft feet tickling without slipping beneath. I am warmed by the sun on my golden rock path and wander on. Under the bridge and now picking up speed, white water along and away from the path.

I am between the fields now, sheep and cows and deer abound. And the soft square shapes of cottages, built from river stones I gave. I splash down below a high arching bridge and then high arching chestnut trees that offer their golden fruit to me in autumn, wrapped in spiked coats. A manor house, a railway bridge and then I split, encircling a meadow and making an island of my own.

Between my arms, children play and dogs run. Birds scatter across these trees I own because I hold them, wood pigeons, jays, blue tits. Every now and then, my favourite ones, the bright blue flash of kingfisher light. One tree seemed to have a face, I heard the people say, before it fell to where it lies with me still. I wrap myself around its half roots left and the green still grows.

As I leave the meadow wrapped in my embrace, I come together with myself again. White water rises where I clasp my hands and create the point deep under leaves, beyond the brambles and the snowdrops, where I leave the land behind and once more run on towards the sea.

COLLY METCALFE

Colly Metcalfe is a deaf writer and performer from Teesside. She's been writing for a relatively short time, only a few years, but has had one poem published by Slice of the Moon Books, and another published in an anthology - What Meets The Eye - The Deaf Perspective, by Arachne Press in November 2021. Colly mostly writes poetry for performance, and uses both spoken English and BSL in her delivery.

I love the sea

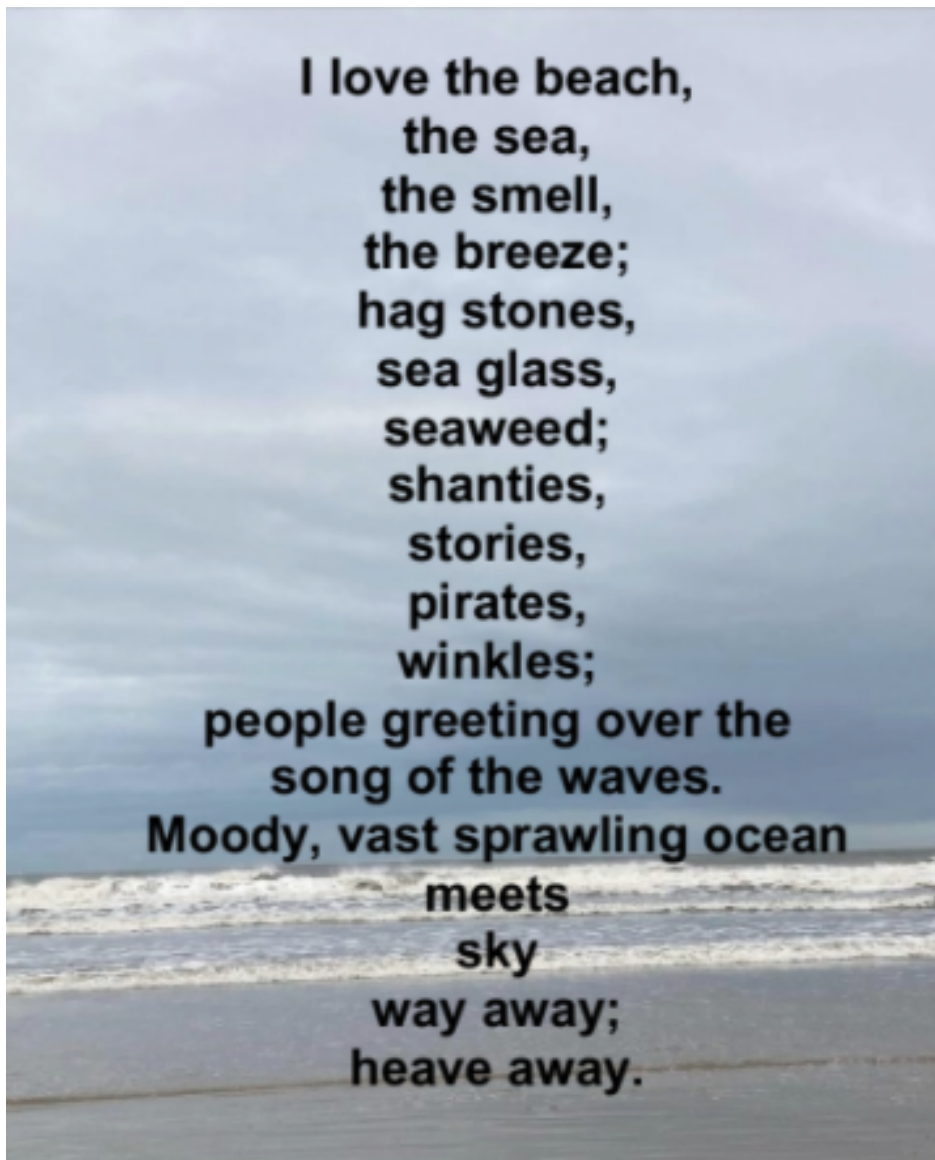


Image description: Waves rolling in from a grey sea onto a sandy beach. The sky is grey and cloudy. The poem superimposed reads: "I love the beach, / the sea, / the smell, / the breeze; / hag stones, / sea glass, / seaweed; / shanties, / stories, / pirates, / winkles; / people nodding hello over the / song of the waves. / Moody, vast sprawling ocean / meets / sky / way away; / heave away"



**I love the feel of
wet sand
'neath boots,
crunching shells,
sea spray,
gulls' cries,
dogs running,
barking;
kids laughing.
Clouds up-up-high,
ships at anchor,
way
away over;
haul away.**

Image description: An image of a person's lace up boots and the bottom of their legs in blue trousers. They are standing on a sandy beach with small dark rocks dotted on the sand. The poem superimposed reads: "I love the feel of / wet sand / 'neath boots, / crunching shells, / sea spray, / gulls' cries, / dogs running, / barking; / kids laughing. / Clouds up-up-high, / ships at anchor / way away over; / haul away."

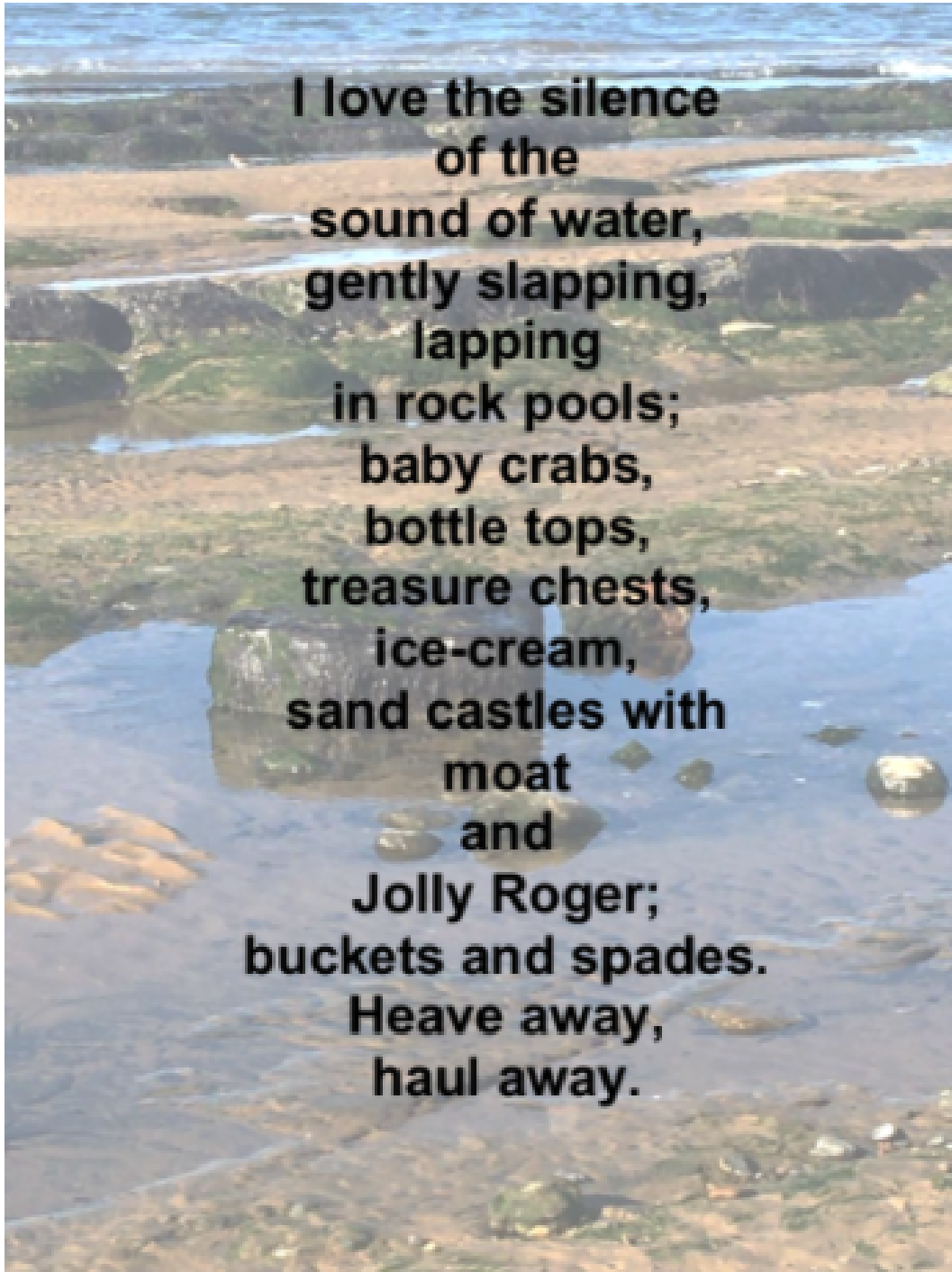


Image description: An image of rock pools reflecting a blue sky. The rock pools stretch away to the shoreline, where gentle waves lap the beach. The poem superimposed reads: "I love the silence / of the / sound of water, / gently slapping, / lapping / in rock pools; / baby crabs, / bottle tops, / treasure chests, / ice-cream, / sand castles with / moat / and / Jolly Roger; / buckets and spades. / Heave away, / haul away."

MARYAM EBRAHIM

Maryam Ebrahim is an aspiring London-based deaf, autistic writer and poet. She also has neurological disabilities and is a keen advocate on the access and awareness of invisible disabilities. Maryam is a bibliophile and an avid reader. She is passionate about writing on topics that are close to her heart and hopes that through her writing she can spark a change in the world – one pen stroke at a time! Maryam enjoys the company of animals and an enticing book. She is rarely seen without pen or paper; when her pen is not moving, she is often found entertaining the family cats!

Where happiness lies

Come with me, one summer's day,
We'll get on a boat and sail away,
On peaceful sea,
We'll pass green trees,
And
Blue butterflies along the way.

You and me,
We'll sail through night and day.
And when hungry we'll catch fish,
Slap it between bread
And eat a sandwich instead.

When the sun sets,
We'll sit and pray -
Give thanks for this day.
Satisfied
We'll rest and share dreams
Of respect,
Of barriers broken,
Of a clean, safe earth, not destroyed,
And love that lasts.

But at last we arrive home.
We must depart.
The time has gone,
Sadness ensues
As we put on our shoes,
And plod on home.
Wistfully wishing of the world we want.

Moments will come and pass,
But memories last.
Do not be upset,
Do not forget,
Happiness is hidden within the heart.
And as long as you have this,
You will always know where to start.



What is "happiness"?

Out of sight.
And out of reach.
Yet closer than we think.

It slowly sneaks in
To our hearts
And warms us deep within.

It rises like the majestic Moon,
And settles like the setting Sun -
Far off in the distance
Just
Dancing on the horizon.

Sunshine

(Dedicated to Nima, the real Sunshine)

Silent was the room,
As they lay in the gloom,
Cold and closed –
The day doomed.

Beds ordered in rows,
Poorly patients posed –
Lost and alone.

Silently, the sun rose.

It slipped between blinds,
Spilling into the room.

The opening of doors,
"Sunshine!"
They exclaimed.

She smiled and waved.

She pushed along a trolley,
Each tray laden
With treats –
Tea at the top,
Biscuits beneath!

Their faces began to glow.

She wandered the ward,
Pouring them cups of tea;
Each sip warming them within.

Sunshine saw their sparkling eyes,
Their sudden smiles.
In between sips,
Stories were shared.

Laughter filled the room,
As they sat in the noon,
Warm and welcoming -
The day bloomed.

Beds basking in the glow,
Perky patients rose -
Feeling less alone.

Brightly, the sun shone.

Alas, it was time to go,
Sunshine started for the doors,
Paused

She smiled and waved.

Through the doors,
Into corridors
Beyond.

Behind her,
The room radiated
With warmth.

INIGO PURCELL

Inigo Purcell is an academic and novelist who lives with chronic pain. He's interested in writing about the decisions people make and how they are influenced by their circumstances.

The Tower in the Sky

"I'm pretty sure that there's an accessible route up the Tor". He's said this, multiple times.

He's starting to wish he had not told so many people, over the last six weeks, that he was pretty sure that Glastonbury Tor was accessible. He's still pretty sure it is, sort of - he's seen signs for the car park for the different trail, but they were not, now, near the different trail. Which he hasn't been able to find that much information about because all the forum answers he'd looked up about it either said 'yes, fully accessible' or 'no, not accessible at all'.

It's in front of them. It's very big and green and St Michael's Tower is on top of it, hanging in the sky. They are just approaching the point where it starts to become the Tor itself, not just a series of fields leading to it. He's managing the paths alright, jumping out of the wheelchair every now and again for a tricky bit, or using it as a walker. He'd been nervous, yesterday, about asking his students to push, but they are eager to help- they've helped throughout the day, either with the chair or when he is on crutches, and it has made a difference. He's aware that they are one of the first groups of people who have only ever encountered him using a wheelchair. This scared him, a few weeks ago, when he started but it does so less now.

He tried to climb the Tor a couple of years ago. He was here in Glastonbury because he discovered the only ever case of a very specific grant where he met the very specific requirements. A travel grant for disabled students at his university to go on holiday with some educational benefit. He'd put in the application that he knew he might be using a wheelchair at some point in the near future. He was starting to try and get used to it, then, although he was still only using the stick. He'd got a while up the Tor and then his ankle had turned and he'd walked down, on one of the many sprains he put far too much weight on. He'd realised he probably needed to go with someone else, if he was to do it. He went and sat with his feet in Chalice well for a long time afterwards, mostly to try and rest them but because he would be a fool if it turned out healing wells did really work and he'd ignored it because of general skepticism. He'd gone back to the Abbey, or the high street, he'd looked at more things, he'd written a surprising amount. He'd felt a bit disappointed, but not overwhelmingly so. When he did, he'd tried to remember that he didn't want to hurt his ankle worse, higher up on what is essentially a small mountain.

He's left his crutches in the minibus because of his misplaced confidence that there would be an accessible route. He's presumed that, at the very least, he can use the chair as a walker. There's steps, though, just as they get to the Tor proper. You're actually already quite high up, when you get this far- you've been climbing the winding set of hills and lanes that lead to the Tor. They're exposed to the wind, although the weather is better than they feared, but there's no natural place for him to wait, and besides, he still wants to ascend.

One of the students offers to take his chair, when he gets up. It's a lightweight one, he knows the young man would not be able to sprint off with it as quickly if it wasn't, and at first he tries to manage alone, on the steps up to the wide incline, but then another offers an arm. He accepts - he barely ever walks outside without a stick these days and he's gone further than he really should. He should have kept the crutches balanced on the back of the chair, he knows this - he'd managed to get them all the way down the country on the train.

It takes quite a lot of effort, even with the student's support, to get used to the climb. The steps are shallow, but the incline is steep, and it's a walk he wouldn't trust himself on alone. When he starts to get into the swing of it, and his student has too, he talks to her about the Arthurian associations about the hill. How much of Somerset would have been islands, how you can see this even as you look at the landscape. St Michael's Tower is out of sight now, hidden by the angle and the incline at which they're standing. The wind rushes round them, even though it's still clear and bright.

"When we can see it again, it will have changed colour. Because of the light. It feels uncanny, even if it's just an optical illusion."

They're at a steep bit again, so they talk less until the tower reappears, shining a near white gold.

"Oh, it does!"

"You can see, can't you, how you'd think things about it? How you'd feel you'd slipped out of the world."

They've reached a bench, where the student who ran on with his wheelchair is waiting. He sits in it, letting the two students sit on the bench, talking a little. He's not that much more winded than his students, although he can feel the pain in his ankles, knows he'll need to be more careful later, when they get back down.

Another student reaches them, offers to take over carrying the chair, so he and the student who has been helping him stand, and once again, he watches a young man sprint away up the steps with his chair over his shoulder.

His student tells him about how "walk" in the UK seems to mean what she would interpret as "hike" in the US, that walks are done in far too inclement weather, but that the view this time is worth it.

"And we know when it ends, it's finite. Not three hours through muddy fields in Wales."

The stone on the Tower darkens again, before it dips out of sight once more, and then before long they're on to the very final stretch, it's a real tower, in normal dimensions, not a distant landmark. The steps are steeper again, but it's so clear now that they are nearly there.

He wishes this would mean the pain would just disappear, that it wouldn't still be hard, but of course it doesn't. He slows down, so does his student, he adjusts his pace once more. It still takes a little while. Then, they're at the summit.

He gets his chair. He lets his students talk among themselves. He wheels himself towards the tower, gets up for a second so he can lift his chair inside it. He touches the stone of the walls.

There'll be time in a few minutes for photos, for looking at the view, for a more formal version of the talk he has about the landscape. Right now, he feels the grey stone against his hand and thinks that he's here. That it is real.

JESS STAFFORD

Jess Stafford lives in sunny Lancashire. She has never titled herself as "poet", occasionally writing when the mood took her. It just so happened the mood lasted a whole 18 months over lockdown and now she's the greatest okay-ish poet you've never heard of, or so her mum says so.

There Should Be Applause

"There should be applause
Crowds of crowds
The type you see for Royalty in films
Yes ok let's have flag waving too why not
With the happiness of people getting free stuff

I don't want rice
It'll get caught in my eye
Throw me glitter -
Bomb me with glitter
All the colours

Zeus will organise the fireworks
It'll be better than any Olympic opening ceremony
They'll be mugs of tea and fresh coffee
Keep people happy
Non stop fresh flowers to my door
I'll politely say "no more!"
But still secretly want them
As it makes me feel important

My phone looks like it's dancing
From vibrating with people checking in
I'll assign someone else to cope
Tell everyone me and myself are doing fine
Please leave all gifts to the side

And they'll be many
Balloons the size of moons
Bouncing their heads on the ceiling
Savoury foods like cheese and biscuits
All the stuff I can eat that won't make me sick

They'll be medals
Too many medals that they switch to trophies
All overflowing with sweets and crisps
And other life best bits
Like your greatest sunsets
Your best summer kiss
With mint choc chip ice cream still on your lips

Church bells will ring like on Christmas day
If you have no bells then they'll be drums
Big fat ass drums that you can't believe people have the arm strength to hold let alone play
But they do
The sound make the soles of your feet tingle
Your mouth widen into a smile

Although I've done all this before
And will no doubt have to do some more
There should be applause
Every time I begin again
I can hear the crowds roar

KATIE MOUDRY

Katie Moudry (they/them) is a poet and performer, organiser of Exeter Pride and devoted cat owner.

Grandson

He concentrates fiercely as a gymnast performing a routine - shuffle up to the chair, grasp the table leg (stopping briefly to gnaw it with his gums) both hands on the chintz covered seat and heave! He has pulled himself up! He can see over the forest of wooden furniture. Like a man who has climbed a mountain, he pauses to take in the view, spotting his prize - the tights clad legs of my daughter who is by the sink. I watch the mechanics of a body creating its relationship with motion - first bending his knees a little to find his centre of balance like a nappy clad sumo wrestler. Like a man who has had one too many, my tiny drunkard lurches forward falteringly, until he overbalances and bumps back onto his bottom. I want to tell him life is like this, that you have to keep climbing back up again knowing you will fall down. But there won't be time for conversations like that - As his expands my world shrinks. I'm lucky if I make it most days to this armchair and I know soon I won't be here to see where his legs will carry him. I have to see within the stumbling steps the man walking, running, crossing fields, hiking through forests of pines not just table legs. The man who will one day drink too much gin and find himself, head spinning, once again bumped down onto the floor pressing himself against a seated girl's legs.

RACHEL LEWIS

Rachel Lewis is a poet and facilitator. Her poetry interrogates and celebrates family, friendship, community and recovery. She co-founded Writing Happiness with Elspeth Wilson. Her first pamphlet on eating disorder recovery, 'Three degrees of separation', was published in 2019 by Wordsmith HQ. She is currently writing a second collection exploring grief and belonging through her family's links to the Belfast Jewish community, and running a newsletter exploring the work of poetry. She can be found at [@rachel_lewis_poet](#) on [instagram](#) and [twitter](#).

Night Walks

(originally published in a 2020 Workshop Anthology led by Cecilia Knapp)

See the lovers with their backs to us,
two teacups on their dining table,
the flip of a child jumping upstairs,
the creased soles at the window swaying
back and forth above the sill, the husband
standing above his seated wife, her grimace
as he trims the hair at the nape of her bowed neck.

A window ajar and many beach towels,
bedraggled, dirty, rapunzelling out,
the woman postered by fluorescent light,
frying in the flat above the shop,
the man stood in his basement, twisting
bulbs into bellies of wicker reindeer.

I stare even if they stare straight back.

Above, the winter cloud
rolls over azure motorways,
the velvet jacket of the night sprouts,
and street lamps drum like jewels
around a wrinkled neck.

A satellite pretends to be a star.

Below, the light switches snap shut,
and so we start to talk about the landscapes
we are passing through,
the garden of banana trees,
the alley of the mismatched gates,
until we reach the estate garden.

One tree that flowered in the summer
leans half over peeling railings.

We spend a few seconds toe to toe,
then walk again away the way we came.

STEPHEN WHITEHEAD

Stephen Whitehead enjoys writing and photography, with a focus on the small details of everyday life and the nature around him. He lives on the edge of the East Anglian fens where he feeds the birds and hedgehogs.

Birds of Paradise

Still leaves shake in morning gloom
Their serrated edges split and flex
And miniscule trails of breath
Form in the cold air as the honeysuckle
Begins to sing.
We attempt to lure them,
Our blackbirds,
Pull the hunger towards us
Towards our doorstep, our proffered palms.
Eventually one will sit
Hidden but so, so close
And sing to us in a hushed voice
Trying out new folk songs,
Telling us that we are part of his world
As much as he is part of ours.

--

Suddenly there is a movement
Completely silent movement
Movement that is more a part
Of your eye than the landscape.
A wren hops through the honeysuckle
Finding a path up through the cotoneaster
Up and up to the gutters.
It is a make-believe bird.
As it sings, I am shocked by the volume
Drowning robins, crows, blackbirds
Even, high above, American eagles of metal and fire.
And I think - as shocked as I am -
How shocked must the wren be
Every time she opens her beak
And stops the world with song.

--

Only when the garden is still again
Do the magpies come in a petrol streak
Wing and whip their way
Landing in a rainbow flash.
These magic birds, smart gentlemen
Bring news from the shadows
With a croak and a chirrup
Of their strong, subtle beaks.
Two for joy!
Truly magic, every fallen feather
Is a spell, transformative –
Weave it in your hair
Feel your wings spread
Three short beats
And fly.

The Lathe

It's a hungry creature
It will eat you
So stow any loose light away
Aim for balance
 As with life
Until you have
Achieved a perfect hope
(as all hope is - perfect)
You will, for the smallest fraction
Of time
Be cutting thin air
Cutting time itself.
Spinning hope will unravel
You see the ghost of dreams

YAZ NIN

Yaz Nin is a Turkish Cypriot writer and playwright from London. She is interested in feminist narratives and humour. She can be reached on Twitter @Yaz_Nin.

At first I was afraid

Every writer is obliged to engage in some version of that infamous “why I write” conundrum. I’d avoided it long enough, I shouldn’t have been surprised when tasked with it on that Monday night. Mine had a particular sting though, “Happiness”

Why do you want to write about happiness?

I’m a reader I love reading, that’s kind of it right?

Nope,

Ok, fine yeah maybe, that – that “arranging my thoughts on paper” angle?

Nahhhh

Story? I heart story! Yes!. I am human, camp fire, cave, images... full stop?

Ehhhh....

Fine, a voice! a voice for the voiceless?

Convincing, worthy, important... but no, no that’s not why I write...

I couldn’t leave the page until I confessed.

When I dissected the happiness pinch to the question, I was shamed.

I thought I was so high brow, I wrote essays on Proust while wearing roll neck jumpers in winter with no sense of self-deprecating mockery.

Virginia Woolf, Shirley Jackson, Zadie Smith are not and have never been why I write.

I write because I will never produce a so-bad-it’s-good power ballad. Meatloaf, Gloria Gaynor, Bonnie Tyler are why I started writing.

Ted Hughes didn’t just write about that crow he became the crow – masterful was Ted but I’d trade his back catalogue for Hotel California any day of the week. Even Freud didn’t grasp the human condition like them guys did,

Some dance to remember, some dance to forget.

My happiness came from music and dancing. I can’t listen to loud or live music anymore. I can barely stand more than five minutes –

When I asked my physiotherapist if I’d ever be able to moonwalk again, she squeezed my hand and asked if I understood my diagnosis.

Yeah, no, yeah, course I do but I’m from a generation where breaking a family heirloom whilst perfecting the moon walk in the living room was a rite of passage. That had to count for something, it must *still* mean something, today, no?

By the time I realised nothing I write will get close to that haunting sensation you get when driving through the country at night an' Nights in white satin comes on the radio, a song that simultaneously takes you everywhere you've ever been and convinces you before the end you've lived a million other lives, I got ill. I had to accept I could no longer dance or listen to music in the same way. And yeah, I know, I can't write like Freddie Mercury.

I write to manipulate myself and the readers from the leftover essence of moments of happiness I've lived. The origin is always tinted with happiness.

I will never run for the 29 night bus out of Camden after a britpop gig again, - was that Courtney Love we saw? Course it was, it was the nineties. It was always Courtney Love.

But I *will* no doubt, along with many writers from my generation, write some kind of fictitious scene where a fan having got drunk for the first time with Courtney Love in Camden gets in a cab and heads home.

In a recent short story I wrote, a character who had just been told her husband was bludgeoned to death "*calmly puts her coffee cup on the brogue table leaving a ring stain that will outlive her*".

that - that's me!, that's the writer's happiness there... that brogue table? OK fine it's not *in* the story, it's not visible between the lines, but whilst the reader lingers on the poor woman's grief I'm moonwalking in 1992 again, my sister is shouting, "*oh-my-god-mums' - gonna- killlll-you-you broke it!*" whilst cleaning broken pieces off the real brogue table we had in the living room.

I try to keep it veiled, the happiness, the source of my writing, the me in the writing. In part cos I'm still a snob,

when another woman I wrote in another story set in Baltimore nonchalantly puts three CDs in her winter coat and strolls to the charity shop to donate them on the mildest day of the year not only am I trying to be Anne Tyler, I'm worried the character in the story will do a left turn towards e17 and expose me,

The laptop I write on is propped up on a box of old cassette tapes. The prized possession is a cassette I once put in *my* pocket and walked to Walthamstow with. Destination? Brian Harvey's nan's house. Three Haringay teenage friends bunking off school on a Friday afternoon in search of a popstar did nothing nonchalantly.

We never met the front man of East 17, but I did return home with a signature in the sleeve from "Brian Harvey's nan"

I realise I've somewhat lost the thread in this piece. I'm OK with that because I want to keep writing and that's the intention/result of any good writing course.

And I've always known if I concluded about writing or happiness I wouldn't be able to face the blank page tomorrow, and I want, I *need* to write about all the times I danced to Tim Buckley with my partner in the kitchen. That moment will of course be in the random paragraph where a character bangs all the cupboards open and shut in search of her salt and pepper shakers.

I'll find out once I start writing if she finds them or not.

TOPE ONANUGA

Tope is a strategic thinker with a background in advertising and marketing. She explores her creativity through producing insightful digital content and has worked with a variety of brands from Channel 4 to award-winning entertainment platform Leville, continuing to develop her voice as a writer. An activist for disability rights, Tope enjoys watching Netflix in her spare time.

Writing Happiness

They can start, end or help move a story along. A piece of paper is where they have their own stage. With many different variations. Too many to keep track of. But I know someone has.

Sometimes they can be calming or just for fun, be dramatic and add the drama. A somewhat alternative for talking, helping to connect with people, show that you care, give you a chance to advocate for a cause you care about or express your emotions.

Words can do that and there is just something so beautiful about words and how they can be part of a journey, and form questions. So, the question I wanted to leave you with is

What word has had the most impact for you?

Stay in touch! Follow Writing
Happiness @disabledjoy on
Instagram & Twitter