



Derbyshire Healthcare  
NHS Foundation Trust

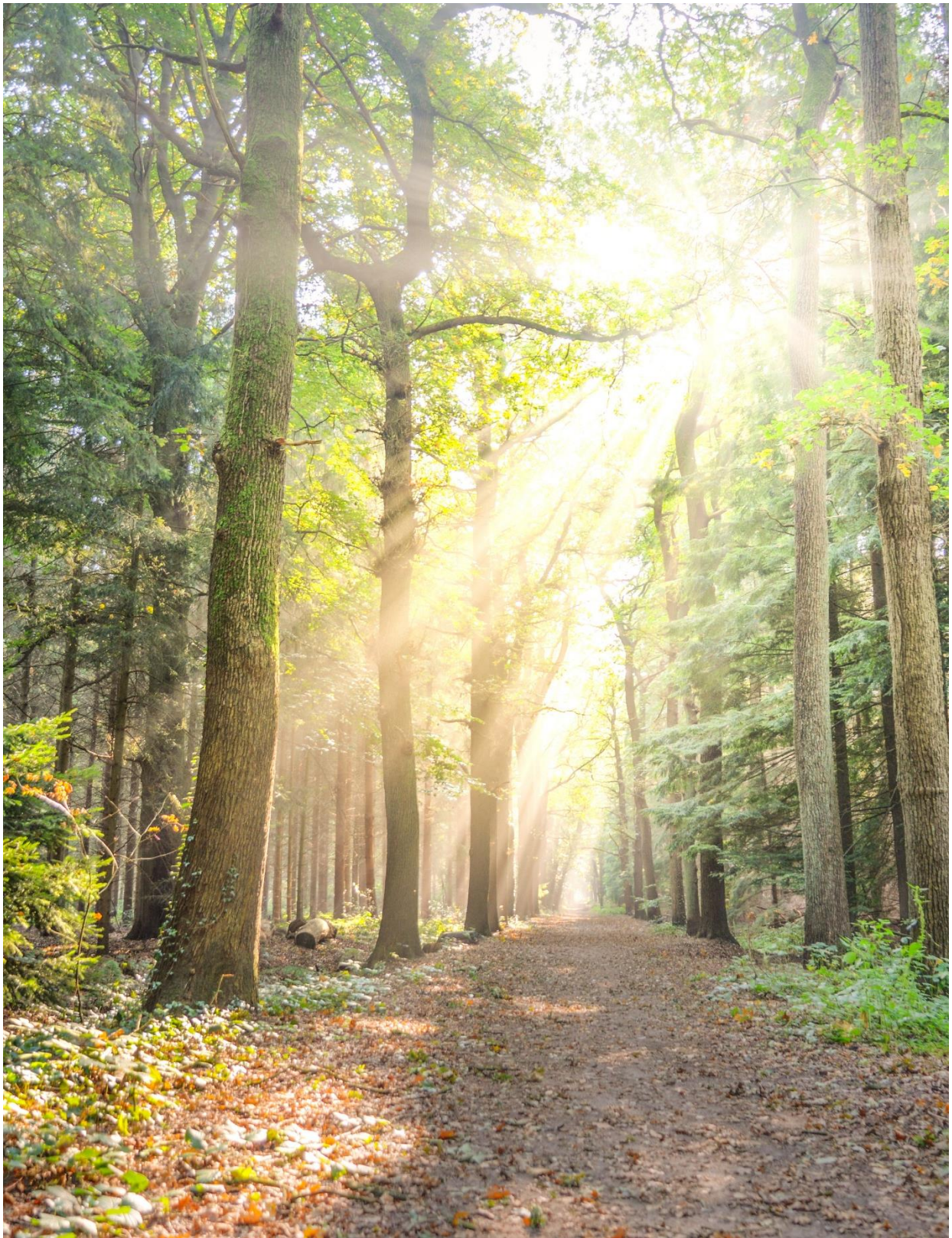


Making a  
positive  
difference





This booklet is dedicated to the memory of Annabelle Hodgkinson.



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## Foreword

Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust launched a writing competition on the theme of 'Finding my calm during Covid' earlier this summer to provide an opportunity for people to share their coping mechanisms to deal with the challenges that they faced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The competition was open to Trust members, service users, carers, Trust staff, stakeholders, partner organisations and the voluntary sector.

Successful local author and poet, **Leonie Martin** (pictured), was on the judging panel. Leonie was joined on the judging panel by Marie Hickman, Trust Library and Knowledge Manager and Staff Governor; Caroline Maley, Trust Chair; Rob Poole, Public Governor; and Leanne Walker, Expert by Experience.



Leonie said: "As an author, poet and Writing for Wellbeing facilitator living with a disability, creative writing in all its many genres is integral to managing my own wellbeing, offering space for reflection which enables me to flourish. It has therefore been both humbling and inspiring to read these wonderful writing competition entries.

Creating and sharing words and feelings in a written form can be terrifying when your confidence is low and anxiety running high – as it was for so many over this past unprecedented time of pandemic. Every single writer who entered this competition deserves acknowledgement and recognition. The scope and quality of entries was truly moving, depicting vivid experiences and personal sources of calm discovered in the midst of turmoil. It was incredibly hard to judge and pick out a short list from such candid words of resilience and hope – in both the prose and poetry sections.

As a former service user of Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, I began writing as a tool for facilitating my own recovery and wellbeing. I would therefore urge all participants to value the words they have created in this 'Finding my calm during Covid' competition and to continue their writing journey within their different communities if they too find that it helps them to flourish."

Thank you to everyone who participated!

## **Our Mental Health – Finding my calm during COVID**

Where to start with my mental health?  
Problems it has caused family, love and wealth  
Prisons and hospitals I've been to many  
One unique mind can't compare to any  
9 long years I've struggled this pain  
Feels too much, no light no gain  
I wish for love a kiss or a hug  
But no one wants this mental mug  
Put up a front, try to be formal  
I pray at night just to be normal  
Gruesome scars that are always on show  
Where did they come from all want to know  
My memories of war, my story of life  
All because of the way I used a knife  
Jobs that I've lost and education I've missed  
Other problems caused, I could make you a list  
A day to day struggle, a constant task  
Portrayed as indifferent like a storyline cast  
This is a snippet of my daily pain  
Nothing to look to, nothing to gain

A continued note on my mental health  
A progresses warp living in stealth  
I talked of the bad, the despair and the pain  
I spoke of no light, could see nothing to gain  
I stand corrected, I know better now  
It was always there I just didn't know how  
How to look to the good and always see the lightning  
Without the rain you won't see the sun shining  
You have to set aside a biased mind  
Be true to yourself and always be kind  
Remember the serenity prayer in its length  
And then use those words when you need strength  
Find your own step, walk your own walk  
Never be withdrawn as it is good to talk  
The loss of the past it cannot return  
But never focus that as your main concern  
I could end on a sonnet, a song or a quote



But I'll stay humble here on this note  
Family and love, don't look to the wealth  
Stay strong for others and look after your health

**Thomas Comer**

*Judges' comments:*

“Powerful narrative voice from the start, journeying through realistic and disturbing darkness to serenity (calm) and light, with refreshing humility and wisdom thrown in at the end.”



## Not an Idiot – A Conversation with Myself

This village has nowhere to sit! No village green, with or without duckpond. No village hall or community centre. Not even a flowerbed with a few seats round it. That just leaves the churchyard and so here I am. It's calm and peaceful here, a good place for thinking. I am thinking about Covid 19. What is it, where did it come from? What happens next? Everyone needs to know. I ask the trees, the birds and the bees, but they say "why ask us? We're not part of the buzz, we don't know anything". I know, I know, of course you don't, I'm not an idiot. I ask the breeze sighing in the trees, but he just sighs and cries, " I don't know either". Of course you don't, I shouldn't have asked, I'm not an idiot. What about the bones down below? We don't know, we don't know. We're dead, we've lost our golden thread to life, we know nothing." Of course you don't, I know that, I'm not an idiot. Lots of animals live here, rabbits, mice, badgers and voles. "Don't ask us, we're just here to dig holes." Nobody knows the answer to your questions, so you'll just have to learn to accept it and go with the flow. Yes, yes, I know, I'm not an idiot.

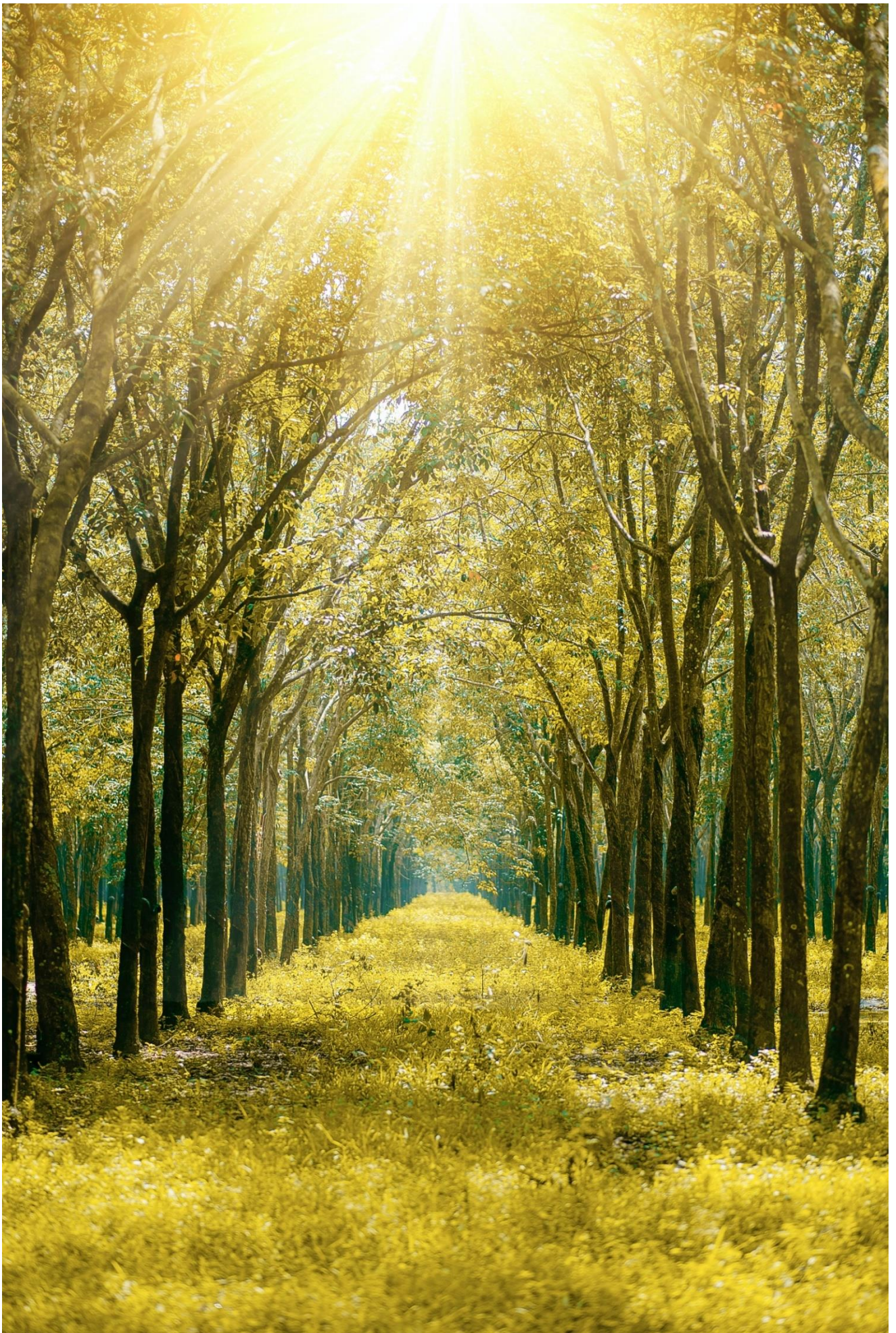
Perhaps I should look for more political reasons. I heard it had been released on purpose from a laboratory in Wuhan. But surely even the Chinese wouldn't be that stupid! What do Boris and Co. know? Not much more than me I suspect. But they're in the precarious position of being blamed if anything goes wrong. So, I'm glad I'm not them! Some people seem to have the weird notion that Covid doesn't exist. Yet the evidence is right before their eyes. People don't die for no reason. Be sensible! A scary thought springs suddenly to mind. What if Mother Nature has taken things into her own hands and decided to do a massive cull of the earth because the planet is so overcrowded, and can no longer sustain such high numbers? So the virus rolls on its merry way around the world, leaving devastation and death behind it.

Helpless is a good word for how I feel. But you can cope, you know you can, you're not an idiot.

**Annabelle Hodgkinson**

### *Judges' comments:*

"An engaging title. Takes the reader on a powerful journey through the writer's experience set in a realistic time and place. It asks more questions than it answers, making it thought provoking. The sense of calm seems to come from 'going with the flow' and accepting their own limitations."



## Resilience found my calm

*“I thought 2020 would be the year I got everything I wanted. Now I know it was the year I appreciated everything I have.”*

A friend sent me this quote and it really resonated with me.

I knew it wouldn't be the year I got everything I wanted (who ever does?), but it certainly gave me a slap around the face and made me see how blessed I am.

I've been far too guilty of 'why me' syndrome.

*Why is this happening to me?*

*Why do I have to stay at home every day when it makes me anxious?*

*Why does my life have to change?*

Rationalising my worries with so many terrifying headlines around was tough and not being able to solve everything made me incredibly anxious.

But has it all been completely terrible?

Well, no. I don't think so. And here's why...

## Relationships

I spent lockdown at home with family and even though this brought its challenges I would not have had it any other way. I felt supported, comforted and like no matter what horrifying things were happening in the world, I was safe and protected.

Not being able to see friends was gutting but thankfully technology connected us when face-to-face gatherings were too risky, and for that I'm super grateful.

## Change

*'I don't like change, I'm rubbish at it'* I would often say. I'm a creature of habit and live a very routined life to keep my anxiety at bay.

If you'd have told me that a killer virus would sweep the world and I'd have to stay home every day I'd have had a meltdown there and then.

Nevertheless I'm surviving it. I'm still here and (mostly) smiling.

Everything has changed and it's been completely terrifying but I'm proof that it's possible to get through it.

I'm proud of my resilience. I didn't know I had it in me.

## **Lack of direction**

I believed that losing my last job in lockdown was a one-way ticket to hopelessness. I've worked since I was 14 (before it was even legal to be paid!) so how on earth would I cope with being unemployed? Well, pretty wonderfully as it turned out.

I realised that job had become a noose around my neck. Without it I felt free, like I had a chance to explore what I'd truly like to do in life. I turned the empty days into opportunities and changed direction to something which gives me more fulfilment than I'd had in years.

The pandemic taught me that I can deal with change, don't need a job to feel valid and have so much good in my life. It wasn't easy, far too many tears were shed and frustrations acted upon. I felt all new levels of hopelessness and like giving up on various occasions. But I have honestly never learned so much about myself, the true meaning of happiness and being grateful for the little things that mean a lot. And for that, lockdown, I thank you.

**Georgie Lazzari**

### *Judges' comments:*

"An engaging title. A narrative journey of self-awareness and gratitude touching on the experience of anxiety, problems with relationships, coping with change, finding new direction. Powerful and inspiring for others to read."



## Finding my calm during Covid

Covid 19,  
How long has it been?  
Isolation  
...Forever  
That's what it seems!  
Seclusion  
Confusion  
Unfairness  
For all!  
Missing loved ones-  
Hearts breaking  
Mind shaking  
Doesn't take much to fall!!  
Got Covid!  
Immobile!  
Coughing galore!  
Sky high temperature  
Sending Ambulance  
Suicidal thoughts are regular  
Planning funeral and more...  
Sent home  
Carers abscond  
...Left alone  
Can't move!  
Can't look after myself!  
...My son is a saviour  
Playing music, incense  
Nice n soothing  
And cooling  
Helped me stay calm!  
Need care  
And help with meals  
I'm scared...  
But my friend  
Comes to the rescue!  
He takes me in  
To his home.  
He's had it,

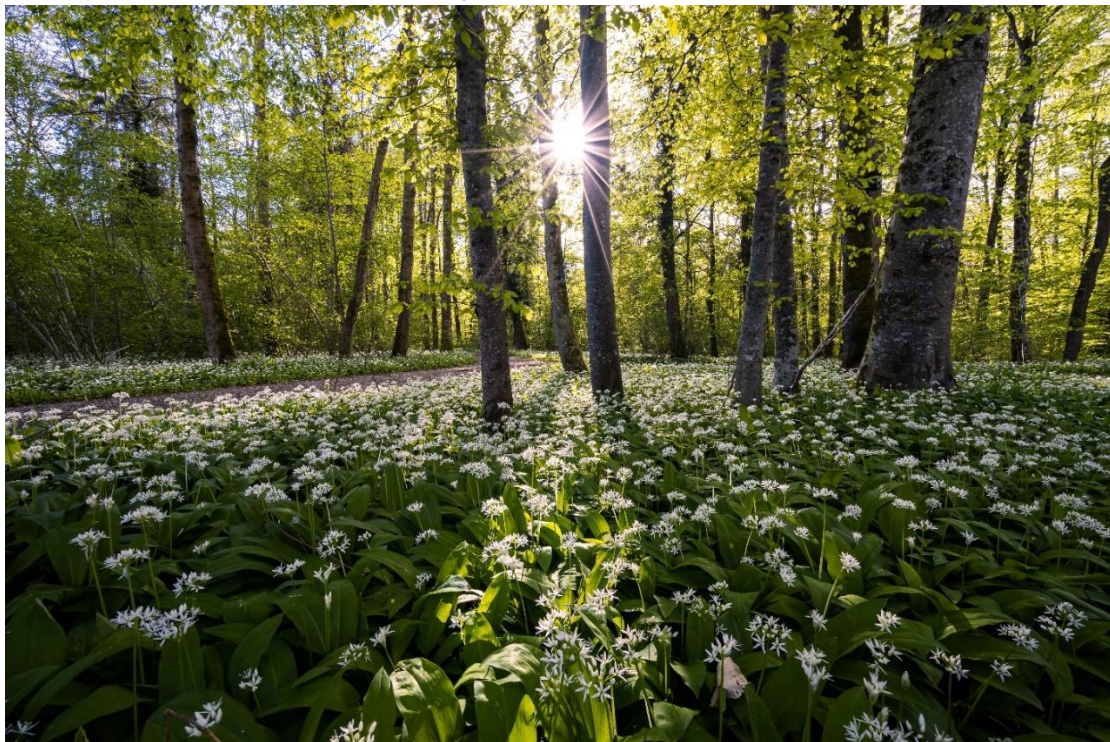
So safely  
I stayed at his house.  
He looked after me,  
he cooked for me,  
Did everything I needed  
Till I was ready  
Going steady  
Then he took me back home  
He's my saviour  
Best behaviour  
Couldn't have lived without him!  
Carers come back-  
Try not to look back.  
No visits  
From other family.  
I stayed safe  
In my flat  
Listening to music  
So soothing  
With my beautiful son,  
Without whom  
Who knows?  
Maybe I'd go?  
But don't worry...  
There's help  
A Covid helpline  
A calm voice to listen  
To help with your troubles  
To help with your pain.  
Video calls with my daughter,  
Not the same without cuddles  
But a blessing to see her...  
Lots of laughs and giggles!  
As restrictions have lifted...  
We've been able to meet!  
We can see her!  
...And cuddle  
And have more laughs!

Go shopping  
If we wanted  
And stay and have tea...  
But a regular thing  
That calmed us all down-  
Was a take away coffee  
And a drive out of town...  
To the beautiful places  
That Derbyshire has  
They kept us sane  
With nature, so calm.  
Life is getting better  
We can take it with ease  
Count all your blessings  
For me?  
Valuing my family!!

**Nicola Lewis**

*Judges' comments:*

“This poem takes the reader on a powerful journey painting a shifting picture of fear and gratitude including particular reference to Derbyshire. It was heartfelt and concluded with a positive ending, providing hope.”

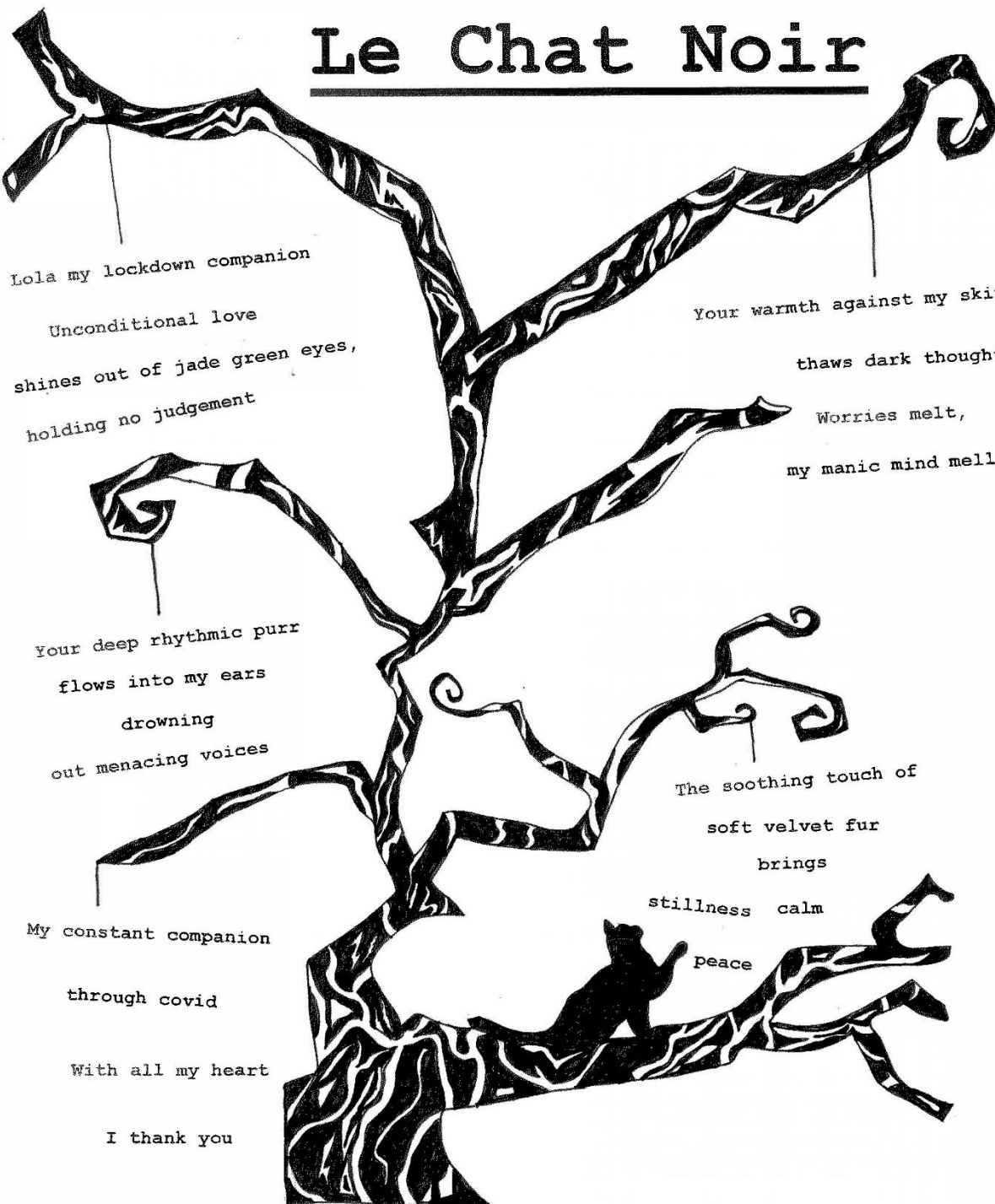






## Le chat noir

# Le Chat Noir



Lola my lockdown companion  
Unconditional love  
shines out of jade green eyes,  
holding no judgement

Your warmth against my skin,  
thaws dark thoughts  
Worries melt,  
my manic mind mellows

Your deep rhythmic purr  
flows into my ears  
drowning  
out menacing voices

My constant companion  
through covid  
With all my heart  
I thank you

The soothing touch of  
soft velvet fur  
brings  
stillness calm  
peace

Amanda Lord

### *Judges' comments:*

"Even without the beautiful graphics this poem would have stood out, with its distinct voice and use of short stanzas packed with metaphor and lyrical language. The tone of gratitude really shines and underpins the sense of calm."

## **Finding my calm during Covid**

Keep calm and search for something,  
How I found our calm each day,  
Showing to you all, in rhyme,  
Just listen to what I say.

Keep calm, spending time in the garden,  
Looking to grow beauties most rare,  
I water, thinking of peaceful things,  
I found my calm right there.

Keep calm, time with my cat,  
I hear her purring, fur feels like silken hair,  
Love reciprocated, take care of each other,  
I found my calm right there.

Keep calm, listening to music,  
Loving songs and beats so fair,  
Singing along to my favourite tunes,  
I found my calm right there.

Keep calm, de-cluttering my home,  
Going systematically through my lair,  
Lots of things to let go of,  
I found my calm right there,

Keep calm, on the phone to my kids,  
Nothing more wonderful, I swear,  
Hearing news of the little ones,  
I found my calm right there.

Keep calm, pretending I'm off out,  
Lots of lovely clothes to wear,  
Enjoy dressing up with make-up too,  
I found my calm right there.

Keep calm, visiting my safe space,  
A mansion built from scratch, colours glare,  
Use imagination, don't move from the sofa,

I found my calm right there.

Keep calm, practicing mindfulness,  
All quiet, just breathing in air,  
Living in the present moment,  
I found my calm right there.

Keep calm, wrapped up in blankets,  
On my couch, practicing self care,  
Watching my favourites on the tv,  
I found my calm right there.

Now I've passed on my calm in covid,  
Trying to heal my trouble and strife,  
Lots of different ideas,  
I found my calm, it benefits my life x

**Amber Ruby  
Phoenix-Browne**

*Judges' comments:*

"Stuck closely to the remit of the competition and used structure, rhythm, rhyme and repetition, weaving in the different senses to paint an engaging, personal picture offering comfort and hope to others."



## Finding my calm during Covid

We've had a log burner since I can remember. Since I was a baby probably, as we've been in this house since before I could walk and it's a staple part of the walls. Every winter – and that odd day in August where it's unnaturally cold – we light that fire and soak in its warmth.

As a child, I didn't notice it. I guess it was behind a baby gate and a pile of pillows so that I could not fall and hurt my head on the tiles circling it. Later it was associated with Santa Claus, biscuits on a plate, a cup of milk and a carrot for the reindeer. And when the morning came, it would be surrounded by presents, the residual magic still sizzling in the air.

When the fire burnt, I was warm, but as a child I was not grateful for warmth, as I was not grateful for my family who tended to that fire as they tended to me, kept it stoked and alive and cracking. As a child, warmth and a loving family was bare-minimum, should be bare-minimum for all children.

It was not till I was older that I learnt that some do not have warmth, some do not have a loving family. At the same time, I reached an age where I could tend to that log burner, light it from scratch with some foul smelling fire-lighters and the flick of a match. I reached an age where I could stack it with logs and would find the perfect spot in front of it to keep warm, my family on the sofas around me. Christmas was no longer leaving milk and biscuits for Santa Claus, but it was setting that fire roaring at midday and soaking in its warmth like happiness.

When I think of my family, I think of that fire. I think of the warm glow of safety. Memories are tinged in orange: fire-lit Christmases, sunset holidays, the sudden angry red of a temper snapping, and the quick resolution mellowing into something so soft it's nearly yellow.

We've had many days shut inside together and I've never been more grateful for the amber glimmer of their love. There has been so much of it, always but particularly during COVID, that it must overflow, dripping down the seams of the house like sticky marmalade. Passers-by can see the marigold light through the windows and be touched by the heat of our love.

There are days that I feel blue but they light me up. They are the sunset chasing away the last entrails of the day, reaching out in bronze beams, grasping the blue of the sky and turning it golden in the palm of their hand.

Whatever has happened, whatever will happen, I know that I can return to that house, that room, that fire and sit in the healing honey glow of the flames, my family solid and bright around me, and know warmth.

## Madeleine Roche

### *Judges' comments:*

“Evocative picture of the writer’s ‘safe space’ of calm. Some beautiful imagery including the overarching metaphor of the log burner. The ‘amber glimmer of their love’ and the ‘marigold light’ paint a vivid picture for the reader.”



## **Finding my calm during Covid-19**

We've found ourselves in the midst of a global pandemic filled with uncertainty. All the country stayed at home, apart from those keyworkers who needed to work, to keep all of us going during this horrible virus. They helped with the elderly and the vulnerable, tried to save lives as best as they could. It's a very trying time at the moment.

We as a family had to isolate ourselves a long with others, we stayed at home and not congregated with family of friends. Who I miss so much, but I couldn't go out to see anyone. I found it so scary at times, I always stayed in my bedroom if my Grandson was not around. I suffer with mental health and physical issues. The pandemic caused me to have even more anxiety and panic attaches.

I had the fear of my family dying as they had not been too good either. It was the fear of the unknown. My thoughts go out to all the families who have lost loved ones during this pandemic. My daily life has been altered and feel like I'm living in some weird dream. My anxiety is through the roof, because of my fear and not understanding why this virus is in our country. How can I believe some of this when we're not being told the truth.

I calm myself down, by doing some art and displaying Rainbows and colourful pictures to show all our keyworkers that we care about them. We showed are appreciation by joining in with the 5pm Thursday evening clap for our hero's. I am so grateful to all our keyworkers for keeping us safe. All sorts was entering my head and this didn't help with my mental health, as things were entering my head, the worst of the worst.

But I had to try and stay calm and look after myself and my family, otherwise I would of just given up. I was so scared about this virus going on for months on end and I didn't realise that my mental health would be affected so much. I've been admitted 3 times to a mental health unit and to see everyone in masks and full PPE is scary on its own. I need to get better and these keyworkers are helping me to get to the place I needs to be, so I can enjoy my family life once again.

I always try to colour or do our diamond art to keep me calm and relaxed. Thank you to all those who have helped me and my family during this trying time.

**Samantha Winson**

*Judges' comments:*

"A frank yet inspiring reflection on the impact of the pandemic on the writer's mental health and family life, including ways she brought colour to her life, relaxation techniques she found helpful, and gratitude to those who have helped her."



Many thanks to all those who entered our 2021 writing competition. It was a real privilege to read all the entries. We hope you have enjoyed reading our shortlisted entries and that the pieces will help you to find your calm place(s). We also hope that these entries help to challenge stigma around mental ill health, learning disabilities and the wider services provided by Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

(Images supplied by Pixabay, Pexels and Unsplash)

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