



Joys of small things
Part Two: Memorable moments

Rajan Madhok & Helen Job

July 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
TREES	5
SKIES.....	11
CELEBRATIONS.....	15
PEOPLE	21
CHILDREN’S WORLD	30
THERE MUST BE FLOWERS	40
SEASONS.....	43
NO EXCUSES NOW	47
SUN AND THE MOON.....	50
GOTTA LAUGH	52
PSST – CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET	54
LIFE RETURNING	55
EPILOGUE.....	56
NOTE	59

INTRODUCTION

Inessential Things

*What do cats remember of days?
 They remember the ways in from the cold,
 The warmest spot, the place of food.
 They remember the places of pain, their enemies,
 the irritation of birds, the warm fumes of the soil,
 the usefulness of dust.
 They remember the creak of a bed, the sound
 of their owner's footsteps,
 the taste of fish, the loveliness of cream.
 Cats remember what is essential of days.
 Letting all other memories go as of no worth
 they sleep sounder than we,
 whose hearts break remembering so many
 inessential things.*

Brian Patten

and ofcourse, Helen would like to say the same of mutts: Ifor and Delyth, who do not always behave but also never stop loving you. We could learn a lot from them, let go off the baggage and stop imagining most of the things that won't happen. One day when Rajan's S**tometer was particularly high (more than usual), we decided to look back at the 'essential things' since the pandemic started – those small things that made us smile and brought joy at the time, the memorable moments. Some were sad but remembering them brought peace, and enabled us to move forward.

In this anthology we record these memories, and with apologies to Yeats for murdering his fine poem: When You Are Old, for those days when we need some lifting up:

*When you are fed up and tired
 sleep eludes and nothing excites
 open this book and re-live the moments
 with fire roaring and mutts underfoot
 and be transported to better times
 You were happy then and can be again
 as day follows night so does joy after sadness
 nothing is forever, this too shall pass*



NOTE:

The S**tometer scale was 'developed' during the first lockdown – please see <https://www.nhs70.org.uk/story/reflections-during-covid-19-lockdown-poetry-diary> for more details

Stometer (1)**

*Six says he in the morning
on zero to ten scale
from chilled to suicidal
in fourth week of lockdown
Gonna be a bad day
so she gives him the red T-shirt
to remind her to leave him be
to work it through and
brings him a cuppa*

TREES

Few years ago, Rajan had written a (bad, as usual) poem about trees and then came across this tree in the corner of the allotment- as if he had foreseen it! Some guess it is about 800 years old.

Imagine

*If trees could talk especially the giant ones
like that outside my window in countryside
stood for decades, tall, wide canopy, mighty
sheltering people from sun and rain
offering privacy for courting couples
or some quarrelling ones wanting
quiet place out of others ear shots
children climbing, hanging swings,
playing hide and seek, running tag
providing firewood from broken branches
or wanton cutting sometimes
even the odd drunk motorist crashing into it
and ofcourse sheep and cows out of rain and snow
I think they will say this too shall pass
we have seen them come and seen them go
there was life before you and will be after
there was pain and pleasure
some had it better than you others worse
but it all evened out in the end
they all exit the stage, empty handed
as they came so they went
stay upright, go with the changes
help others to help self
to stay alive and to grow*

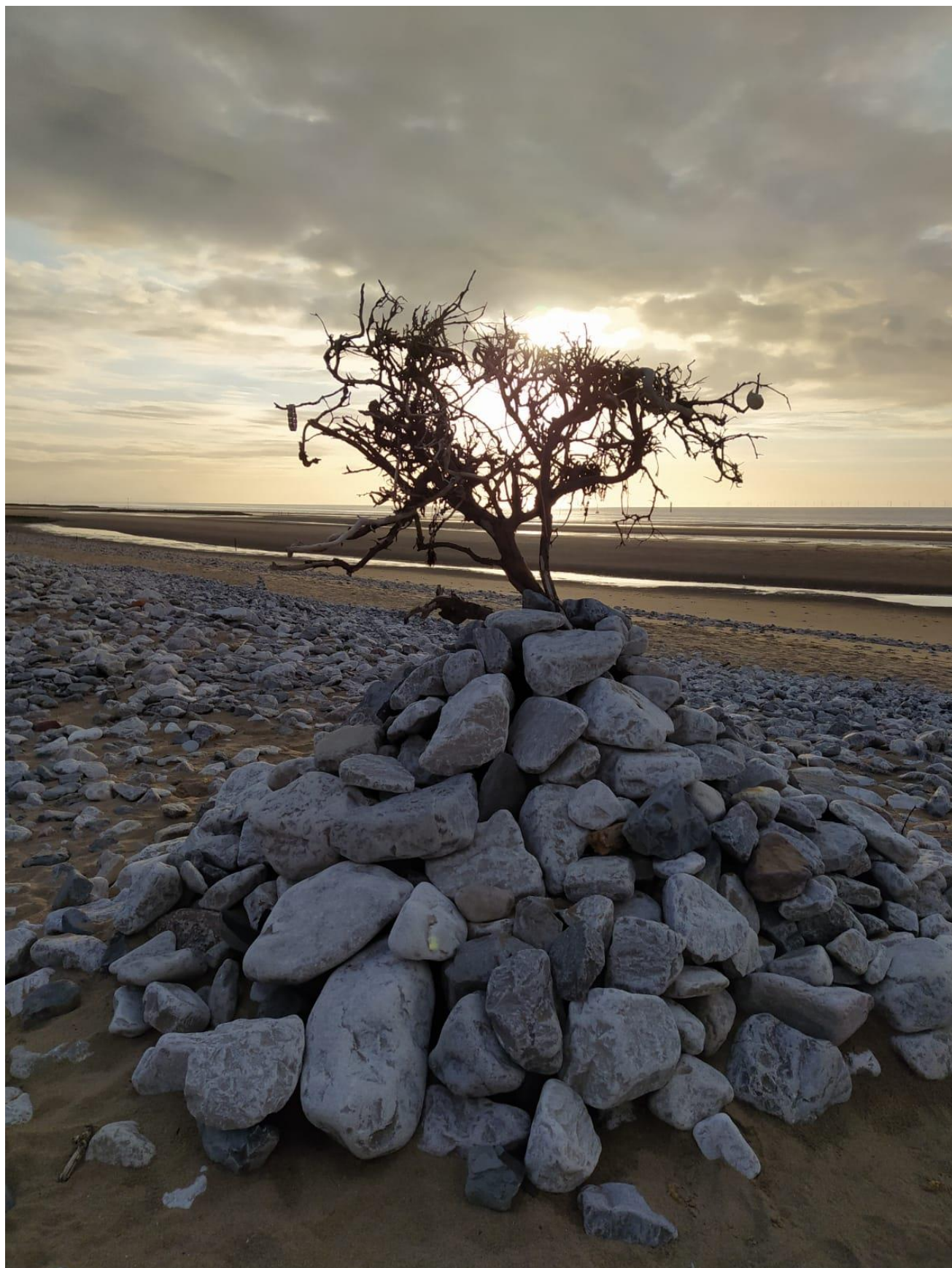


and ofcourse trees continue to fascinate us.

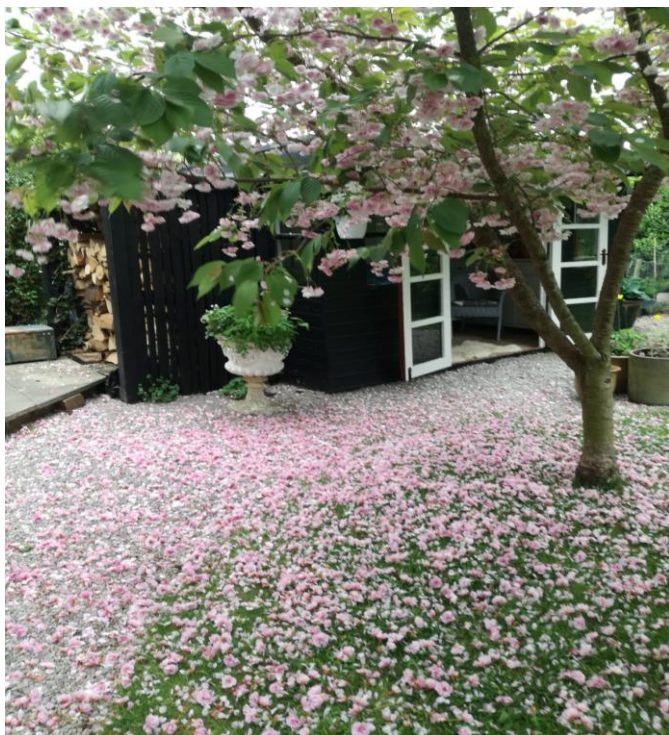
This evergreen oak was planted by Geoffery (Helen's late husband) on her 40th birthday – good of the new owners to keep it, they had offered to let Helen take the tree away when she sold the farm, and as it happens not a bad idea to have left it there- as we walk past it on way to the allotment.



One of the places we frequented was Prestatyn beach, whenever allowed and this tree caught Helen's eye



The cherry blossom in Helen's garden was such a joy



and this tree up the road from her home towards Moel Gasyth seemed to pull one up the steep incline on a cold, icy and frosty day, and for skating down



Then life resumed again, and all was well with the world



Before you know it was time again, for that most important one- the Christmas tree



SKIES

There can not be many people who have not been moved by ever-changing skies and wondered about them – gazing, lost in thought, feeling connected with the universe and giving thanks – the meaning of life and universe. These on Prestatyn beach came in handy whenever the cabin fever got bad:



And up the road at Brenig, often hardly a soul, unlike the regular times when full of 'townies'



and not to forget Anglesey; there are always rainbows, if you know where to look



Our walks provided fantastic views



and on drives around Denbigh Moor, the endless big skies- some say the uplands are desolate, and each to their own, but for us the moors are fascinating, we can, and do, easily spend much time lost in their beauty. Plug: go see Helen's exhibition at the Court House



One night sitting on the deck in Llanbedr, Rajan could not get away - the sky was dancing, sheer magic- a show put on for him, must have been a good boy!



and Helen took this from her house



CELEBRATIONS

The main life events, like clock work, kept coming around but the celebrations took on a different format and although sad at times at not being able to enjoy them 'properly' the pandemic made them more meaningful.

Helen's birthday was a walk in Ty Mawr Wybrnant where we saw Bishop Morgan's house where he translated The Bible, walking all the way down through mud we were pleasantly surprised by a film company shooting a period drama with vikings; it was surreal.



Rajan's was spent in Anglesey visiting Pen Mon Priory and Llanfairfair PG.....



No way was Liz going to be left alone in her large house on Christmas



and virtual Christmas on Zoom



The pyromaniac strikes again- how can it be New Year's without fireworks, so up in Peniel he woke the older folk up at midnight



The children in Llanrhaeadr were really creative during the scarecrow festival (parents were only the technicians under their guidance!)



And Denbigh Castle was all lit up and a joyful sight



When ever possible tried to fit in other celebrations; Brian came over on his birthday and the opening (or not, as not been able to use it much) of the annex in Llanbedr brought some dear friends



Diwali was another muted affair, with lighting and managed to set off some fireworks in Peniel, and few neighbours came around, sitting on the street with some 'mithai'



Joined Rajan's family in Mumbai virtually for festivals



and Susheela stepped in for the absent family, with all precautions 'Tikka' by her, standing on doorsteps



PEOPLE

Finally, Dean and Ashley decided to make it official – here comes the bride



Simon came over to help with the allotment project



and Megan was happy to get some saris, which were given to us by Dev as he was moving down south and clearing up the place



'Old' friends came to visit, post lunch walk around the village with Mary and Graham



Helen perfecting her socially distant greeting with Tariq



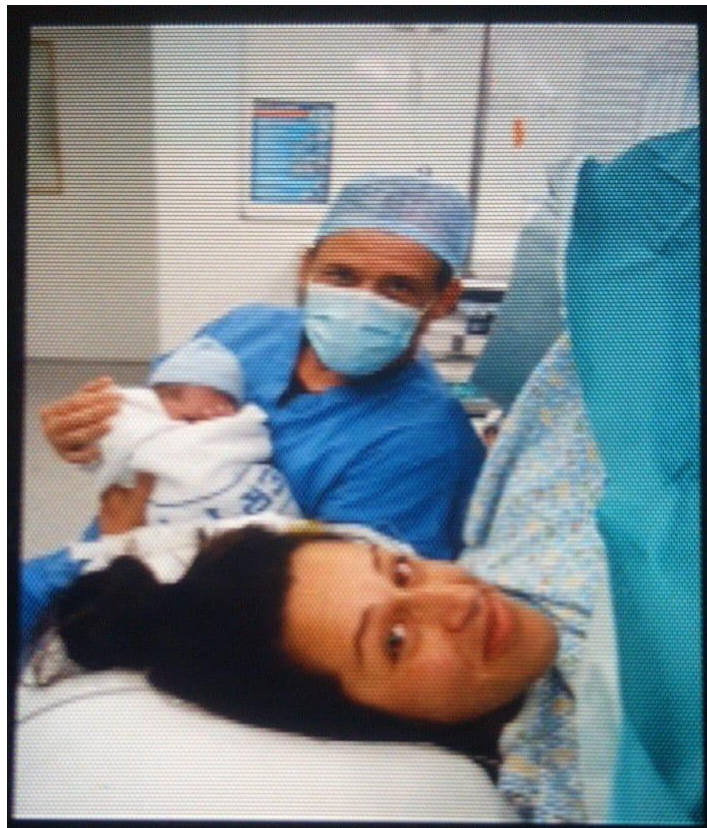
Nice to have Judith, Barry and Stefan- what a lovey boy, and Raj and the girls- not sure was a good idea as they now have a dog



Cefyn used the time to work on his India project- he cant wait to go back



and Helen became step great grandmother when Sophie gave birth to Bruno



Mixed feelings as the joy of having Mair 'around', though not as much physically due to lockdown, turned into sadness as she became ill and then passed away



We had a good laugh as the clinic in Glan Clwyd when Mair saw the name of the nurse practitioner when we went for her appointment – but sadly the NHS failed her, and we lost a dear friend. But she gave so much joy, and was a great support for Rajan.



Pandemic made us realise the value of friends and families; Rajan still misses his father, more as getting older and struggled with not being able to see mum- who is getting on now



Tribute to Dad, 2021

More respect with each passing year
with age comes wisdom they say
but only if the foundation there
which clearly he well provided
along with basics, good education
do miss the chance to sit and talk
say sorry and make up for lost time
or make the best of time now
look after self, others to make him proud
that would have been my dad
remember him and remember this
as give thanks for his life today



Helen's regular walking buddy, Pam had Amber and Indie, grand-daughter, come to stay for a while, and lovely to see them



and Helen's niece, Stephanie, found a little friend on her visit



It was good to see Aaron and Nis, as soon as allowed they came over from Sheffield



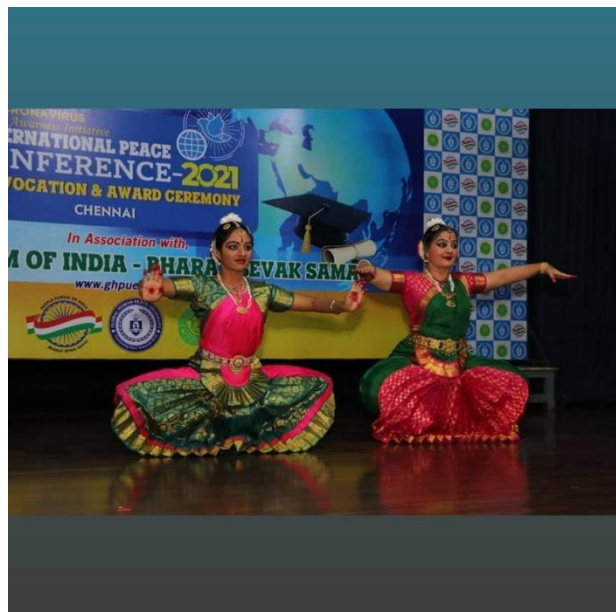
and Rajan had some time with Ryan



Blast from the past as Wendy came, during one of the open periods, and brought the rainbow, literally and metaphorically with reminders of happy days in Tyneside; what a remarkable woman- almost bionic with many joint replacements



Helen's weekly dancing lessons with Meera for Bharatnatyam continued unabated, courtesy Zoom – the pandemic made it easier to be disciplined with hardly any missed classes over more than 15 months



CHILDREN'S WORLD

One of the joys was the regular video calls with the little-fellow Rey, Ruchita's son, Rajan's great nephew, in Mumbai and we started noting more as we used to record the various fauna for our chats



He could not have enough of Ifor and Delyth, and he is in good company



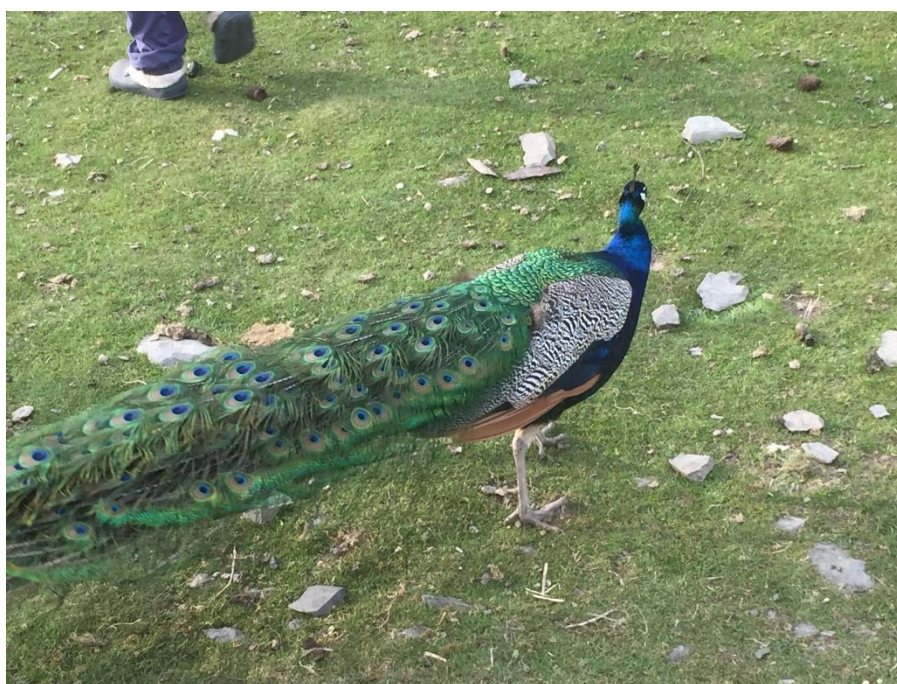
Jim's ferrets, sadly not seen in action!



and further up the road- Bertie, felt sad for him as always alone in the field



Since he had seen the photo of 'Nanu' with the peacock when Raman visited Ruthin some time back, Rey had been after peacocks and Dean and Ashley's menagerie rose to the challenge; after all it's also the national bird of India



more joys in their menagerie, with piglet, and Maggie the dog looking after lambo



and no shortage of posers in the Welsh countryside





The naughty goats in Llandudno, after running free in town, been banished back up the hill



The seagull came to say hello as sat eating lunch overlooking Menai bridge



Is it fair to expose young children to 'death' – will they be frightened?



So long as they can see life too?



And like all young boys, he had to see the tractor- and as if on cue Trevor appeared, from Helen's upstairs window



THERE MUST BE FLOWERS

Helen made Ashley's bouquet for the wedding



Gardens provided colour



and regular supplies for both homes



SEASONS

Terrible floods in 2020, the valleys were swamped and the roads were like rivers



And then the picture postcard winter





Brian, living in the hills, sent photos of the winter wonderland up there, here is him on his stilts



Blaenau Ffestinog when Helen went walking with Megan and fell off the mountain hurting her back



Driving back from Ruthin, seeing Llanbedr DC fills Rajan's heart with joy everytime



Jim's is always good for a pitstop and chinwag with him on walks around Moel Gasyth



Horseshoe falls



NO EXCUSES NOW

Rajan used his mum's recipe book to try his favourite dishes – Helen rose to the challenge and became the guinea pig and since has largely turned vegetarian (atleast around him).

Making Gajrela – Carrot halwa and Okra (Bhindi/Ladies fingers)



though draws a line at his favourite masala chai



Meantime, Helen (finally) got back to her studio and her latest exhibition about Denbigh Moors is currently on at the Court House in Ruthin; the previous one at Twm o’Nant is still there and hopefully people will be able to visit soon



Rajan indulged in his favourite pastime of idling- disguised as reading



and walking on the hills, to the extent that during the peak lockdown in winter hardly used to see anyone on his way up to Moel Fenlli (he did it for ten consecutive days though had the idea of carrying for longer- best laid plans etc) and got 'annoyed' if others also came- feeling very proprietarial!

With Tony, Iain and Aaron on various walks



SUN AND THE MOON



Driving home one evening, the moon struck Rajan so strongly that he had to pull over, sit on the roadside and drink in its beauty

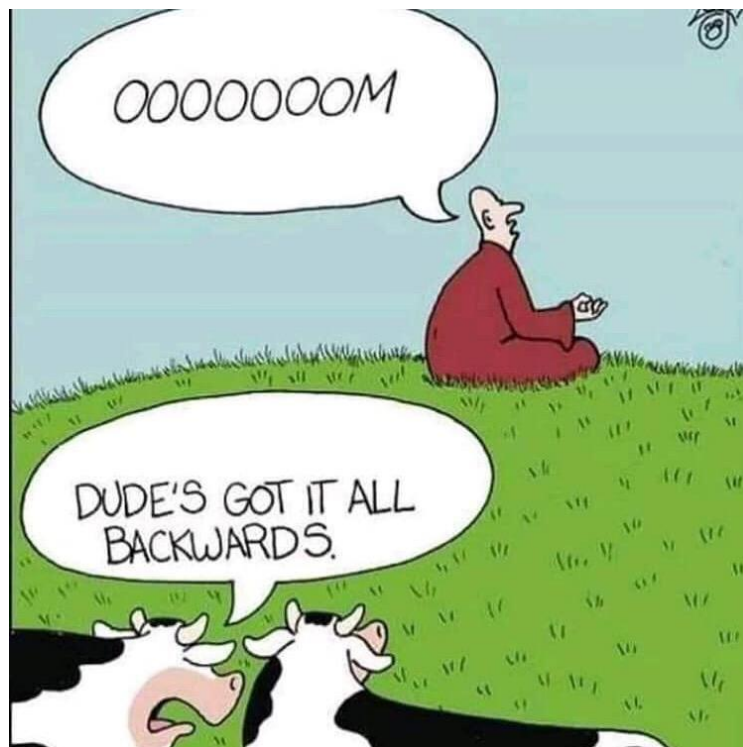


GOTTA LAUGH

Up and then down- posing for photos can be dangerous as Rajan discovered whilst carrying wood back from the walk; thankfully no harm done except to ego



There is a danger of getting things backward- yes, it has been challenging, yoga does help but do not stop to laugh –try laughter yoga



Certainly, we marvelled at people's creativity and whatsapp messages kept us amused



PSST – CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET

But given that you have been good, we can let you know – our favourite place, Llyn Aled, now do not go telling everyone



LIFE RETURNING

Recently was nice to see people returning and enjoying our beautiful land – scene on Ponderosa cafe after a loooong time



and the Gods smiled – sun came out and Shakespeare play at Nantclywd y Dre was a success, Aaron came over



A rather fitting end- definitely Much Ado About Nothing; despite all the challenges joy is possible and within reach, Go for it!

EPILOGUE

How we wish there was no pandemic, and are sad about the toll it has taken on everyone, some more than others. We fear for the poor and the vulnerable, and despair at the widening inequalities – and our attempt to be light should not be seen as ignoring them or deter us from finding ways to challenge these societal problems. Rather our aspiration has been to ensure that we survive these difficult times and help us prepare for the trials of life; as the old saying goes: What does not break you makes you stronger.

The (not so) secret ingredient is taking joy in the smallest of things to help find meaning, and to keep us safe, sane and strong, and these precious things are mainly free and all around us, if only we care to look.

Here is another one Rajan wrote earlier, he never stops plugging:

The sweetest

*Laughter of little children
running around, playing, joyful
Smell of fresh flowers
in the park, morning walk
Sight of the destination
after the hard, long journey
Touch of the beloved
lightly on cheek, gazing into eyes
Taste of hot bread
straight out of oven
Life's simple things
happiness and peace*



To be continued

Late Fragment

*And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on this earth.*

Raymond Carver



NOTE

Helen is the main one taking photos and as expected from an artist has a critical eye whilst Rajan is rather pedestrian in his attempts. We did not set out to photograph for this anthology, rather used whatever was on our phones when we set out to make it-ofcourse there were so many other things we could have added, flowers alone would fill pages as waves of daffodills, snowdrops, bluebells, primrose or wild garlic kept coming on roadways and meadows, nature constantly evolving, ever changing and ever pleasing, if only one looked – whats this life if full of care, no time to stand and stare! Our central purpose was to remind ourselves about nature, families and friends as part of interconnections and to enjoy the small things.

This volume complements others which have been developed during the pandemic; Rajan's work is available on <https://www.nhs70.org.uk/story/rajan-madhok>

We thank all of our families and friends (and many strangers) for supporting us and keeping us safe and sane.

Stones and sticks wont break our spirits and indeed can lift them, as the artwork on Prestatyn beach did.



We dedicate this volume to all the front line workers, many of whom paid the ultimate price



**Tribute to the professionals who gave their lives battling Coronavirus
And many more whose names we could not include**



Dr Habib Zaidi
Essex



Dr Jitendra Rathod
Cardiff



Dr Paul Matewele
Barnet-London



Donna Campbell
Cardiff



Dr Krishan Arora
Croydon, South London



Amged El-Hawrani
Leicester



Dr Abdul Mabud Chowdhry
East London



Dr Anton Sebastianpillai
South-West London



Dr Syed Zishan Haider
East London



Dr Amiruddin
Wolverhampton



Areema Nasreen
West Midlands



Dr Abdul Alfa Saadu
Hertfordshire



Dr Fayez Ayache
Suffolk



Dr Manjeet Singh Riyat
Derby



Dr P Hamza
Dudley

Poetry diary during COVID pandemic

Hypocrites

Praising the heroes
praying for recovery
heartfelt condolences
and so the cliches go
but why asleep on job
not acting on time

No going back

Will life resume
where left off
matter of time
Maybe as lessons not learnt
history full of examples
Or maybe not
as you can show the way
Don't lose the hard won
peace, love, humanity
Recalibrate the world

Corona explained

Give me cock-up over conspiracy any day
no dark theories, secret societies
only poor folk carried away
in mindless, relentless struggle for survival
enough money to fill belly, clothe
driven by 'smart' ones outdoing each other
to be bigger, richer, more powerful
now all f****ed, never mess with nature

Rajan Madhok is keeping a poetry diary during COVID pandemic with help from friends. Here is a selection: the first is a comment on politicians, second exhorting us to learn and do better, and the third is the pessimistic reflection of our times
He will be happy to receive your contributions and to keep you updated via madhokrajan@gmail.com