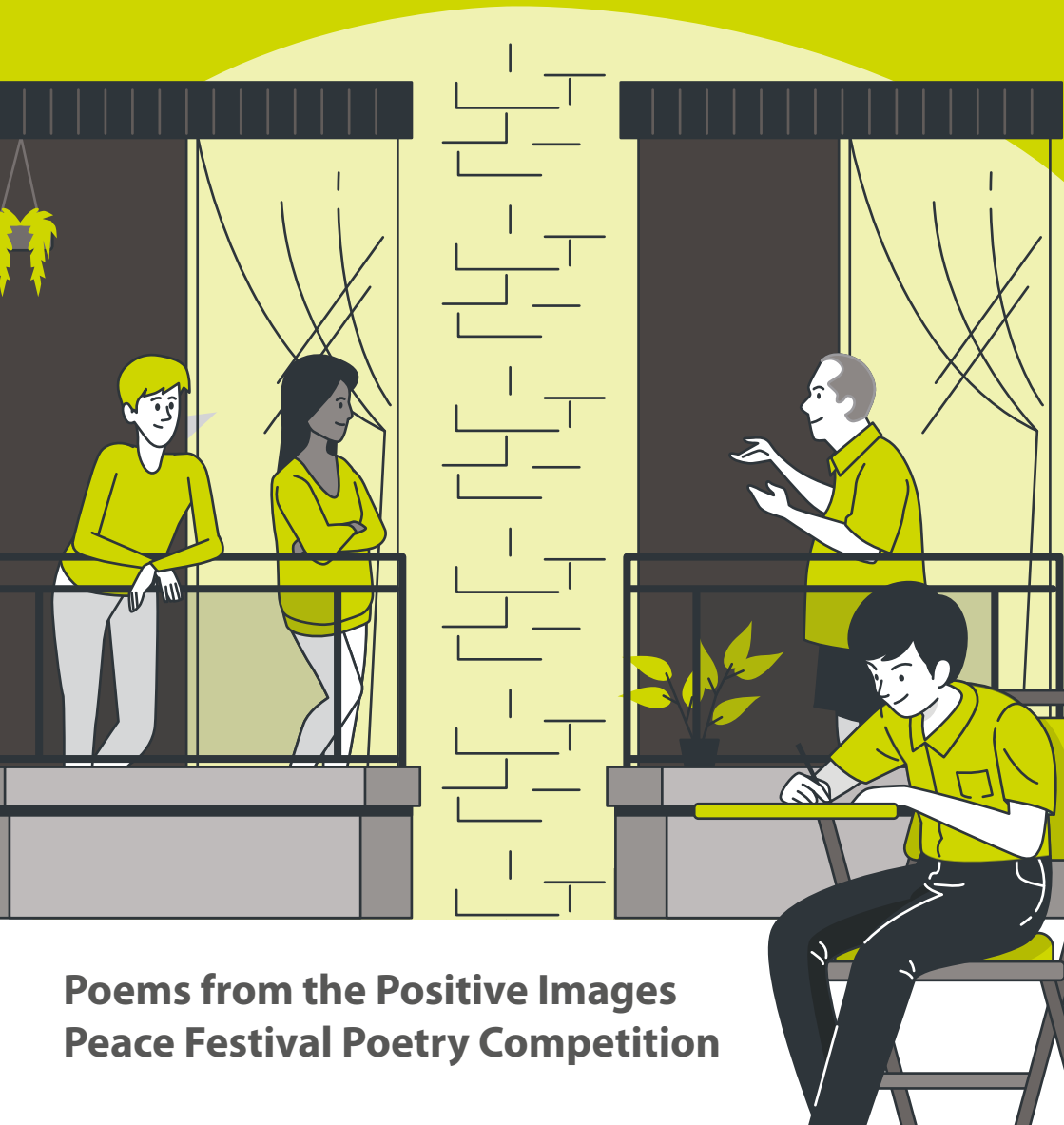


Listen to the World 2020

NEIGHBOURS



Poems from the Positive Images
Peace Festival Poetry Competition

Introduction

A huge thank you to everyone who entered a poem into this year's competition. It was an honour to be on the judging panel again this year and to experience the wonderfully diverse range of styles and approaches to the theme. I had no idea who any of the poems belonged to and the words spoke for themselves. I read and re-read every poem so many times, even after the result had been decided, each poem worked very well alone but it is so lovely to see them come together in this brilliant collection. In what, for many, has been a difficult year, these poems are a little piece of light and happiness.

Emilie Lauren Jones, Chair: Judging Panel

In memory of Leanne Bridgewater poet, artist,
animal rights activist and a great friend of the
Positive Images Festival.

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Winner

Joe Reynolds

Good Neighbours and Bad Friends

They give me a room now, a sanctuary,
Not too big but I'm grateful for small mercies,
I got a bed and a window and a stove to cook, and a place to keep me clothes,
They give me a little money and some vouchers for food,
I'm not afraid, I'm waiting for me papers to come.

I been here a week now, most people is nice, one lady give a pan,
Another bring me some chicken soup and some bread.
I had to wash the door Monday, it was dirty and smelled,
I'm not afraid, I'm waiting for me papers to come.

The door rat-a-tat on Tuesday, nobody there but I hear footsteps run,
Maybe somebody just having fun,
A pigeon, dead on the step; ruffled feathers, bit of blood; I place it in the bin.
I'm not afraid, I'm waiting for me papers to come.

A parcel come Wednesday, pushed through the door,
I open it quick with anticipation, have my papers come? It's just dog shit wrapped up,
I dropped it and had to scrub the rug,
I'm not afraid, I'm waiting for me papers to come.

On Thursday I see him first, chase him back to his home and rat-a-tat that door,
Lady in a dressing gown and slippers looking tired,
I said, 'Look what your boy done, he don't frighten me.'
And I lift up me dress, right there on the step,
And show her the scar that the bullet left,
She crying and invite me in saying sorry over and over and he's not a bad boy,
He just fell in with bad friends and I put my hand up and said, 'Stop! Stop. Stop.
Surely friends should be good not bad, bad is for enemies.'
And she ask me in, made a cup of tea, every problem in the world can be solved with
tea.

And she call in her boy and I showed him the scar,
Showed him the wound and he squirmed,
'You think a bit of dog shit gonna scare me?
They took my baby before it was born, took my husband, took my son,
Took me for a toy.'
But I'm not afraid, I'm waiting for me papers to come.

And we sat on her sofa, tears dilute the tea,
And she hug me, the first hug I'd had since that day,
And she asked who it was that had done that to me.
It was my neighbours, educated women make them afraid.
She smile, 'Neighbours? Neighbours should be good not bad, bad is for enemies.'
But I'm not afraid, me papers have come.

Runner Up

Olga Dermott

Betty and Her Winnebago

After Roy died, Betty signed
Christmas cards from her
and the dog, one kiss each.
Zumba class on a Tuesday,
drank Jagerbombs at her
grandson's 18th. Could talk

for hours, the sound of petrol
in her voice. Betty still kept
the accounts polished, along
with Roy's biking trophies
in the front room. Out early
and late. Her semi-detached

bungalow was small - tiny
as Ismael - swallowed whole
by a great whale of curved
metal on her driveway. We
were always breathless as
Betty reversed, oblivious

to the potholes; the entire
lane watching as she sailed
through the shallows, past
the odd numbers, our captain
in pink tracksuit, pink lipstick,
ready for the next adventure.

Joint Third Place

Steve Denehan

Several Fields Over

Her voice is on the breeze
a distant softness
talking, sometimes singing
several fields over
we have never met
she, a blur
a stranger
to me

but
I have heard her sing to herself
I have heard her call her children
out of the rain
into the sun
I have heard her berate and chide
and laugh

like the lowing of the cows
the whisper of the grass
the buzzing flies and chirping birds
her voice is there
stitched into the fabric of the air
yet

if we were to meet, I suspect
knowing myself as I do
I would not like her
would want to get away from her
and she
from me

she is out there
a few fields away
hanging her clothes
wishing away the rain
and that
for both of us
is enough

Russell Berry

Closed

Before they gated our community
a boy made a snowball in the entry.
He patted it and rolled it till it doubled,
quadrupled and doubled again

Sensing mischief in the wind, other children
waded in, working with the elements.
When they quit the ball was six feet fat,
a swollen Mint Imperial
blocking the throat of the entry

All day it loomed at Mrs Parrot's gate,
twig-pricked and plastered in leaf mould;
Mrs Parrot, who, the Saturday past
had found our football in amongst her husband's winter greens.
She stabbed it with a kitchen knife before she threw it back

It was dark by the time the cars came in.
From his room the boy could just make out
Mr Parrot's orange Vauxhall Viva
wheelspinning, acquiescing back into the road.

Judges Choice

Yi Jung Chen

Poco A Poco

Laying a branch of fir tree across the foot of your bed,
you finally fell asleep,
the emblem of broom flower,
thrusting the inauspicious hunch into your mind,
you woke up in cold sweats.

A fortunate stroke of serendipity,
the clasping bellflower waving her hands at me,
sitting there on the green grass,
with a random flower sketch,
you looked up into the sky,
brooding over the uncertainties of life.

Listening to Brahms Fantasien for piano,
every moment with you,
a mixture of euphoria and raptures,
two souls longing for redemption,
approaching each other,
poco a poco,
shadows concealed our fears of the ravaging storm,
we cuddle over the fireplace,
seeking the lodging of tranquility.

Jack Cooper

Screen of Saints and Angels

after John Hutton's glass engravings in Coventry Cathedral

The city has sickness round its neck like a ring-road
or concrete torc.

The city has four cathedrals; buried, bombed, abandoned
and now this tower block
which I watch from my window for four long months,
seeing a saint in every flat,
a miracle each day:
disease driven away without a touch
but with a quiet night, another cup of tea.

The city is kept safe by ordinary people
not seeing how the angels sing their praises.

Joe Reynolds

Initials Carved on a Cemetery Oak

(A Villanelle)

In the cracked crust of an aging oak, penknife scratched in a cordate shell,
Five capital letters tattooed in the bark; does A.P still Love G.D?
Through the tangled bones of four funerals, buried where acorns fell.

In the lost back-to-backs where kisses were stolen, furtive fingers held,
A feathered shaft, struck through a love-heart, struck diagonally,
In the cracked crust of an aging oak, penknife scratched in a cordate shell.

And now as neighbours, so close they might touch, graves laid parallel,
A legend carved, their love consummated, in the solitude of a cemetery,
Through the tangled bones of four funerals, buried where acorns fell.

And friends and paramours and secrets, clandestine moments, an anonymous hotel,
A room and a bed on a weekday afternoon G.D shared; love with A.P,
In the cracked crust of an aging oak, penknife scratched in a cordate shell.

Their limbs, now disturbed, roots, twisting through loam, caressing beneath the soil,
Ghostly kisses blown and returned, and now a forgotten, deceased memory,
Through the tangled bones of four funerals, buried where acorns fell.

Two headstones chiseled from black marble, the epitaphs do not tell,
That the scar cut deep in the bark still bleeds,
In the cracked crust of an aging oak, penknife scratched in a cordate shell.
Through the tangled bones of four funerals, buried where acorns fell.

Ojo Taiye

Tradition

after Enrique Villasis

& to give weight to the meaning of charity
i return to my childhood's black and white,

inside the unfinished body of an old district
building; a homeless golden retriever,

with dark eyes, set widely apart, exposed to
the cold, already wounded & scored— its tousled

skin and the low percussion of its arteries scissoring
to the rhythms of distant feet. *not as a multitude*

but as one—my sister caught in the flush of her own
humanity, chases through the broken window not

minding the prickling thorns. to the direction of this
fevered animal. like how one recognizes *suffering*

& there is no one to beg or ask for pity. kneeling
at the bath, she pours warm soapy water on his skin,
sponge his face, brushing from head to tail. & over the
kitchen table my mother & i stitching together the bruises

with no other motive than mercy— all night long i watch
my sister give life to this newborn, lolling in the crook

of her elbow. the warmth in her voice as she sets him down
on her flowery bed. maybe i love the joy in her finest—

the night purring so deep until it matched the scale of
their snore. today staring at the sky & thinking for a moment—

what would have happened if my sister hadn't picked up tradition?
as a child, how was she to know whom to call a neighbour?

Amy Clennell

Sometimes the Grass “is” Greener

Last week had been our first meeting,
Before that, we'd never conversed.
I'd caught glimpses, only fleeting,
Of his movements as he traversed
The meadow adjacent to mine.

The burgeoning bushes and trees
Have created a scenic screen;
Springtime presents a fragrant frieze,
As summer's verdure intervenes,
The density intensifies.

Autumn's palette transforms the hues
Of this effusive barricade.
Shedding of leaves slowly ensues,
Bared branches and twigs are displayed
Densely entwined throughout winter.

Did he observe these same tableaux
Each year as the seasons shifted?
The answer I would never know,
Unless this lush blockade lifted.
I wonder if he wonders too?

Then came the day a gap emerged,
A breach in the constraining wall.
Now were our meadows to be merged
Or were they about to install
A gate or another rampart?

Yet this open portal remained.
First we exchanged a friendly nod,
Then with our passage unrestrained,

Through each other's pastures we trod.
We became inseparable.
I am a grey, he is a bay.
Where ever he goes, I follow.
We graze together through the day,
We will do the same tomorrow
Safe in our equine paradise.

Margaret Eddershaw

Greek Neighbour

She arrives breathless
black wool molds her round shape
severe grey hair drawn back
lined face etched with a smile
a shaft of sun
between mountain clouds.

As she reaches up to cup my face
I see warmly creased palms
a wedding ring bites
into a plump finger.

Her kisses melt
into the all embracing Greek gesture
of admiration and benediction,

our home is blessed.
I am firmly folded
into the sweet-smelling
landscape of her body.

Jack Kerr

My Old Fence

The sun comes out and dries wet wood,
Dry wood stands where wet wood stood.
The rain comes down and wets dry wood;
Wet wood stands where dry wood stood.

For most of the time I understood
That this was neither bad nor good,
But most of the time has since elapsed
And my old fence has just collapsed.

The Best of the Rest

S Afrose

Love Your Neighbour

The universe is created by God
Lot of people live here
We are neighbours at each other
So many differences show all over
Yet all are lived under the same sky
Same blood flowing in our veins
Same feelings in the heart
Situation making it so difficult
To make rift within all of us
Crashing grasping all is going
Only for some momentary peace
The long lasting peace is achieved
Showering love rain towards all
Forgetting the so called pride
We can make the earth so bright
Hand in hand we should walk
To lead a lovely life

Paula V Andrade

Pandemic Portraits

On the edge of Dante's hell, | What was once important?

After that, it is no longer serious.

Freedom and breathing, returned to having the value of life,

Moreover, the true meaning of love and loving yourself.

In addition, not even the conscience of science | You can placate, or resolve,

What is that about money, can I always buy? I choose not.

The benefit of the invisible | It is no longer laughable | Moreover, it changed the direction of humanity. | In addition, many have lost immunity.

After the planetary chaos | Many turn to God | Others remain atheists.

And the survivors gave (very sadly) | So many sorrowful goodbyes | To loved ones.

Neighbours' danced around | The same fireplace to keep safe | The elders and children,

The simple and the weak, the sole fragility of being in despair. Isolated.

They tried to support the lonely unsaid and the pain as an awful liquid painting to portray.

As ancient people from the woods, they danced to the gods of the mountains and rivers.

Moreover, there were no gods, to comfort them | There were no more drums to play.

Public health worked non-stop. | Without much solving.

In addition, deaths piled up on street corners | From every city on the planet.

As our neighbourhood, our streets, our ceilings. Next door. Next window. Who's next?

Isolation made everyone look | Internal worlds. | Moreover, to glimpse the eternal sky.

And after so much pain, | Unpleasant portraits.

Even so, so many worked out their sleeves to save smiles

They found the way to help and volunteer with going to grocery shops, to pets' cares,

And so on, the next door could mean more than just a piece of wood.

The loss of the value system (world's collapse) | Took a deep breath.
Recorded what in the pandemic was silent. | After so much disgrace.
What could bring life into the eyes again?
Hope and faith gave the air | Of your grace.
People opened the hearts to look into the eyes.
People were back in the streets in the square.
The hugs could embrace the infinite joy of a warm presence.
Being together is an eternal circle of celebrating the stars we all carry inside us.
It is all about a constellation of lives, people, smiles, | Treasures, pleasures kindly
rejoining forces, | To unite communities.
United (Uno) One kind of hugs. | Humanity has rekindled, | Therefore learned.
More so ever, the world was reborn. (We keep waiting next phase, so.)
What's up, more. What's next door?

Becca Beales

A Hand to Hold

Fear and anxiety fills my head,
Overwhelmed, alone, nothing but dread,
My whole world coming to an end,
Darkness I can never comprehend.

Locked up inside my head, days, weeks, months
Delusions, something never to confront,
Normality a distant dream,
Getting to that point, wanting to scream.

In the darkness, slowly, appears the light,
A little deed here and there, winning against the fight,
The smallest ray of hope, a beam of sunshine,
The voice from afar saying everything will be fine.

Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself,
Thinking of others and not just yourself,
A time when something so little helps,
All their actions, so kind and heartfelt.

Thank-you so much for just being there,
Bringing me back from my darkness and despair,
Your words of kindness, a hug, or saying you care,
A heart like yours is so very rare.

So to those who feel alone, desperate or afraid?
A Neighbour who will help the darkness fade,
Help is waiting, a hand to hold,
An angel, a warrior, someone with a heart of gold.

Paul Bowler

Earth and Venus

One is a delicate sprite of blue and grey
the other, an enchantress veiled in white
who men have sought to conquer

And while Earth promotes nurture and growth,
beneath her temperate, glowing exterior
Venus is unwelcoming, inhospitable

These neighbours in our solar system
are celestial twins, some have said
because of their similar size and mass

When microbes were discovered on Venus
scientists on Earth became excited
that once, she may also have supported life

Imagine, this source of a thousand myths,
the star of morning and evening,
was like our own world long ago

What of her people, if any
Practical beings, a bit like ourselves
or creatures we couldn't even begin to comprehend

Did they look to the skies, as we do
wondering about life over there?
Make plans to explore the world next door?

And then, when their climate turned hostile,
gradually consuming their world of two continents
did they seek to escape its destruction?

Questions to which we may never have an answer
But Earth sends Venus expensive gifts
Probes, in hope she'll one day reveal something of her past

Martin Brown

Neighbours

We have no neighbours round about,
Astronomers boldly state;
None to help or borrow from,
None near, at any rate.

The outer ones are much too cold,
The inner ones too hot;
All are dead or deadly,
Each inhospitable spot.

Others are so distant,
Neighbours not at all;
Two hundred trillion years away,
Much too far to call.

So all we have each other,
Eight billion souls to care about;
So let's all be good neighbours,
and help each other out.

Rachel Burns

Bay Windows

The damp wallpaper around the window frame is flecked
with black mould, stachybotrys chartarum.
A boy in red wellington boots splashes in puddles in the rain.

On the sill a porcelain Giselle dances arabesque.
I wonder can she reboot from beyond the grave?
Outside, the glare of a neighbour's security light,
black rain glistens on the tarmac.

Inside, the hum of the computer
and the monitor's familiar creak.
News travels fast along centrifugal wires,
amber warnings, second and third tiers in towns and villages.

Rain from the leaky guttering splutters
onto the cracked paving below.
I used to live in a house with a coal fire
and bay windows, in a place where horses ran wild

through postcode black spots, where children wept,
screaming naked, pressed against glass from abuse and neglect,
where no one brought you flowers unless they were nicked
from gravestones or some poor bastard's deathbed.

Christopher Burleigh

A Drop in the Ocean

We are desperate migrants
Risking everything to be free
We are only a drop in the ocean
War-torn, destitute, crossing the sea,
We are afraid, and so are you
Lost in the sea of humanity,
In truth our numbers are very few
Merely seeking a safe country.

I am only a drop in the ocean
A small boy alone in the sea,
My family longing for dry land –
A small boy, limp on wet sand.

Amy Clennell

My Alfie

My son and I reside
In adjacent spheres
Which often may collide
If I don't adhere
To rigid rituals.

It's hard to comprehend
Why peace is shattered.
My task is to transcend
The debris scattered
by his relentless rage.

Like two globes gliding by
Closely yet remote
Or bubbles in the sky
Side by side we float
In silent solitude.

His world is so lonely,
Mine he cannot share.
How I wish, if only
I could place in there
Just one fragile foothold.

I might see through his eyes,
Glance into his mind.
A chance to empathize
If our thoughts combined,
Shine through this hopeless haze.

He can hear, he can speak,
Yet he's thought witless.
He's even called a freak
By those who witness
His bizarre behaviour.
And often they complain
About his loud shouts
Once more I must explain
Though they have their doubts,
"Alfie is autistic."

Caroline Davies

The Boy Next Door

He hates the Sun
And loves the rain
I see him getting soaked again

Raptured in precipitation
Loving his unique location

I hate the rain
And love the sun
Watching people having fun
Feel the rays upon my face
Delighting in my happy place

He's the Yang to my Yin
When he's out, I am in
Our paths have never yet collided
Our fates were long ago decided

Neighbours forever and frozen in time
Will my sweetheart ever be mine?

No Romeo or Juliet. No Bonnie or Clyde
Is this a love story?
I will let you decide

The end, my conclusion
A time to take stock
I am the girl who loves the boy
In the old weather clock

Ganesh Dutt

Can I Borrow Some Peace Please?

Everyday I switch on the telly
Everyday I can see some big rally
People cry for life
From the edge of the knife
Destroying the glory of the world
Is not nice!
People paying life's heavy price
Throw your dagger Throw your knife
Oh God
enough is enough
We don't need any more fuss
Let us have peace
I want to borrow some
more peace

Emmanuel Eremah

Neighbours

What good!
Can come out from the lockdown?
But Neighbours.
The lockdown
Not a knockdown
I laid in defeat
My Neighbours stood me to my feet.
In spite of all the echoes
I have come to see
Skin may differ
But affection
Dwells in black and white the same.
My aim
The renewal of my mind
To unwind that which I had feared
Had not come to pass.
The task I will no longer be lonely
Keeps me alive
Drives me to true friendship
With my Neighbours.

Good Neighbours!
Close the doors of hate
Opens the gates of love
Solves the quest of indifference
Brings radiance of togetherness
We keep smiling
That's what Neighbours are for.

The pillars of uncertainties
Finally collapses between Neighbours.
We advance
Our kids come together
Border lines of colour are broken
We are awoken to love.
Love becomes our reference
Here in the Neighbourhood of Coventry
The inventory of a new life

Parents are glued into friendship
Relationships are built between Neighbours
The naysayers are put to shame
Our labours weren't in vain.

Chris Farn

Neighbour at Number Twenty-Four

Come in, come in, dearie.
Would you like a cup of tea?
What did you want to ask, officer?
My neighbour at number twenty-four?
He's foreign but seems very nice.
He kindly offered to sort my electrics.
When? Oh, about two months ago.
I was shocked when I got my next bill,
It was over two thousand pounds!
And there's me with a gas fire.
I couldn't understand it,
Neither could the electricity board.
Said they would contact the police
And here you are, dearie.
Did I notice a distinctive smell?
No dearie, Covid-19 put paid to that.
Mind you, I've still got my sense of taste.
Well I never, cannibals next door!
Oh sorry, cannabis you say.
My hearing's not too clever at the mo.
Can't get out for batteries you see.
Did I see anything unusual next door?
No dearie, Covid-19 put paid to that.
My cataract operation was cancelled.
Did the gentleman visit me again?
As a matter of fact, yes. Let me think.
Yes, it was a couple of weeks ago.
He asked me if I smoked.
I told him I hadn't smoked for years.
Anyway, he gave me a couple of fags.
They were a bit funny looking.

Did I smoke them? Well, I tried one
And dearie, I had never felt so happy!
I was lonely with this lockdown malarkey.
It put me right, I can tell you.
Have I still got the other one?
Yes dearie, I popped it in a little tin.
Thought I'd save it for a rainy day.
Can't believe how good fags are now.
They should put them on prescription!

Rob Gibbs

Sharing Walls

Love thy neighbour as we know,
The bible stated long ago,
To have good neighbours nearby,
Is like an angel from the sky.

In times of trouble they are there,
To lend support and show they care,
Displaying much consideration,
Avoids a lot of consternation.

Good morning and a friendly smile,
Stop and chat for a while,
If they misplace their front door key,
Invite them in for scones and tea.

When they go on holiday,
Check all is well anyway,
Give help to others and it's true,
They will probably do the same for you.

If they're ill it's not too hard,
To send a thoughtful get well card,
Even gestures that seem small,
Are worth much more than none at all.

It's fine to take but also give,
That world's a better place to live,
Let's all thank and also treasure,
The folk next door who give us pleasure.

Peniel Gifted

In This Small World

In this small world of sweeping strides
We broach our days in unending thoughts
With people from different tribes
Each with a different style of life.

Everyday, when we wake
In our ears, a wonderful good morning
In search of greener pastures, we follow a steep
With "have a beautiful night", we go to sleep.

Dressed in suits, they go to church
In their hijabs, they go to mosque
In their hands, their holy books
With legs mounting, the doors they lock.

Different languages, they really speak
Different dishes, they go to eat
In their knowledge at different peak
They do things their own way, bit by bit.

In this small world of sweeping strides
We have the ones to fill the huts
Living with them as time goes on
They are our neighbours all along.

Hayley Harman

All in it Together

"Do we wear masks or not?"
I've almost forgot
The panic that came at the start of lockdown.
"Can we go to town?"
Then we were stuck in doors
Waiting for Thursdays
When the neighbours
Would come out and clap
For the NHS.
Some had saucepans and spoons
And cars beeped.
They even let off bangers
In the next street,
All in it together.
We had rainbows
In windows.
I put one up
And a neighbour over the road
Liked it so much
They asked me to make one for them
Which I did.
We'd never spoken to each other before
Strangers behinds doors
But now, somehow, all in it together.

Caroline Hobday

I Spy a....

Who? Where? When? Why?

Lived here for 12 years!

No one asked, No one invited,

Divorced, Married, Children,

Had a baby, Been a death,

No one told me! No one spoke,

Parties, New car, Caravan, Motorbike,

In work, Out of work? Stays at home,

Has lots of parcels, Plenty of visitors, No one goes there,

Watching, Looking, Staring,

But never speaking,

Is this you? Me? Us? Them?

Hello! Hi! You OK? How are you?

Approach, Smile, Communicate, Talk,

Engage, Help, Listen, Be there,

You, Me, Begins with N,

NEIGHBOURS

Antony Huen

Neighbours

We're looking at you, divided
by the window frames.
You walk to your right, disappear,

and emerge again, divided
by the window frames.
You never step close to

the windows. We're watching you
walking back and forth, looking
for something. You don't notice us,
we assume. You've left the bedroom
for like ten minutes, keeping
the pendant light on. As you return,

you're topless. I turn off the lamp
and draw the curtains, but keep
a narrow opening. You face us

with your back. Then a man
covers you from behind.
You both wear sweatpants.

He faces us, stretching his arms.
He draws the curtains, but keeps
a narrow opening. Like a crevice.

Now my curtains are on top
of each other. Sunlight still creeps in
underneath their hems, making

a column. I hear from upstairs
the sound of pouring,
then dripping.

Milan Jagatia

Childhood Recalled

Friendly banter and advice
flowing freely from next door
many a good time shared...
swimming lessons, plant cuttings and dog sitting
open doors, cups of tea a must
visiting a busy mum
playing to relieve her burdens,
lifts to shops, lifts to work and shared concerns
jubilee street party for all
unity and love at the core
feeling free, safe, my spirit soars
as bikes are ridden at top speed
left on side roads, no locks, trust assured

Shock! Body in bin store....
mistrust and suspicion rears up
all a suspect, darting eyes, sharp ears
furtive glances and jumpiness
doors locked tight and playing out paused

Jay Joshi

A Poem about a young man called Jay who saved his neighbour called May

A young man called Jay heard a young woman called May who was his neighbour shouting for help

As Jay ran outside he could see there was black smoke coming from her house.

Jay ran back to ring the fire brigade who said they would call tomorrow as they don't work Saturday.

Jay knew it would be late for May if he waited for the fire service.

He found two fire blankets.

He wrapped the first blanket around himself and held the other in his right hand.

Jay kicked May's front door down and saw May lying near the bottom of the stairs

He saw a fireball was travelling down the stairs.

Jay wrapped May in the fire blanket before taking her in his arms and ran out of the front door with her in his arms.

Jay was relieved to see the Fire Brigade and Ambulance Service had arrived to take care of May and Jay and they were both taken to hospital

Jay was given the all-clear by doctors.

Jay went to see if May was okay.

Jay could see May was okay.

May thanked Jay for saving her life

Jay told May there was no need to thank him

Jay told May I will come and pick you up tomorrow when you get discharged from the hospital. Jay gave to May a place to stay his house because hers was damaged in the fire

May thanked Jay for giving her a place to stay.

Jay went back to the hospital to pick May up from the hospital

He gave May's carrier bag which had a red dress and new shoes which Jay brought for May because Jay knew May's clothes were all burnt in the fire.

May thanked Jay for his kind gesture.

Jay waited outside whilst May changed into the new red coloured dress and new shoes.

Once May was ready May and Jay left the hospital

As they headed to the car park, where, Jay's black Golf was parked

Jay unlocked before both opened the car doors and sat down before closing and both put their seatbelts on before Jay started his car.

Jay asked May on the way home if she minded if they stopped off at the fish and chip shop because they were both very hungry.

Jay arrived at the fish and chip shop while May sat in the car.

The shop was empty, there were no customers waiting to be served

Jay was able to get two portions get offish and chips

Jay paid, left the shop and returned to the car and opened the driver's door and passed the carrier bags to May to hold

Within a few minutes, Jay and May arrived at Jay's house.

May was upset and had tears running down her face, May saw the smoke damage after the fire

It would take a few weeks to fix the smoke damage

Jay opened his front door with his key.

Jay turned the light on and May followed him into the house before he closed the front door

Jay and May sat at the kitchen table and they both enjoyed their fish and chips

Jay worked as builder and offered to fix and repair May's house to allow May to live in the house again.

He did not take any money for the work he did in May's house.

Jay and May were not only neighbours but became fantastic lovers and got married

Once Jay had got May's house ready to live in, May invited him in for a cup of tea

Annette Kinsella

Parliament: Three Neighbours

Westminster Palace is a bearpit
Centuries of plotting and intrigue
Secrets and corners
Riddled with rats, mice and asbestos.
Three neighbours, decades living side by side.
One a silent killer
Gnawing away at lives
One a rodent
Nibbling steadily on age-old foundations
And...
...and
...and...
One makes the laws of the land.

Nick Knibb

Not like the old days

you told me they were all miserable around here
"its not like the old days where we used to live;
when we knew each other's business
we knew each other's ways.
we could leave our door open - most of the time
a baby out the front
the washing on the line
the milk on the step
and run credit at the shop
come to think of it, when did that all stop?"
but you didn't remember that business of Dad getting grassed up for doing
cash in hand
the weird looking neighbour and his brother Stan
that house that burnt down
mysteriously
and the jumper that smelt of smoke
or the nights when I was too scared to get off the bus from school
not knowing who I was going to meet
not knowing if I'd get home in one piece
and that morning when our dog didn't come back...

this place though
you say
"it's not like the old days here
nobody speaks
nobody crosses the road
nobody laughs - nobody jokes
nobody knows one another's names
nobody cares
nobody has five minutes
nobody shares – nothin'"

but that day you had your fall
and Rob at 32 rang me up
to tell me that Mr and Mrs Gadhavi had taken you to the Walk-In centre
and could Mrs Franks have the spare key as she's got some food
to stock up your cupboards
and to turn on the heating
and for Mr O'Hare to move your bed downstairs
I think you could tell
this was not like the old days
at all
the old days was hell.

Saradha Krishnamoorthy

Neighbours

My Neighbours are great
Always there to relate
They are my mate
They ask me if I ate
They share their home cooked food they create
My neighbourhood are a diverse estate
The chats we have to pass time at eight
While the children are asleep in bed in a state
By chance we became great neighbours to interrelate
One day I hope my children will recreate

Hasnaa Kurdi

My Neighbour

I wish my neighbour told me
about her condition
Because of my condition
is same as her
I hope to relieve her of a burden
That's tired her for holding it
The two loads will be easily carried if divided
She is like the sister that my mother did not give birth to
I see her face in the morning and evening
If it were not for my neighbour near me, I would not bear the burdens
That exhausted me
My companion all my years, I feel so happier in her presence near me
And I support it in its accommodation and travel.

Matt Loat

Gift of Christmas

It was Christmas time
There were blankets of soft snow and trinkets of icicles on every gate post
There was a sharp crispness in the air
I drove carefully down the icy road
The street lights flicker as carolers sing merry tunes gleefully
As I pull up to the house with the red door
I sense a homely warmth
Children's laughter in harmony with the flashing lights and sweet aroma of freshly
baked cookies
I open my car door to see an audience of smiling faces
A piano melody as we exchange introductions
This welcoming truly erupts as more people engage with this chorus
A hundred hugs and dozens of handshakes
Finally unladen my baggage from the car
Entering the threshold of my new home
The next few days pass
Pleasantries and surfing hands over the fence
Forever offering help and sharing kindness
Breaking bread and drinking tea
My greatest Christmas gift
Wasn't the presents under my tree
It was the new family and neighbours I got to share it with

Matt Loat

No More Water

I pray for rain
Looking out from the glassed safety of my apartment
All I see is them burning
The sun hidden in the redness of the screaming flames and smoke
Roaring winds carry their screams
I'm crying as I cannot reach them
My outstretched palm isn't long enough
The beauty of this land is baptized in darkness
The black smoke chokes the very air in front of me
Mother nature has called upon her necromancer
The screams are louder now
An entire nation showered in droughts
There's no more water in the wells
Fences of red orange and yellow ablaze all around the innocent
My heart is breaking
I can do nothing but pray
There is no water
My beautiful neighbours are in the furnace
I cannot get them out
The nights are lonely now
No choruses at sunrise or encores at sunset
The heavens finally open the rains breached those clouded gates
Though for so many of my friends
The water came too late

Pete Longden

...street...

Are they the over-the-fence gossipers of t'north,
safe with their confidante bosom buddies, exchanging the news of the world,
knowing their world barely extends
beyond their street, rumours not going far,
perhaps only as far as say – Sheffield!

Or are they the reliable neighbourly-types who
borrow the lawn-mower because theirs is broken;
neighbours who you can trust to return it that same day?
All clean and cut grass removed,
a bunch of their cut-flowers bundled together in thanks?
They might be the ones who know everything,
can be relied on to have plumber and electrician they can trust;
one who moves the waste-bins back into place,
shovels up the snow in winter, if there is any,
if the car breaks down will help with a push.

They are the ones who joined on the street each Thursday,
when Covid locked down the world to one street,
they were there to thank key workers,
while thinking of protesting at how slow was the lockdown
and at the beginning about the shortage of PPE.

And the ones who should be spoken to,
greeted each morning, not ignored or shunned,
exchanging as much of the pleasantries of the day
that can be found with so much chaos around,
a future of hope for when this pandemic is done!

Alison Manning

Neighbours

Before this year,
I did not appreciate the neighbours I had.
Many throughout these streets
I hadn't met as much as I should.

Stuck shielding at home
Was hard,
Sought release,
Relied on those in our neighbourhood.

Even ones we'd never met
Fetched prescriptions for us,
Or bought cheese,
Cheese on toast never tasted so good!

We tried to do our bit:
Passed on messages,
Helped transport settees,
Supported those we could.

Though others,
Blasting loud music through open windows,
Brought peace
When they moved out.
Silence never sounded so good.

Martin Mellett

I've just moved house

I've just moved house
Into a new neighbourhood
Didn't know anyone
Was a little anxious
I'm on a quiet road
At the end of a cul de sac
What about the neighbours, I thought?
Wonder what they are like?
Are they young or old?
Do they have children?
Are they talkative?
Do they like to chat?
Or are they quiet?
And like to keep themselves to themselves?
Keep wondering what the neighbourhood is like
A car pulls up in the drive next door
A man gets out, I introduce myself
And he greets me
In that familiar Irish accent
I recognise the face
And can tell he recognises me
So we get talking
And I find out he's from Mayo
Just like my Mum and Dad
He knows people that I do
And we have much in common
He tells me about the neighbours
And says how friendly they are
He's lived here a long time
And he's been happy here
And wishes me happiness too.

Guna Moran

Rock

A rock can be only made smaller
By beating and hitting
Can never be made larger

The rocks are generally homeless
They lay everywhere

Run over by vehicles
Rock do not get flattened
Passer by stamp on it repeatedly
Not even the epidermis is damaged

Struck by hammer
Rocks turn smaller and tinier
Even after that we term it hard and ruthless

Rock for benevolence
Rocks are immortal-never ageing
Because it can turn itself smaller immediately
(benevolent never die)

Time-winning aesthetic is impossible sans sculpture
In every era the rock sculpture stands best
Still we find it hard to accept
The eternal rock is the ever spreading glory of the mankind

Aimee Morley

Neighbours

We see them everyday

Every morning we wave to them awkwardly as we set off for the day ahead

They can be nose-y

They can be kind

Or they can just be completely annoying at times

But still we always remember our neighbours because they are Part of our story...so close to home

We can loath our neighbours

I know I have at times

We can even love our neighbours like they are part of the family since we were knee high

As they pop round for a cup of tea and a chat

Or just to see how you are

That's neighbours

Part of lives for a time

We always remember them for being part of the neighbourhood

Helen Mosley

Neighbour from Hell or The Lament of Peeping Tom

SETTING: THE GODIVA CLOCK

On the hour, a set of doors which have the symbol of the Earl of Leofric on, open, and Lady Godiva naked atop her horse, rides out.

Above, a tailor - peeping Tom - appears, before covering his eyes.

Once, I was a tailor,
I would thread the finest thread,
pick out the brightest silks,
Gloried in colour and praise
Pointed out as a man of worth,
Men considered me honourable,

She rode by clothed only by her golden hair
how could a seeker of beauty resist?

They carved me from wood,
painted me lurid, vivid and crude
Frozen forever in a perpetual leer
Gave me a new name to hang about my neck
Put me up high
I'm a warning to all
Of the perils of temptation
Damned at the time, dammed forevermore

Call it lust, if you care
Ever grasping after her
Temptation compelled me to look
Against all decency
stuck
in perpetual purgatory
I am more than I seem:
Not just lecher, spy, voyeur,
Your eyes upon me
as I am caught in the act

Castigated in the pages of history,
a moment of weakness,
As the bells chime the hour
I peep out and I ogle her still
Forever out of my reach
Compelled by a grinding
temptation to peek, just to see
Call it love or lust as you like
In the age of Me Too
I'm the neighbour from hell

Olugbemi Moronfolu

Loneliness in the time of Covid

I am pervasive loneliness, that dark abyss
Lurking with you as you relive the moments missed
Knocking persistently as you desperately try break out
I tie your tongue when you are asked what is wrong
And reply with it's all alright
I sing with delight as I seep into your heart
broken down, weary and forever torn apart
Shrouded in the shadows, silent sobs and screams
Imperceptible, in fact, things rarely seem amiss
And this, this is loneliness, that great uniter
Of the young and old, tormenting the shy and seemingly bold
Ever more present, as the pandemic unfolds
And we each try to cope with the burden that we hold
Together but all alone

Loraine Mponela

**Our Neighbours were our Neighbours.
Our Neighbours were not our Strangers**

Dear Wabuya,

I want to remind you what our neighbours did when you were away or whenever you left home. I can only look back and pat you on your back for the heaviest duties you accomplished. There is no doubt you left your big mark in your world which is us, me.

Grandma, you remember you were carrying goods such as bananas, oranges, mangoes, kadonsha, on your head, over 20Kilometres away from home to exchange for fish from fishermen or sell for little pennies. You would leave very early and come back in evening. And all days were not Sundays - sometimes you came home happier than other days.

It is these days when you were trying to find our bread and butter, to find our school fees, to find our clothes, that our neighbours were showing up for us. One would pass by to check if we have had a bath, another would come to check if we have eaten and what we have eaten or if we were going to eat. Someone to check if we needed to fetch more water.

Wabuya, I also want to tell you what happened when you were in hospital with one of your grandchildren khazy, who was admitted for having serious bouts of malaria. I was still little but could not forget this moment. Tiwonge, one of my older sisters also got sick from malaria while you were at hospital looking after khazy. I remember our neighbour carrying my sister to her house for close monitoring as she got worse and you could not be in two places. I still remember Tiwonge opening her eyes and shutting, she was convulsing and weak on the mat, on the veranda. Our neighbour tried home remedies to help her stop the convulsions but my sister was slow to respond, and the more she deteriorated.

I was playing under the closest tangerine tree with other children there and one of our male neighbours was trying to put Tiwonge on his back so he could cycle to hospital with her. My sister died at that moment, right on our neighbours back.

Our neighbours were our neighbours. Our neighbours were NOT our strangers. You trusted them and they trusted you.

Hope I can find another opportunity soon to remind you how you also stepped up for our neighbours.

Rest well Grandma,

Masiya

Kitty O'Shea

Neighbours

Oh Maggie! Just the person I need,
We're away to the dales for a restful week.
A few things I worry could go wrong
Perhaps you could keep an eye while we're gone,
I'll leave you a key if that's OK.
Then things will feel safer while we're away.
Hopefully alarms won't blast off and blare
But I'll show you the switch under the stairs.
I know your soft spot for our cat Midge,
Could you check there's plenty of food in her dish;
If that gets empty, I worry she might
Wonder the house dragging unsavoury diets,
Sorry here but I'm pushing for more –
Friday, would you wheel out the green bin, it's by the back door?
Not to drag on but you'll spot in the hall
A bulging black bag for Tuesday's charity call.
Could you ever stand it outside on the wall,
Hopefully the forecast won't give rainfall.
Oh. I see by your face there is something amiss
Of course, your sister is coming with her bunch of kids.
That's a reminder that life behind doors
Beats its singular heart rate, knows every pore.
But neighbours all, a smile and a wave
Puts a heart in our street, recognition as safe.
We cover the same footprints, pass the same walls,
And the air that blows through
Says goodwill to all.

Emmanuel Ojeikhodion

Food as an Act of Kindness

Somewhere around, a family wanes into hunger while another family's kitchen is a repository of stale food.

The lacking family hopes for a rough meal to hold their belly for the night while the other family fills their garbage with untouched food & a ceremony of flies hovers to feast.

You hustle & hustle in the daytime for anything to lay in your hands as food & in the nighttime, hunger spreads your body in its soft couch while your stomach sings the lyrics of food.

You reduce yourself before your neighbour's door to plead for food & they feed your ears with the hardness of everything stifling the country.

You lunge to your room shrouded with shame & wonder where the aromas that invades your nostrils all day come from.

The aroma of chicken stew & rice swirling from your neighbour's flat awakens your intestines into a war.

You can't quell this hunger to rest. Yet, the remains from your neighbour's pot turning into a feast in their garbage still befuddles you.

The provision-store won't grant you more purchase on credit again. Everytime, you think of how to break free from the manacle of what to eat.

Katalin Patnaik

Arachnid Neighbours

I'm getting you evicted I swear!
Not a minute more I can bear!
You're always just... hanging there,
With your hairy privates all bare,
Watching me with that obnoxious stare!
Peeping when I'm washing my hair.
I can't stand your unblinking glare!
I don't want to kill you, it'd be unfair,
But one more time I see you up there
I'll roll up the newspaper, I swear!

Alun Roberts

We Are All Much The Same

Peel away our skin,
shave off our hair,
silence our tongues,
we are all much the same
in front of our God. Heads

full of random squiggles,
curved outlines,
abstract shapes,
prejudices that make no sense,
we have them all. Our

ears that do not listen,
eyes that will not see,
mouths exuding bile
with hurt, no remorse. Yet

we are captured for our beauty,
for posterity,
for our ego,
by artisans of oils
who portray what we fear. For

the colours they paint
are but the same,
only we differentiate
black, white, brown, yellow
and shades in between. Then

in front of our God, true
neighbours are much the same.

Judith E Roberts

Helping Hand

A bloody nose bleed
Out of the blue,
I really didn't know
What to do.

I knock the wall
And Sukhi's there,
It's not something
She wants to share

But here she is
Set to be helpful.
We're worlds apart.
I'm feeling shameful,

Blood's really mucky
Her work's hard labour.
But I'm VERY lucky
To have such a neighbour.

THANK YOU

James Rose

Across the Street

The privet's a disappointment:
brown patches in the green,
so neatly clipped.
An excess of fertilizer,
much regretted,
and there's moss in the lawn – again.

Across the way,
grey hair hangs lank from crown to shoulders;
grass grows in the gravel of the garden path;
paint peels from the window frames,
while the bees in her hives make honey.

She longed for the teacher,
twill, tweed and brogues,
forgave him his pipe and deafness.
But he never asked
and she cooks on her Aga called Albert,
while the bees in her hives make honey.

Sucking hard and cupping his ear
he moved away,
possibly even married.
But she never asked,
and the roof trusses sag in the attic,
while the bees in her hives make honey.
Buddleia grows from the chimney bricks,
smoke filtering through the leaves
silent as a crematorium,
while the bees in her hives make honey.

Oscar Ssemwanga

A Good Neighbour

A good neighbour is family,
She's fast to lend a helping hand,
In times of need,
She quickly responds when called for.
When an emergency arises,
And there's need for a car,
A good neighbour will provide transport.
When clothes are left out on the hangline,
And there's nobody home,
She doesn't let them get wet again,
When the rain comes, Off she takes them.
Sometimes mum and dad take long,
Before they come back home, As a good neighbour,
She gives us food and shelter,
When we come back from school.
A good neighbour is a guiding friend,
She advises and counsels,
Loves and cares, When she sees an injustice being done, She always intervenes.
At home, when we have a function,
She helps with the work,
And does all that has to be done,
To ensure a colourful day,
She's a third leg on a tripod,
And she stands with us in times of sadness and happiness,
And at all occasions,
With us she stands,
A true definition of a neighbour, That's what she is.

Christine Stafford

The Missing Piece

Sunlight gleamed through the conservatory windows,
And bounced off the wrought iron table, that lay within.
On it an unfinished game of chess that Leah had played with Lyn.
Over the garden fence neglected grass stood high.
Nettles choking the vegetable patch, and Leah began to cry.
No more casual conversations with her neighbour, her friend.
This was not how their story should end!
But a virus had robbed them of a future to come
And a sense of deep mourning had left poor Leah numb.
She could see in her minds eye the winter before.
When a wreath of Holly had hung on Lyn's door.
Then a spring where Lyn's wreaths were not ones she'd see.
A life cut so short. How could this be?
The house once so full was now up for sale
And the letterbox basket held unopened mail.
Leah saw in her minds eye her friend at the line.
Or polishing windows to make them all shine.
Singing out loud in a voice that was flat.
Doing her press-ups on an exercise mat.
Taking her grandchild to the nearest playground
And waving to Leah as the two came around.
Drinking their tea, as the child was at play.
Two friends discussing what had happened that day.
Leah looked at the table and the unfinished game.
Without her friend there, life would not be the same.
For the Queen had now gone the main missing piece.
Forever remembered, Forever at peace!

David Sutcliffe

Neighbour

who is my neighbour?
I pick up the question like a blade and
crimson rivulets run down my palm

let it fall from my hand
clatter to the ground
and break in two

who is my neighbour
my neighbour
who is

my neighbour who is
my innocence my guilt
my sister my brother

my always
significant
other

my neighbour who is
myself sometimes glimpsed
in the eye's swivelling mirror

Marjorie Tavistock

Converging Paths

You see him ~
A stranger, a young man-child,
Weeping in the street
Shoulders bent, with
Tears streaming down his sobbing
Face
You go to him,
You talk with him
He puts down his phone
& blows his nose & stands up straight

He says, it's all so hard these days,
And you tell him, it will pass...
He thanks you, from
Deep within,
His heart is softened
By your care ~
And adds, that he has just
Spoken
With his mother, who used
Exactly the same words...
It will pass

As you part, your heart
Feels broken
By the enormous pain
Surrounding
Each of us, today
And, after awhile, you return
To your own path ~
And someone sees you,
A stranger, a woman-child
Weeping on the street...

Alan Wales

People

You see him ~

and petty paranoias

People with their problems

and petty paranoias
and worries

People with their problems

and petty paranoias
and worries

and stupid niggling hates

Niggling hates and people pains.

Well people ARE a pain

A pain in the bum
A stab in the back
A fib or a lie

I lie. I do. I say hi to people

when I mean DIE
Die people. Go away.
Leave me alone.

Get your face out of my space.

The human race eh?

Oh ya like what a concept.

What a joke

What a sick joke

What a sick tragic joke

too tragic to be funny.

But then I think,

why am I rolling around the floor in hysterics?

It's not tea time.

Ah of course it's people.

I mean you've got to laugh at them haven't you? Eh?

Ah well. Back to work I suppose

Back to people.

Send in the next patient please Miss Fleming

Positive Images is Coventry's Diversity Festival and is in its 27th year.

Neighbours has been produced to commemorate the 2020 Coventry Peace Festival and celebrates the diversity and unity of the different communities in the city. It is the result of the Coventry Peace Festival 2020 which was held in October and November to find poems that celebrate "Neighbours" in the ways those entering the competition felt most appropriate.

Positive Images will continue to promote peace and harmony and diversity in Coventry and will again organise a fantastic programme of free events from June 2021 to June 2022 to celebrate the City of Culture 2021.

We hope that you enjoy these poems of hope and love.

www.positiveimagesfestival.co.uk

facebook.coventry.com/PositiveCoventry

twitter: @positive_images

Instagram: [positiveimagesfestival](https://www.instagram.com/positiveimagesfestival)

