

This is Our HOME



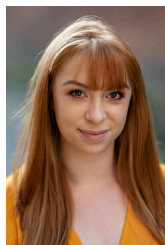
Curated by
KATIE HOLTOM

'This is Our Home'

2022

A collection of stories, poetry, memories and musings written by communities across Dudley.

These pieces were written in response to a series of creative writing workshops, led by Katie Holtom.



Curated and edited by
Katie Holtom

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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



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When You Came To Be

The universe took its time when it made you.
Crafted you carefully.
Sewing the seams
And pressing the edges.
Stuck sequins to the sky
And added pastels to the hills.
Plasticine people built porcelain houses.
Threw your castle on a potters wheel
And folded origami flowers,
When it knew we needed Dudley.

Katie Holtom



Who I Am

Pen and page, where my thoughts come to life
and ideas sit on shelves. My sketchbook is where
my soul, heart and mind live.

All my worries and hopes, the characters which live
inside.

Michael



How To Describe You

History
Hidden
Hopeful

Love
Light
Laughter

Fun
Friendly
Fascinating

Entertaining
Enjoyable
Eccentric

Cobbles
Cobs
Card Games

Delicious
Delightful
Diverse

The What? Centre



Metal Birds

We ran outside at the first cackle of hydraulics.
A pitter patter on the ground
That fell from the sky
And left us treasure.

Metal birds chased each other behind the clouds,
Their song unsteady the air with sharp bangs
And the buzz of propellers
In the limitless sky.

We gathered the feathers as they shed,
Lifting the shrapnel from the stingers
And hoarding the aluminium,
still warm in our palms.

Ann Ladd

A memory of the war, where Ann would compete to see which of her friends could collect the most shrapnel, unaware of the seriousness of the dog fights above that it was coming from.



A Life in Lyrics

I have a very good memory for 1980s pop song lyrics - I kind of tend to think in pop song lyrics! I used to think this was a fairly random and not very useful thing, but as I've gone along in life, I've discovered that pop song lyrics are very helpful!

I'm a 'trainee priest' and I've noticed that pop songs can be very helpful for theological reflection. When I think of the Black Country, for example, it's the song lyrics to the theme tune of the 1980s TV comedy show "Cheers" that come to mind - they kind of sum up the dynamic that I've discovered here as a Londoner.

Foluso Enwerem



The View of a Busker

10am stood in the high street
Wrapped up warm with a guitar case at my
feet.
A coffee to go from the Greggs down the road.
People pass by whilst change is being thrown.

I sing the same songs again and again,
Whilst the people on the market sell their fruit
and veg.
Parents cue for the hole in the wall.
The children start waving as they pass by the
stalls.

The high street of Dudley beats busy and
frantic.
Old people walk holding hands, all romantic.
It has flaws it has problems, believe us we
know.
But Dudley and its people is our place and our
home.

Bradleigh Aston



Harmony

Walking along the canal,
Seeing the flowers, butterflies
And enjoying the sunshine.

You idyllic place, you.

Davy



Determination

When I learnt to ride a motorbike for my CBT, it was really difficult. I was 40 years old and the bike was too high for me as I'm only 5ft3. The other learners were all around 17-20 years old and male. They found it easy and would do their courses and go home with their certificates. Only one learner was refused his certificate and he was angry he failed and refused to come back. I, on the other, hand persisted. I fell off many, many times and had a disagreement with the trainer about how many cars I nearly 'wiped out'. He said it was 3, I'm sure it was only 2!

Eventually, after 2 entire weekends I got my CBT certificate. I got my motorbike and would ride around the streets of Penn in the early hours of the morning.

It was one of the hardest things I have ever done. It demonstrated to me that if I can do that without giving up and leaving the course, then absolutely anything is possible. The sky is the limit.

Paula



On Canvas and Hearts

Dudley is the colour of August
washed over a canvas by lamplight,
its mixer's hand slipping
down the brush with fond abandon.
It is no longer a melting pot,
but a painters tray--
complements and contrasts blending
into six letters.

Emily Wyatt



Our Town

If our town was a song, it would be loud but with a beautiful melody.

If our town was a book, it would be a period romance.

If our town was a show, it would be a pantomime.

If our town was a season, it would be autumn.

If our town was a colour, it would be a lush, vibrant green.

If our town was a food, it would be a large Sunday roast.

If our town was a person it would be my Dad.

Michael



The Person That I Love is God

I have always grown toward God. My Nan was very religious. I went to Sunday school but didn't listen. I went with my first friend Olly to my local church, The Emmanuel in Bentley.

I was put in hospital as a schizoaffective because I believed in God. But I have awoken.

My life of God is like pure light. He is as blue and pure as the azure sky.

Steve



Dancing in Dudley

The Queen Mary Ballroom
Put magic in our feet.
Stopped our heels from scuffing,
And lifted us into the air.

We circled in a Waltz,
Our bodies like the rise and fall of a sunset,
Hanging on the beat that pushed our legs in strides,
And leaned our necks backwards.

We sank effortlessly into the floor,
Snuggled in an embrace
As if no one else was around.
1,2,3 1,2,3

Eileen Porter & Brenda Atkins



Vibrant Memories

The colours of my favourite memories are the rich burgundy reds of the curtains at my first performance, 14/12/2010
and

The vivid rainbow of 24/03/2021, the date I came out to my Mom.

Harry Gardiner



With Love,

Writing to my partner,
I needed to know she was on my wave length.
We had both been through so much,
But I declared my love.
As I wrote, 'Too Much Month' played in the
background.
Everything changed for me
And life went on.

Chris



The Tomcat

I see these streets from just after breakfast until
just before dinner.

The people who pass by are kind and give me my
space.

It makes me feel safe in this territory of mine.

Getting to experience things from up high to down
below.

Reminds me of my first days in this world.

Someones kindness to give me a home.

Being saved from those trying to poison me.

Makes me grateful to be able to terrorise the dog
next door.

Michael



Picture This

The soul of my home is in my family.
The colour of my favourite memory is a rainbow.
The street I grew up on sounds like the Topsy and
Tim theme song.
If I planted my emotions in the ground, weeds
would grow.
There is magic in childhood photos.
Calm smells like strawberries and Lynx Africa.
My childhood reminds me of roast dinners and
noisy children.

Payton



Speak With Class

A black country girl isn't a 'babe'
Or a 'sweetheart'.
She's not a 'love' or a 'honey',
And she's certainly not a 'chick'.
She has far more class than that.
And her community respects that when they
address her as
'Bab'.

Anon



For a Short Time

The delicate fabrics,
The brilliant hues,
Of pinks and of purples,
Of greens and of blues.

Embroidery and patterns,
We would overlook,
For beautiful houses,
At F.W. Cook.

Back then I was Miss Wilcox,
The world at my feet,
Who worked on the wall counter,
On Dudley high street.

The wages were poor,
But we had to look good.
Black cardi, white shirt,
Did all that we could.

But times were tough,
It was hard to believe,
Mum couldn't afford it,
So I had to leave.

Joan Marr



I remember in 1970 walking along a street and as I passed a house, an old woman called me over and asked me to open a bottle of Lucozade for her, because the stopper in (what was then) the glass bottle was too tight. I have never forgotten this even though it seems insignificant.

Michael



Heirloom

That family heirloom; a flat cap.
Passed down through generations.
Each with a hundred stories to share
And a thousand more memories in their heads.
Wear and tear scuff its rim
And pull at the cotton,
Loosening the threads around the base.
Patches now adorn the fragile fabric,
With repairs through the years,
That made sure its life went on.

That is Dudley.

Luke



I've got so many grandchildren I can't remember all their names, so I have to give them numbers.

Marlene Connelt



Sanctuary

In this haven we are nurtured.
Finding refuge from judgement
And smiling with each other,
As we discover what it means to be loved.

In our barracks we take a stand.
Champions of morality
And heroes of community,
Fighting for the dawn of our reign.

Our predecessors clutched to a dream,
But it was fragile and blown sideways
Like a feather in the breeze,
Knocked about with the ebb and flow of the wind.

Stronger together
With vigour in our pride,
Our steely grit anchoring their feather
And stabling its course.

Learning how to be ourselves
And showing our families what that means.
Accepting our bodies
And loving our flaws.



Holding hands, we are guided
And we see our futures.
But this is no crystal ball,
We made this future ourselves.

Learning things we never knew
And getting braver by the day,
Accepted, loved, cherished.
We found our home here.

Katie Holtom

This poem was written in consultation with groups at The What? Centre, to capture their experiences of being with the charity.

The What? Centre provides essential advice and counselling services for young people. This particular focus group specialised in providing support for members of the LGBTQ+ community.



How I Got Here

1972

North London

“STA” Infant & Junior School

HARINGEY - all over it!

1991 University of Leeds

France - Italy - Belgium - the 1990s

1999 - back to North London

Peru - France - Gloucester

2007 - Chris!

2010 - Welcome to the Black Country!

Foluso Enwerem



A Thank You Note To My Neighbour, Who Died Suddenly

Thank you. I know that I have never thanked you for all the help you have given me through my recuperation. You have done more than I expected. You have become a rock and my strength that motivates me to get up every morning.

Davy



Tranquil Town

Dreaming of lying
Under the stars
Down by the castle.
Letting the cool air
Ease the day and
Yawning.

Jennifer Wyatt



Dinnertime Supervision

Armed with an apron,
Redhall school was my stomping ground.
Bored in retirement,
It gave me purpose again.
A lunchtime warrior,
A friend and a comfort blanket,
I was there for them.
Their strops and their smiles,
Their laughter and their stories,
Of fish and chips and of spiders.
They left me with bellies full,
And I left them with heart full.

Eileen Turner



Dudley is

A time capsule, enriched with history.

A bag of pick and mix; each person sweet but with all different flavours.

A wild jungle, with predators and prey alike.

A Tardis town - more to enjoy than meets the eye.

A cuckoo clock with echoing sounds of police and ambulance sirens.

An oasis; hard to get to but worth it when you do.

An art gallery, vibrant with watercolour people.

A hotpot; the smells the tastes, the flavours, just like home.

A treasure chest - the more you dip in, the more interesting things you find.

A rough diamond.

The beating heart in the body of the Black Country.

The What? Centre



Centuries, Eras and Ears

I collect antique gramophone records, which I play on a wind-up, 100 year old gramophone. I have around 5,000 discs and still collecting. My oldest recording dates from 1901. I am enthralled by being able to hear sounds/ music/ voices from people who lived long ago. The records I have cross many centuries, eras and ears.

Michael



My first love was Mark. He was such a profound love, but it was bitter sweet. I had 5 years of joy but when it ended I was devastated. Now I remember fondly those 5 years of love and friendship.

Steve



A Short Collection of Limericks

There once was a Black Country man,
Who drove an Amazon van.
He thought it was cute,
To shout out JUST SHOOT,
Because I'm an Albion Fan!

Dudley, a Black Country Town,
Must be seen, have a good look around.
You will see some sights,
But you won't see no kites,
Cos the soot in the air brings them
down.

There once was a Black Country man,
Who was a home bred Yam Yam.
His hometown was Dudley,
Which is rather ugly,
But looks lovely when covered in jam.

Tony Wyatt



The Gardener

I have a memory of when I was a child. My next door neighbours were an elderly couple. The husband was a keen gardener despite being almost completely blind. One night he died in his sleep.

Sometime later I'd often be awoken by the sound of a lawnmower and clippers doing the edges of a lawn. I didn't think much of it at first, and would go back to sleep. Then one time I looked at the clock and it was about 2am. I checked every time I awoke after that and it was always in the early hours of the morning. I mentioned it to my mom once and she said she heard it too.

The rest of the family didn't believe it.

Paula



Cosy and Content

I will never forget the night in 1990 when I was sitting on a veranda overlooking a floodlit waterhole in Mount Kenya.

Everyone else had gone to bed and I remember wearing a nice warm jumper whilst watching the rain gently falling against the light.

Roy



Out

I came out as non-binary
And finally felt human.
It felt like a weight lifting off my shoulders.
I could finally breathe and it felt
Right.

Payton



Dark Landscape

Birthplace of industry and of revolution.
The colour of coal.
A steel garden
In a smoggy haze,
With memories of The Titanic in its anchor.
Saxon blood
But a Norman conquest built our castle.
A capital in its own right-
Is it the Black Country, or is it Mordor?

Katie Holtom



Together We Are

My brother in arms, worryingly close to losing our right to manhood, the younger of us their boyhood. A government threatening to take away our right to live our lives in the name of morality.

Michael



I was born on Hitlers birthday. I remember asking my Mum if he was going to get me a birthday present and she said to me if he did, it would be a bomb!

Joan Marr



My Brother's Love Story

Engines buzzed on the motorway,
Where they searched for a table to smoke at.
It was just a quick pit stop along the way,
But sitting together was more than just that.

At 63 he lived life to the full,
Spent 6 months together then married.
Looking back at that meeting in Cornwall,
They were grateful for the habit they carried.

18 years later and he passed away,
But I was glad that my brother was blessed.
They'll meet together again some day,
And I'll meet him too, in my rest.

Eileen Porter



Soundtrack To My Life

Crime of the Century

Hide in your shell

Asylum

Dreamer

Breakfast in America

Goodbye Stranger

Steve



Lost Trains

You used to carry our tired feet home,
Munching on Dudleys own coal
And coughing up black.
Would pick us up
And tether us to The Black Country.
Why did you leave us
And abandon your home?
Your tracks still wait,
And your tunnel sits dormant.
Maybe you'll keep your promise
And come back next year.

Brenda Atkins



My roots are in memories with my grandparents.
What they taught me instilled the old fashioned
ways of life

Anon



To Climb Again

What a feeling,
To reach for that crumbling surface.
Stretching for a piece of rock that will hold you
Metres off the floor.
Gripping the folds of earth,
Your mind set on the pinnacle.
The summit calling,
Willing you not to freeze.
Natures breeze drying your brow.
You ignore the pain of scarred fingers,
And conquer.

Samuel 'H' Wilkes



I feel proud of the Coronation Gardens because on November 11th, we celebrate the people in Dudley (my great grandad included), who gave up their lives for a bright future and made us proud.

Harry Gardiner



Children. Grandchildren.

The light and laughter
That plays across your soul.
A bond of blood passed into 5 of you,
And then 16 more.
How lucky of me
To be surrounded by you.
Blessed with 21 extra smiles
And 42 hands to hold.
Contagious giggles,
Bringing youth into an ageing body.

Marlene Connelt



Home

Where we rest our tired eyes
And hug our loved ones.
Negotiate the traffic at the bottom of the drive
And pop out for the weekly shop.
Where we uphold family traditions - some silly,
some not.
Like Chippy on a Friday,
Or toasting Grandma with a sherry on Christmas
day.
Where the pencil lines on the wall scare us with
how fast they are growing.
And the shoe rack is never full with shoes, because
they are all on the floor.
Where we decorate and redecorate again.
And cover ourselves in flour attempting to make
another birthday cake.
Where neighbours pop in on one another
And become Auntie and Uncle
Over a cup of tea and custard creams.
Where an old receipt has been a book mark for
years.
And won't change any time soon.
We love it here.

Abby







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