



Whispers from the Woods

Dan
Webber

Bolton Branch

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Whispers From The Woods

By Dan Webber

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“Whispers From The Woods is a powerful celebration of how young people reconnected with nature during an extraordinary time. Including poems written in the stillness of lockdown to lines inspired by the magic of Timber Festival, it reminds us all to slow down, step outside, and rediscover the beauty and solace that woodlands can bring.”

**Jo Maker, Arts & Creativity Manager,
The National Forest Co**

After twenty years working in the Arts, Whispers From The Woods is the project I am most proud of. The programme launched during lockdown snowballed from an idea to encourage young people to think about, and share, the good things about being outdoors during the pandemic. Their words inspired Everlong/Evergreen the poem which was shared at Timber Festival & Melbourne Festival and then painted onto logs to be discovered during 2022 & 2023 along the Whispers From The Woods trail – a walk around Melbourne which people still remember today.

**Sharon Brown,
Director of Arts Melbourne CIC**

We would like to thank the following people for their involvement in Whispers From The Woods

Project Staff and Supporters

Chris Moss
Heidi Donohue
Jo Maker
Joe Coghlan
Josh Beardsley
Katherine Parrish
Sharon Brown

Partner Organisations

Brown's Field
CivicLAB™ The University of Derby
Creative Melbourne
Derby Parks
Markeaton Park
Melbourne Arts Festival
The National Forest Co
Timber Festival
Whistlewood Common

Performers

Aoife O'Connor
Ben Macpherson
Camille McCawley
Charlotte Lunn
Grae Tower
So Sparham
Suzanne Fraser-Martin

Young Ambassadors

Alexandria Zak
Ella Battersby
Louis Rust
Logan Minifie

Foreword

‘Whispers From The Woods’ is a poetry and nature project documenting the experiences of young people from Derby and South Derbyshire during The Coronavirus Pandemic, exploring how they connected and reconnected with nature during Lockdown. Following a call-out for submissions in Spring 2021, the stories and experiences shared by the young people formed the basis of a poem called ‘Everlong/Evergreen’ written by Dan Webber. The 33-line poem was painted onto locally and ethically sourced wooden slices by young ambassadors involved in the project.

A touring version of the installation, debuted at Timber Festival in July 2021, before being exhibited at Markeaton Park, Derby in August and as part of Melbourne Festival in September. The Whispers From The Woods nature trail was installed in Brown’s Field, Melbourne and opened to the public on Saturday 29th January 2022. It is now at Whistlewood Common, Melbourne, one of the locations where lines of text for the project were conceived.

‘Whispers from The Woods Presents’ a poetry showcase inspired by the project, was performed at Timber Festival in 2021, 2022 and 2023, showcasing local LGBTQ+ poets and spoken word artists. Whispers From The Woods was originally produced by Arts Melbourne and Dan Webber, made possible through funding from a National Forest Arts Grant.

This publication has been supported by University of Derby Civic and Community Funding Grant, 2024.

“The Civic and Community Grant Award from the University of Derby provides a unique opportunity to support brilliant initiatives from local communities, businesses, and individuals in Derby and Derbyshire. Whispers From The Woods is a fantastic body of work that speaks of our time and place. The work directly speaks to the importance of culture as a driver for change and is a bold and future focused practice by the writer/artist Dan Webber.”

Dr Rhiannon Jones,

Associate Professor Civic Practice.

Head of Civic and Community,

University of Derby.

Everlong/Evergreen (Whispers From The Woods)

After an endless winter
the spring has finally come,
a reminder,
that all things will pass
eventually.

In defiance, nature remains
guarded by tall tree
and howling wind.
The beauty of the forest
is untarnished.
Frostbitten or sun kissed
upon doorstep, or far, far away
travellers and explorers
old and new
are welcomed in
in equal measure.

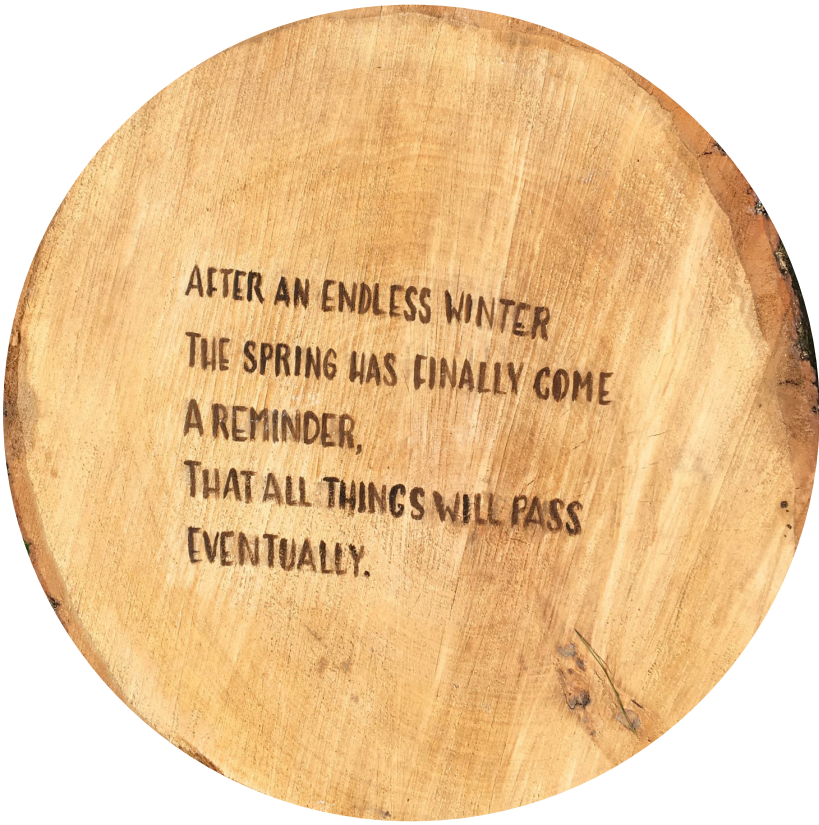
These whispers from the woods call:
Come.
Sit a spell.
Breathe in the good air.
Calm mind and soothe body.
It's peaceful here,
but never lonely,
still but ever-changing,
eternal yet new-born,
respectful, if respected.
It's time to reconnect.

Mother Earth
has waited long enough.
She wonders when we will realise
that every day is different
when you stop and look up.
So, look up.



Make It Memorable and Personal to You

Once a year, at work
they make us change our passwords.
Last year mine was 'breathe.'
This year it's 'keep breathing.'
I shouldn't need the reminder,
but it's getting harder to remember.



AFTER AN ENDLESS WINTER
THE SPRING HAS FINALLY COME
A REMINDER,
THAT ALL THINGS WILL PASS
EVENTUALLY.

Child's Eye

Each day I take a walk in the woods.
At first it was intimidating,
but now it feels good.
No one to bother or hover over me,
just me and my mind
peaceful, as one.
Spring is here.
Daffodils and snowdrops appear
leaves dance through the breeze
joyous laughter echoing behind them.
The birds sing as if in love,
the sun glistens through the tall branches above,
golden light fractures through the treetops,
rainbows scatter towards the gentle earth.

*(Inspired by young people's submissions to the
Whispers From The Woods Project)*



IN DEFIANCE, NATURE REMAINS
GUARDED BY TALL TREE
AND HOWLING WIND
THE BEAUTY OF THE FOREST
IS UNTARNISHED
FROSTBITTEN OR SUN KISSED

How To Festival

On arrival, find the bar (and the toilets)
within minutes,
ask where's the food at?
Either bought on site or brought on site.
Planning for days, reacting to moments.
Trust me when I tell you
it's worth it.
The unexpected.
Midnight rain on tents
the sound of music in the air
hitting the ear from a distance
but bringing back memories to the forefront,
Simon Armitage playing The Smiths.
Don't forget your wellies.

*(written on site at Timber Festival 2021 by the
Whispers From The Woods young ambassadors)*



UPON DOORSTEP, OR FAR, FAR AWAY
TRAVELLERS AND EXPLORERS
OLD AND NEW
ARE WELCOMED IN
IN EQUAL MEASURE

Do Not Disturb

I used to think it was the green
or being surrounded by trees
but for me it's about no phone signal
out of office on,
that moment post-arrival
smiling proudly as the tent goes up, and stays up
(hopefully).
This is my retreat
my domain
all here for the same reason
two or three days escaping the rat race
no flagged emails
no to do list
the only immediate action is relaxing.
Sorry I can't help you
I'm literally stood in the middle of a field.



THESE WHISPERS FROM THE WOODS CALL
COME
SIT A SPELL,
BREATHE IN THE GOOD AIR
CALM MIND AND SOOTH BODY

Snapshot

After A Portable Paradise by Roger Robinson

I'm not sure what my paradise is.
It might be in the palm of my partner
or the solitude of a single viewer cinema screening.
It might be by the sea
reflected in the lights of the Mumbles arcades
or the smell of 2p wins
pennies like gold hitting the payout tray
my Grandmother slipping me £1 coins
“don't tell your mother”.

These nights, these moments
make up my happy place.
In nature, the stillness helps me remember
the gentle breeze the same which blows
through beach and birch
through high-rise and stone circle
a calming presence, reminding me
to pay attention to the present
to collect more moments.

Written on site at Timber Festival, 2023



IT'S PEACEFUL HERE,
BUT NEVER LONELY -
STILL BUT EVER-CHANGING
ETERNAL YET NEW-BORN
RESPECTFUL, IF RESPECTED

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

On a beautiful June day
admiring faux marble arches overlooking the lake
I make the mistake of walking through a man's
photograph.

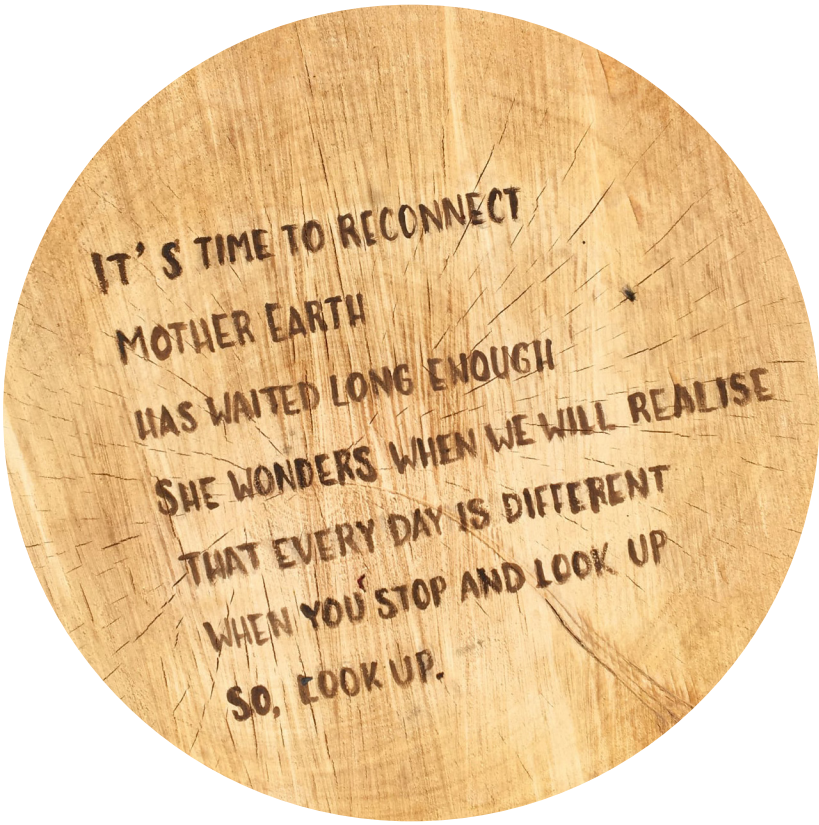
The British in me, is apologetic.

Turning, hands raised, I say, "God I'm so sorry"
and step aside.

"Don't worry," he smiles.

"Enjoy the peace and quiet,

You can always take another shot"



IT'S TIME TO RECONNECT
MOTHER EARTH
HAS WAITED LONG ENOUGH
SHE WONDERS WHEN WE WILL REALISE
THAT EVERY DAY IS DIFFERENT
WHEN YOU STOP AND LOOK UP
SO, LOOK UP.

The Maypole

In life, consider the maypole
where every wrong turn can be undone
with the support of good friends and dancing.

(written on site at Timber Festival 2021)



Whispers From The Woods

- Poetry and Well-being Exercises -

These poetry and well-being exercises can be used separately, or combined together to create a beginner's writing practice. All of the prompts and exercises are informed by practising authors, such as Nature Connection expert Giles Richardson, the contemporary German-Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han and the international poet Éireann Lorsung. The exercises are written for teenagers and adults, but parents and teachers can also use them to facilitate activities with children.

Well-being Exercises

*Contemplative time: The philosopher Bjung-Chul Han writes in *The Scent of Time* about the differences between the contemplative life of previous societies and the active life of today's western society and culture. Han suggests that the active life results in 'dyschronicity', of times being out of sync, due to the experience of time 'whizzing by' and lacking pauses, duration and narrative tension. A practical exercise that can help slow down our perception and experience of time is focussing on 'being' rather than 'doing'.*

Well-Being Exercise 1: Being

Take at least 5 minutes a day to stop and 'be'. In a quiet environment such as a garden or park, turn your phone to silent, sit in a comfortable position and focus on your breathing and your body. Your thoughts will naturally keep going, but with time and duration of

practice you'll likely reach a place of calmness and reflective peace.

Nature Reconnection: In the book 'Reconnection' the Nature Connection expert and author, Giles Richardson, makes the case for the well-being benefits of developing a relationship with nature. In the book, the author suggests that this relationship requires more than just 'visiting' nature, and that an emotional connection needs to be created. Richardson advises those seeking to connect with the natural world to notice wildlife in their local area and make note of three 'good things' they observe; this could be the feeling of the sun on your face, or seeing the iridescence of a pigeon's throat feathers, hearing the wind in the trees, or noticing the scent of a hawthorn or cherry tree blossoming. Richardson found that this simple activity performed daily was an effective exercise for both improving participant's nature-connection and their well-being.

Well-Being Exercise 2: Noticing Three Good Things in Nature.

Make the time each day to notice the wildlife in your local area, this could be during a daily walk to school or work. Note down three positive things you experienced and then reflect on the page how you felt in response.

Writing Exercises

Haiku:

A lecturer suggested that I read the ancient Chinese poets Tu Fu and Li Po. These writers often composed haikus in response to experiences they had in nature.

Haiku is a Japanese short poetry form consisting of three lines or phrases, the first line is 5 syllables in length, the second line is 7 syllables and the third is 5 syllables.

Writing one or more haikus each day is a good way of beginning a daily writing routine, and practicing the elements of effective writing, such as observation, choosing language, brevity, image, metaphor and form.

Writing Exercise 1: Haiku

Write one or more haiku each day in response to experiences you have of the local wildlife in your area. Reading one or more haiku each day will develop your understanding of the poetry form.

Journalling Through the Seasons:

The second writing exercise is based on the international poet, Éireann Lorsung's practice of journaling in response to the changes that can be observed during each season. The seasons have their obvious connotations, such as winter being cold and summer being sunny, but few people take the time to observe and note down the subtle shifts and changes during each season, such as which plants can be

seen through winter, the timing of when particular trees blossom in Spring, the different qualities of light, or when migrating swifts can be seen in the sky.

Sustained attention and observation of the natural world combined with a daily journaling routine will help develop your connection with nature, well-being and your practice as a writer.

Writing Exercise 2: Journal

Journal on a daily or weekly basis in response to changes you observe in your local environment through the seasons. Try to include sensory details such as sight, sound, texture, taste etc and engage emotionally with the experiences you have of the natural world in your local area.

Recommended Reading:

- *Reconnection (2023) Richardson, Giles. Pelagic Press, London, UK*
- *The Scent of Time (2017) Han, Byung-Chul. Polity Press, Cambridge, UK*
- *<https://Bewilderment.substack.com/p/entering-the-day-entering-the-work>
Lorsung, Éireann. March 1st, 2023.*
- *The Selected Poems of Tu Fu (2020) Hitton, David. New Directions Publishing, USA.*
- *The Selected Poems of Li Po (1996) Hitton, David. New Directions Publishing, USA.*
- *<https://thehaikufoundation.org/new-to-haiku-foundation/>*

About The National Forest

The National Forest is one of the boldest environmentally-led regeneration initiatives in the country – transforming a post-industrial landscape by creating a forest across 200 square miles of the Midlands, linking the ancient remnant forests of Charnwood and Needwood. Since the early 90s, millions of trees have been planted in an area that was previously one of the least wooded parts of the country. Together, with the help of communities, partners and passionate people, it is creating real change, in a real place, and demonstrating that a positive future is possible.

Walk The National Forest -

<https://www.nationalforest.org/explore/walking>



**Supported by the Civic Community Grant Funding
from University of Derby - awarded in 2024.**

You can find out more at www.derby.ac.uk/civic
or scan here:



These Whispers from the Woods call, come, sit a spell...

Created following the Coronavirus Pandemic, 'Whispers From The Woods' is a poetry and nature project documenting the experiences of young people from Derby and South Derbyshire, exploring how they connected and reconnected with nature during lockdown.

This collection contains poetry written as part of the project by young ambassadors and poet Dan Webber, as well as creative writing prompts, wellbeing exercises, and maps of The National Forest – everything you need to explore nature and find your own 'Whispers From The Woods'.

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