



'Nature Nostalgia' Our Stories of Nature Oral History transcriptions

1 Nature Nostalgia stories teaser

(compilation of stories -Victoria McLaverty, Jean Dickens, Margaret Dorr, Anne Dunn, John Cutler, Anne Harris, Alison Billings, Carol Chivers, Jane Atkinson)

My favourite thing to do was to go down with my mum's old Tupperware boxes and wooden spoons and make mud pies. Stirring mud, water, and then we would start picking up the worms, snails, sometimes even newts. Putting them in the mud pies. I would go back in with mud round my mouth, having eaten some.

We loved to go and fish. Things they used to catch, mainly tadpoles and I was so proud when these little things grew legs and gradually become little frogs. And then when I eventually released them as little frogs, course the chickens next door were delighted.

There was two brothers, older than me, we used to go up the fields and play cowboys and Indians and they always captured me first. And tied me to a tree.

If I remember rightly he said to me could I hand him his cap, and when I lifted the cap there was a grass snake under it. So of course I screamed which had the desired effect.

In Sheffield we had bombing in December 1940 and immediately we went to Lincolnshire and were there three and a half years, as evacuees. It was the countryside and there were lots of birds, lots of flowers, butterflies.

And the grass verges during the war years were not cut. So the grasses grew higher and higher and they were a lovely place for us to play.

My dad loved nature and he showed us the white dead nettles. And if you gently pull up the top petal and look, it looks like there's two pairs of shoes and he used to tell us they were fairy shoes.

And the fields themselves beyond Delapre Park were all Ridge and Furrow with buttercups and the daisies and then the dog roses in the hedgerows were lovely.

And we'd get to the Firs. We'd usually have a bottle of water and some Marmite sandwiches and we'd have a picnic, but we'd pick our spot, because of the red ants. I don't know whether they were red ants or termites, but I know they used to bite.

But yes we just used to run and play, just loved it and the day was sunny because we weren't allowed out unless it was sunny.

And sometimes my parents would be quite annoyed that I made such a mess but I had such a fun time, but those days were really the best days of my life. It was simple. We didn't need expensive toys to enjoy ourselves. You know. The fields and the trees were enough.

2 Alison Billings, Woodland Story

At the village I was brought up in, which was Ralston-on-Dove. It had a woodland area that was closed off because it belonged to the Hall. And we used to sneak in, as kids, and just play together, run around the woods. It was much safer then. And, but it was also nice if you were feeling sad, or you could just go in there on your own and it was a peaceful place that always felt lovely. And if you were really daring, you could go and be near the waterfall. And I still now, if I'm back there, I like to try and go and have a walk through the woods. Which are now open to everybody.

3 Jane Dickins, The things I kept in jars

I had a very happy childhood. I amused myself because I was on my own. And I used to collect jars with stream. There's a local stream. I used to love to go and fish and get little things. I used to catch mainly tadpoles which grew into frogs. And eventually they would. And I was so proud when these little things grew legs and gradually became little frogs. And then when I eventually released them as little frogs, because the chickens next door were delighted. And I was horrified because they were gobbled up as soon as they escaped. I was so upset. But that's nature. Very happy chickens. Oh dear. But I used to collect other things as well, like pupae. I think they were pupae, where the butterflies hang until they are ready to emerge. And I used to keep those as well and feed them leaves as necessary. Anything that's living and breathing would be suitable, I was just keeping these jars.

4 Wendy Blythe, Playing schools in field

Well, we were actually living in a village called Mitchell Troy, which is a little village outside Monmouth and I, right opposite where we lived, actually there was a hill leading up to a meadow. And I used to go up there. I mean, it's amazing that I can remember it. I went up there and I allocated parts of the meadow mentally to different classes in the school. And I would, and I called the school, you see, I remember the name of it. I called it Baikantan. Don't ask me why I called it that. And then I went into the various little sections and pretended that I was with the children in those sections all the way around this big field. Yeah, that was what I did, you know. And a number of did that for a couple of years, I think, you know. And I was probably between eight, about eight and nine years old then. Yeah. So that was my little story. And the fact that I can remember it, remember the name that I go to the school, you know, was...

5 Anne Ball, Walking on the moors with dad and dog

Right, well I was born in Sheffield. I spent about eight, ten years living on the edge of Sheffield, which was on the moors. From my bedroom, I could look over the moorland and see Rivlin Valley and a reservoir there. And it was surrounded by lots and lots of conifers. And I always thought it looked like Canada, although I'd never been to Canada. Every morning, before school, my dad took myself and my younger brother and the dog for a walk

over the moors. And if we had enough time, we crossed a tiny little brook called Wyming Brook, went over the other side, past the farm and down into the valley. And the dog loved it there. He used to go bounding round and round and there was a particular little area, and we don't know why it existed. We called it Rusty's Roundabout. It was like a little moat, just in the middle of this area. And he used to go racing round and round it, and we loved that. My older brother, he was six years older than me. We were let out. The bottom of the garden, there was a stone wall and a little gate, and we were straight onto the moorland and we used to disappear down the valley in amongst the bilberry bushes. If the dog was with us, he used to collect the bilberries as well, and he used to come back with a purple mouth. And if it was towards wintertime, there weren't many trees there in this particular area, but there were the occasional holly bushes and we used to go and collect holly berries there to take home for Christmas. And it was just a lovely free time. We could go out when we liked, we could disappear. Nobody wanted to know where we were going really. As long as we were back for our tea, then that was fine. I didn't have many friends around there because it was the edge of the town, just a little strip of houses. But I just loved it there and I used to spend a lot of time playing on my own as well. As I say, my brother was a lot older than me, and he disappeared and joined the RAF. But it was a very special time for me.

6 Kathryn Frost, Policeman story

Well, as a child, in the village where I grew up, we used to hang out in groups and if we were noisy the local policeman would appear with his red notebook and take all our names down, writing profusely with his scrubby brown pencil. Of course we always gave him the wrong names.

7 Michael Garlick, Left in the hedgerow

Well, yes. I was told by my brothers that when it was farming time or in the middle of the summer, which was out in the fields. My mother used to carry me out, lay me in the hedgerow and leave me there while they went off and done the work. And various times they'd forgot where they'd left me and somebody had to go and find me. And hopefully every time they found me. Other instants when I was quite a bit older we used to go out delivering hay and straw, manure in tractor and trailer. And I used to sit on the trailer. And on several occasions I fell off the back of the trailer in the country lanes and they didn't know till they got back to the farm that I was missing.

8 Anne Harris, Playing in grass verges during war years

We lived in Clifton Close in Kettering, which had grass verges all the way round the close. There were only six houses in the close. And the grass verges, during the war years, were not cut. So the grasses just grew higher and higher and they were a lovely place for us to play. We used to make beds in the grass. Flatten it down where we were and then had this wall of grass all around us. And it was a beautiful place to play. We could hide in it. The boys used to be a bit jealous of it because it was a girls game. But, so my brother, one day,

came along with a stone. I'd been called to go in. It was bedtime and I'd told my friend I had to go in and she was cross that I'd to go in and so she picked up a stone and hit me with the stone on the head. But I still had to go in because it was bedtime. So we had good games there

9 Elaine Goldswain, Growing up outside

As a child, I grew up outside. Playing in the garden. Enjoying the freedom, watched over by caring adults, my mum, dad, uncle, aunty and grandparents, nana, grandma and grandpa. Now this is how I spend my days with my grandson, Bryn. Once I watched the apple trees blossom and bear fruit in my nana's garden. She would make pies. Then store the apples, lovingly wrapped in newspaper to use in the wintertime. The smell of the ripening fruit would waft from under the spare bed, reminding me of those sunny summer days. Now the apples grow in my garden, watched over by an impatient little boy, my grandson, Bryn. Walks in the fields as a child with my grandpa were happy times. He taught me the names of flowers and trees and birds. The yellow cowslips like freshly churned butter, bluebells, large oak trees, singing blackbirds and black and white magpies that we saluted and said good morning to, were all around me. Now I pass this knowledge onto an inquisitive little boy, my grandson Bryn. Trips to the seaside were my magical times. Days spent making sand castles. Paddling in the sea. Searching in glistening rock pools for those darting shrimps and scuttling crabs. The sunshine seemed endless and the sky always blue. Now I paddle and splash in rock pools with an excited little boy, my grandson Bryn. No phones or Xboxes then. Just skipping ropes, scooters, bicycles, tennis rackets and balls. Hoola hoops and roller skates. I felt safe with my friends as we played outside all day with sandwiches in a paper bag for lunch. Now I play all these things again and watch over a happy little boy, my grandson Bryn as he plays with his friends enjoying the freedom of nature with nana close by.

10 Janet Maleham, Picking chestnuts

When I was about six or seven years old, a very cold, wet, dank October or November day, my father decided it would be a good idea if we went to gather chestnuts in a wood not far from where I lived. So off we went with my mother, father and my sister to gather these chestnuts that had fallen off the trees. Now chestnuts have very prickly outside cases and I fell. And I fell on these horrible prickly cases and my hand was covered in prickles. Oh and I cried. I was cold. I was so miserable and I sobbed and cried. And my father took his handkerchief out of his pocket and he wrapped it around my hand. And my mother was nowhere near so sympathetic, said, just get on with it. But I never went picking chestnuts again

11 Denise White, Kings Health to Dallington Park

My story began in Kings Heath in Northampton, which was a new estate, following the war. But we were surrounded by fields and countryside. All the children in the street used to play out together and particularly we liked to go to Dallington Park which at that time was in a village quite close to Kings Heath. And we used to put the babies in the pram and one of the older girls, probably only about ten, used to walk us all down to Dallington Park. On the way we passed through Dallington village, which at that time had a farm there with dairy cows and we loved to watch the dairy cows going up to the fields and come back.

12 Alison Billings, Police story

As you got older, you changed how you were in the woods. And we used to go right to the back. And we'd have guitars, sing and just have fun. And one night the two policemen came and we thought we were in real trouble. And they just asked us to sing a little bit quieter and sat up there with us there singing. So it was a really nice night.

13 Janet Maleham, String the new potatoes

There was a big piece of land at the side of the house where I lived and my father grew a lot of vegetables on there. On a Sunday morning I would go with him, he had his fork, I had a bucket of water and a stick. He would dig up the new potatoes which were quite muddy, he would throw them in the bucket and I'd stir the bucket round with a stick and all the mud fell off the potatoes. I just loved playing in water.

14 Denise Horn, Tiger striped Caterpillars

So it might seem a strange connection but whenever I see the ANC colours or the Northampton Saints colours, it reminds me very much of when I was a child. And I was fascinated by the Groundsel growing along an alleyway near my home. That beautiful green and gold and on that Groundsel were caterpillars, and tiger striped caterpillars, black and yellow. And I was fascinated by these mini-beasts but those colours are very prominent in my mind's eye. And it was sometime later I was given, by a family friend, some school text books. And I was very drawn to the nature side of things and I found out that these caterpillars were the caterpillar of a Cinnabar Moth but as a youngster I couldn't relate that vibrant caterpillar to the quite dull moth that it turned into. The very sort of matt, pale purple and pale red. It didn't seem to equate in my young mind, obviously I now understand why but then it was quite an enigma for me. But books have sort of been quite prominent again in my childhood and my attachment to nature. I had the Ladybird books, what to look for in, and birds and things like that. So I use these books and I went out into the countryside. I was fortunate to live on, although it was a modern estate, it was just on the cusp of the village so I could go wandering across the fields and just immerse myself in what was around me and it was that form of escapism and getting in touch with nature which was lovely

15 Yvonne Herbert, Cones as weather forecast

Well the cones that come off the trees. They fall on the ground but they're supposed to, if you have them in your house they open when they're wet. They used to use them for telling the weather. They told you when it was going to rain and when it was going to be fine.

16 Carol Chivers, Play at Delapre

My story, well its starts when we moved, in connection with Delapre Park, starts when we moved to Queen Eleanor Road. When I was three and a half, in September 1959, with my mum, dad and my brother Stephen. We were taken over to the park, when we were quite small with my dad. He was a keen photographer so he used to take photographs of us and we used to use mainly the Spinney, we called it, that fronted onto the main London Road, cos it was the main road in those days. There was no ring road. And we used that and the paths, the public footpaths, that went through the Spinney and then across the fields that are now a golf course and up through a path which we called Black Ash path. And through fields into Hardingstone. There's now a bridge there. It's no longer just a path, there's a bridge over a road now. As we grew older we were allowed to go over on our own, once we were seen over the main London Road. We were allowed to go over with my brother, with strict instructions that I was not to get dirty 'n my brother was certainly not to get dirty and needless to say ever time we did. We used to play in the streams, make dams. There's a group of us from our area. We all went over there and we played Commandos. Which is probably not politically correct these days but that's what we did. There was a pond there which we called the Greeny. We'd go pond dipping. Just playing. There was no signs that said, This Is Dangerous. We'd just would play. We didn't go in the pond because we knew shouldn't, but it was good fun. We'd climb trees. Yeah, it was lovely and then the fields themselves beyond Delapre Park were all Ridge and Furrow which intrigued me as a child. I now know why they we Ridge and Furrow with Buttercups and the Daisies and then Dog Roses in the hedgerows were lovely. And then sometimes we would venture into, nearer the Abbey, which in those days was the Records Office. I didn't know that. It was just all boarded up and always fascinated me because it was just white shutters. But it was only a metal fence between the bit we were supposed to be in and the bit we weren't supposed to be in. We'd just climb through the fence. We never did any damage. We just used to play. And see the old water features that we could see would one day had water running through them with the ponds. And obviously it was very overgrown. We just used to play in and around all the bushes which were much more overgrown than they are now its been looked after. Found the Pets Cemetery, which again intrigued me, cos I couldn't understand that people buried pets and gave them headstones. Which was something I couldn't imagine ever being able to do for our pets. But anyway, it was just intriguing, the whole place was just intriguing to us because it was old Northamptonshire stone and it was an old property. And what happened there

and what did the nuns do there. We knew it used to be a nunnery originally. But yes we just used to run and play, tracking, as I say Commandos. Just loved it and every day was sunny because we weren't allowed out unless it was sunny. And if it was raining we had to stay in and you didn't have your friends in to play when it was raining. So it must have been sunny when we were over there. It was just the most fantastic place to have as your playground as a child. And that was only up to when I was about eleven or twelve. And we were on our own. We weren't accompanied. We were sent out. Come back at a certain time because we had watches and we knew how to tell the time. Just try not to get mucky. So what did I do, I fell over and put my head in a cowpat. As you do and Stephen would regularly put his feet out of his shoes and get muddy in the streams but it was worth it cos it was great fun. I was very lucky.

17 Alison Billings, Fairy Shoes

My dad loved nature and used to take us out and see things. And one day, I can always remember, he showed us the white dead nettles. And if you gently pull up the top petal and look, it looks like two pairs of shoes and he used to tell us they were fairy shoes. And I've always passed on that information to children.

18 John Allen James, Moving from London to Countryside

Well I was born and then we moved to London and we was there all through the war. After the war had finished we stopped in London till 1948. And that was my, from five to eight that was my playground on the bombed buildings and then we moved up from London to Northampton and we moved into a house in St James. We lived with my Aunty and when I was old enough I used to cycle over to my Auntie's, whose husband fetched us over in the cattle wagon and he was, he used to transport beasts all over the place. And the first time I sat in the wagon really, I see this this come through the winder. I'd never seen a sheep, cow or nothing being in London we didn't see them and consequently this thing come through the winder and its was black and yeller and it landed in me so I hit it and it was a wasp. I'd never seen on in me life so I went to me Aunty and said, 'Aunty Dolly, look what's happened'. She said, 'What?'. I told her what's happened and she said, 'Oh, you got stung by a wasp', and she put a blue bag on me sting. And over a period of years I used to spend a lot of time over there in the country. Cos I'd never been seeing grass and everything and I remember one Sunday I cycled over in me best suit and Albert said to me, 'Just the bloke', he said, 'You stand there'. And he backed the wagon up to the five-bar gate and he left a gap and I'd got to stand in the gap. And he fetched this big boar pig out of the Dutch barn. Well it come straight through me like a rocket. Up in the air I went, on me back. Me suit was covered in muck and dirt and we had to chase the pig all up into the village before we caught it. And that was it.

19- Beryl Evans, Tomboy climbing

I was always climbing trees because I was a tom, tomboy, there's no doubt about that. And so I would climb the trees but these were young trees. There was, had been a quarry and we used to go in and play there, climbing up the, what was the wall, now, in the place because of course it was chilled out and they'd taken out all this, all the stone that they wanted at sometime or other. So it was vacant and so that was a part of the playground. The wall, the face of the wall of the quarry was chopped about, you know, in square sort of holes. So there was quite a bit of climbing going on

20 Sue Pearson, Swimming

So I was just thinking of growing up. So we lived in Gorlestone from the age of three onwards and it was right by the sea so as often as possible we went down to the seaside and just learned to swim in the sea, eventually. But what I was thinking about was right by the seaside there was an outdoor swimming pool. And I used to get a season ticket for twelve and six. And I used to spend, when I was a school age child, I used to spend the entire day on Saturdays and Sundays at the pool. And they didn't turf you out, they didn't make you go away. You could go in the swim and you could lie in the grass by the pool. And it was just so lovely having that open air pool. It was just taking the fresh air and the sunshine and just lying on the grass afterwards. And the world was a lovely place.

21 Denise White, Poem 'Among The Trees'

Here we sit among the trees
Week after week we sit and freeze
But laughter and joy fill this space
And it becomes a wonderous space
And now today the sun shines through
Happy to be here with you and you and you

22 Vivian West, Granny-pop-out-of-bed

Yes, when I was younger, a friend of my mum's. I think they must have had an alley at the back of their garden. And there was a sort of fence there that was full of this Granny-pop-out-of-bed and that's when their children, I mean, they sort of said about this. Oh, this is Granny-pop-out-of-bed. I think they also said about Old-man's-beard. There was this stuff there, I don't know what it's really called, but you know, that was there as well. So, it was obviously all out at similar sort of time.

23 Jane Atkinson, Snowdrops in memory of son

So my story is about Snowdrops, and they bring me light when they start to poke through at a dark time. So Snowdrops peeking through are very important to me. I lost my only son, my only child to cancer when he was 23 and it was on the 24th of January 2014. So when it was approaching the anniversary, at the end of 2014, I thought I'd plant some Snowdrops in the garden. So I planted them in the lawn. And he was absolutely football mad. So I planted them in a big circle, the shape of a football, and then when it comes to his anniversary they're just about poking through. And it's a horrible time. His birthday was November the fifth. So, from there to his anniversary, it's like, Christmas, and you know, all the memories. So, when I see the Snowdrops it's like those sort of, few black months and look forward to Spring.

24 Kathryn Frost, 'I am a bluebell' poem

I am a bluebell,
Tall with a slender stem
And flowers like bells.
I am fragrant and sweet
And attracting bees.
In groups, I thrive,
I belong in the woodland.

25 Juliet Jeater, Surrey memories

I was born in Surrey, surrounded by trees, meadows, streams and hedges. And somehow I just took it all for granted. It was just a part of me. My earliest memories of sitting in the little metal seat on the back of my father's bike as he cycled from Dorking to Westcott, our home village. I remember the hedgerows flashing past and then the long hill into Westcott, where he dismounted and pushed the bike along. When I grew older I used to catch the 425 bus from Dorking to Westcott to visit all my relatives there. The bus driver was called Curly Archer. He knew most of the passengers, some of who had a dog with them or occasionally ducks or chickens in a wicker basket. He stopped all over the place, ignoring the traditional bus stops to let passengers off near their homes. The lanes were cut into the green sandstone and had names like Hollow Lane or Damphurst Lane and the tree roots were carved into the sand. My cousin Wendy and I used to visit her Aunt Nell who lived in a rather ramshackle cottage where I later discovered that my grandfather had been born. Aunt Nell used to give us watery cocoa and we played Chinese Chequers with her when we visited. One day we arrived and knocked on the door. There was a lot of pulling and pushing as Aunt Nell tried to open the damp, swollen front door. Suddenly there was a loud crack and the door came off, entirely. Held up by Aunt Nell. Luckily she saw the funny side of it and burst out laughing. My cousin Wendy was sent off to fetch the village handyman. What happened next is lost in the mists of time. I expect Wendy and I went back to her house and then I caught the bus home. We escaped the watery cocoa that day. I forgot to mention that, about the hills surround Dorking and Westcott. They're the North Downs, part of the

beautiful Surrey Hills. There are wild orchids on the chalky downs and the hills are covered in Bluebells in springtime. There are small blue butterflies there too. And once I saw an Adder.

26 Margaret Newport, Playing with the boys

Well, I was an only child, which was a bit of a lonely existence. So I ended up being a bit of a tomboy because there was mainly boys in the road we lived in. So I inevitably played with the boys. We lived at the top of a hill and at the top of this hill was a big pond, and it was surrounded by trees. And we used to go in there and play in the trees and they surrounded by water. And then we used to climb them and jump in, which was a silly thing to do cos it was quite deep and dangerous, but we did because we were children and we got no adults with us, who really frankly didn't know were we were playing.

27 Karen Dunn, Walking on beach with dad

I was brought up by the sea. Every Sunday my dad and I used to borrow one of our Neighbour's dogs and we'd take Honey the Labrador down the beach. Never knew what you were going to get. You'd get different weather, one minute to the next really, but you could get sunshine or hailstones or snow. But it was always beautiful and if you were feeling a bit eugh, then the beach was the place to be. And while my dad and I were walking down the beach, my mum would bake so we'd always go back to lots of homemade caramel shortbread and lovely Scottish cakes

28 Vivian West, Birds at the doctors

Well, when I was younger I suffered quite badly from Asthma and I used to have to go to Great Ormond Street on a regular basis. And when I was at school, I was sort of confined to the classroom for about a year during break times and that, because of my breathing. I was used to have a lot of visits to doctors and hospitals, but the local doctor, they had, I don't know whether, there must have been a garden outside because doctors tend to be houses anyway. And you'd go in and you'd just hear either the cuckoo or a wood pigeon and that is, sort of, I tended to associate with doctors. With the sound of birdsong. When I was a bit, bit older I was sent to a convalescent home where we were put outside. The beds used to be wheeled outside on to a veranda and covered with a rubber sheet cos fresh air was supposed to be a cure for respiratory diseases

29 John Cutler, Evacuated to Lincolnshire

In Sheffield we had bombing in December 1940 and immediately, the following day we went to Lincolnshire and were there three and a half years. This is my sister and myself, as evacuees with my Aunt and Uncle. It was the countryside. It was Lincolnshire. It was very flat area. Reclaimed land and there were lots of birds, lots of flowers. There were lots of butterflies, insects, all kinds of things. Some of them I've not seen since.

30 Norma Foster, My father and the Mango tree

My story today is about my childhood. It's full of love. I grew up surrounded with animals, growing our own vegetables, helping my father spraying Mango trees around our land. I passed the spray and pump to him to spray on the Mango. After doing the job we had lunch. We have a siesta, which we sleep in a hammock under our trees. Then afternoon tea break, evening we had our dinner, do my homework and play my piano. Then my parents dance. It's a job that I do to help my parents. As I am the only child.

31 Christine French, Key in Abington Park

There was three girls and one boy, I think. We always used to go and play in Abington Park, nearly every day. And we used to go all round on the swings and the slides and the lakes that were there. And we used to go quite regularly into the museum as well and have a search around all the rooms. And this particular room, the boy that was with us, he put his hand up the chimney and he pulled out a key. But we didn't know what the key was for and I don't know what happened to it after that

32 Pat Pollock, Shaking acorns

My mother used to complain about acorns because we used to go and collect them and then rattle them. And it used to annoy her intensely, which is something as a child you liked doing. So they were banned.

33 Jane Atkinson, Harlestone Firs

So, Harlestone Firs for me? Nowadays, I walk my dog there. I like to walk on my own. I like to walk off the beaten track and if I get lost in the Firs, which is quite easy, there are some places I can still pinpoint from my childhood, but otherwise I follow the sun, to get back to the main gate. But it reminds me of being a child, growing up in Kings Heath. They were very happy, carefree days. We were allowed to go. It was safe. We'd play down the fields. We'd go across the corn fields, get shouted at by the farmer. We liked to hide in the corn, when the corn was high. And then when it had been cut, we'd play with the hay bales. But we'd go on from the corn field onto the black road that led all the way up to the Firs. It was like a, we called it the Black Road. It was like black broken tarmac, and we'd get to the Firs. We'd usually have a bottle of water and some Marmite sandwiches and we'd have a picnic in the Firs. But we'd pick our spot, because of the red ants. We was always worried about sitting down. I don't know whether they were red ants or termites, but I know they used to bite. So now I go there with my dog and I never see any red ants but the trees are still there. It makes me remember being young, carefree and when life was, it was simple. We didn't need expensive toys to enjoy ourselves. You know, the fields and the trees was enough. I'm happy in Harlestone Firs.

34 Anne Dun (Muriel May Dun), Snake under hat

After the war finished, my dad was transferred to Daventry to work with Daimler and obviously we went to school in Daventry. And I think I was about eleven, twelve, I don't know and there was always a crowd of us who went out together. And we'd just go out and walk. Take a bottle of cold tea. Something to eat and this particular day we'd walked out to Badby Woods, which was quite close to Daventry. And we were sitting around, just talking, larking about like you do and one of the lads who I used hang around with quite a bit. Although I was a good girl. He was in the Airforce Cadets. And he'd put his cap down on the ground while we were talking, eating, whatnot and if I remember rightly he said to me could I hand him his cap. Which I did and when I lifted the cap there was a grass snake under it. So of course I screamed which had the desired effect. I don't think he was my boyfriend for long after that. I have met him since he's been adult, a couple of years ago, but I did meet him and I reminded him of his cruelty.

35 Eileen Smith, Wartime play in the rabbit field

My sister who is nine years older than me, used to go and alert the men when the alarms went off, the raid alarms. And she had a pretty medal at one stage. And that was the atmosphere that I grew up in. And when I was in my pre-teens, we as children used to go to play in what was known as the rabbit field. The rabbit field was run alongside railways and it had a lot, a lot of rabbit holes. And we used to go to play in this field and look at the rabbits and watch them. If we were very quiet, we could see them running in and out. But one day, a lady came along with a young Jack Russell puppy, and the Jack Russell went straight down the rabbit hole, and we couldn't get it out. And we children were very upset about this, obviously. And the lady, concerned spent nearly all day trying to dig it out and eventually it was got out and so we were highly delighted about that. But my daughter who was quite an animal and horticulturalist thoroughly enjoyed that field and if she was feeling a little bit miffed with people she used to take herself off, she used to go away. She was leaving home and she was going to the rabbit field and I have a memory of her with a little plastic, PVC type bag with flowers on it, pink, and she used to put her pink mac on and carry the bag and go to the rabbit field but she always came back.

36 Patricia Ball, Scrumping and collecting tar

Well when I was a child, me and my friends, we used to go out and we'd go scrumping. Into the trees and get the apples and that and the allotments and collect all we could get and take it home to our mums. And then the main thing we used to take out, my mum's big pram, and we'd go around and follow the men that carried the tar block machines that pulled up the tars and the road and we'd take them round to the houses and sell them because each block we would charge a penny. Because they used to burn it on the fires if anybody had flu or influenza or something like that and it would clear the chest and then maybe we would go and collect bottles from the back of buildings and take them into the

shops to get the money from there to give to our mums. So we got up to quite a lot and it was all fun and games, all fun and games

37 Alison Billings, Snowdrops and biting cookers

Well its about my sister and myself. Snowdrops have always been one of my very favorite flowers. And when I would be about ten, Jane would have been eleven, I had really bad bronchitis and Jane come in from her paper round with a big paper bag and sort of threw it on me and said, 'There y'are'. She'd gone to try and grab a handful of Snowdrops. Which she had a paper bag, which was about the size of a Tesco Bag for Life, full of Snowdrops. And there was a very eccentric lady in the village and Jane had gone to grab some Snowdrops in her garden. Heard her coming out but this huge clump came away from the bank so she just stuffed it in. We had that for many' many years and then, because she was very eccentric Jane never wanted to deliver a paper in the dark. She was well known by the local gas board and electricity board because she had cookers in the garden that had bitten her. If a cooker, if a cooker, we all know with cookers, you catch it, don't you, you get burnt. Well she decided they'd bitten her and when they'd bit her she'd go and buy a new cooker and her back garden was full of old cookers because she wouldn't let them go to anybody else in case they got bitten by these cookers. They had to be kept away from anybody.

38 Denise Horn, Bluebells

When I was three years old we lived in a caravan just outside Epping Forest or within the forest and one afternoon I was taken for a walk by some other people who lived nearby. And I just remember the trees being very tall and very dark but what really sticks in my mind is the swathe of bluebells. They were just such an immense blue and it's a memory from such a long time ago. And the people that I was with kept teasing me or trying to encourage me for looking for the teddy bears that were having a picnic in the woods. I suspect it was to keep me walking, to keep me going that extra foot until we got home.

39 Karen Dunn, Bluebell poem

I am a bluebell
I am tall and elegant
I have beautiful lilac bell flowers
I smell lovely
My energy is calming
I sway gently in the breeze
And I belong to Mother Nature.

40 Diane Roper, Pike in the river

Long, long time ago, when we was children we used to roam all over Newport Pagnell. It's a lively little town and you could just roam around. We'd gone fishing, with the old nets on sticks. And we'd gone down this little pool, little lake, river and we were all paddling in there, there's lots of kids cos it was a nice summer day. Must have been school holidays and there was loads of children there and we're paddling in there trying to grab sticklebacks and things like that. And suddenly there's a shout, and people are shouting, get out the river, get out the river, there's pikes coming, there's pikes coming. And this this big shoal of large fish swum up the river. It went from the deep side, on one side of the bridge, to the shallow side where all the children used to play. Loads and loads, there could have been a good two dozen fish and they were quite big. For a child of my age and my size, they were quite big. Whether they were pike or not I don't know but all the children just scrambled out the river and just ran and stood on the sides and watch the fish swim past

41 Christine Scott, Memories of play in and around Delapre Abbey

This is about mid 50's and as a child the Abbey grounds and surrounding fields were our playground really and we would cross the busy, well not so busy, London Road and go through the gap in the wall, about halfway up. The honey coloured wall was made from Northamptonshire stone and was from Delapre Gates almost to Queen Eleanor's Cross. The spinney of Horse Chestnut trees followed the wall up from the bottom of the road to the top. The gap in the wall was about halfway up and enabled us to go through to the path which would take you to Hardingstone. On the left, there was a kissing gate and beyond that the green pond. We called it the green pond because it was always green and always seemed to have algae on the top. I know that newts lived there in the pond but I never managed to catch any but I think some of the boys did. The field beyond the pond led to the Abbey and we crossed diagonally towards the rookery. Always noisy with the many rooks that nested there and I didn't like the rooks, they sounded sinister to me. Then under or over the fence and across the south lawn to the woods at the southeast corner of the walled garden. The walled garden was rarely open those days. Just inside the wooded area was a stone built round pond and here you could find frogs, obviously frogspawn earlier, but we could find the frogs there. The boys liked to catch them and scare the girls who would run screaming into the woods or to the derelict summer house which is no longer there. I can remember carpets of Celandines and bushes of Rhododendrons, but not the Snowdrops of today's springtime. There was a small stream that trickled from the pond into the gardens northwards but seemed to disappear underground somewhere and I don't know where that went. The stream water came from down the hill which is now the golf course but nowadays is dry. I think sometimes cows are in the bottom field but I'm not 100% sure about that. But there were several old Oak trees in the bottom field, these too have gone. At certain times of the year in May we would pick the Buttercups and we'd take them home. They would be limp in our arms and probably dead by the time we got them home to Mum. Also in the Spring, the spinney was coming to life and we pulled young sticky buds from the base of the Horse Chestnut trees or from low branches if we could reach them. Another offering for Mum. In the Autumn we would collect Conkers and have

fun kicking the leaves up and throwing sticks up into the trees to get them down. I don't remember anyone deliberately doing any damage but we just wanted to explore and sometimes take nature home with us. Happy days

42 Margaret Dorr, Cowboys and Indians

I was one of eight children and there was two brothers older than me. We used to go up the fields and play cowboys and Indians. And they always captured me first. And tied me to a tree. While the boys got on with cowboys and Indians.

43 Pamela Gould, Seeds from police station garden

I had three friends that lived in the street. Our names were Iris, Drina and Moja. And Moja and Drina lived at the corner shop. And we all used to play in the police station gardens. We used to go and talk to the police lady that used to attend the gardens and she used to give us some seeds from the hollyhocks and I got these seeds and I threw them over to my aunt that lived next door to me in her garden. Well they all come up and bloom beautiful and she looked, she said to me one day she said, 'Well those hollyhocks up the corner there', she said, 'they're beautiful' and she said to my mum, 'Min you come out and have a look at these hollyhocks they're beautiful I don't know where they come from', so I said, 'I do', she says, 'where did they come from then'. I said 'Well I pinch the seeds out the police station. 'Oo you little devil', she said, 'but they're beautiful' and they were.

44 Christine French, Dentures in County Ground

Well we lived quite close to the county ground in Adnitt Road us four again, and we used to go there quite often when they weren't playing Cricket or Football, have a look round and the boy that was with us, he was obviously quite adventurous, he's climbed up on a pillar and he put his hand in cos it was hollow and he pulled out a set of dentures. I don't know again what happened to them, I've no idea but they were quite old cos they got a lot of mud on them and this sort of thing, They'd been there quite a long time I think.

45 Victoria McLaverty – Making Mud Pies

I moved to Worthing when I was about two, in Sussex. I used to like playing with nature in the garden with my brother. In those days we played outside more than inside. There was no technology or anything like that, other than TV. We used to like getting really messy which frustrated my parents, going in covered in mud. Sometimes we'd take worms and things in, to show my parents what we'd got. But my favourite thing to do was, my dad had like a compost heap at the bottom of the garden and there was a lot of mud and when especially it had been raining, was to go down with my mum's old Tupperware boxes and wooden spoons and make mud pies. Sometimes my brother would join me, he was a few years older than me, and we used to stir in mud, water, grass, whatever we could find, a bit like baking cakes, I suppose. And then we would start picking up the worms, snails,

sometimes even newts, which sounds a bit cruel these days, and putting them in the mud pies. And sometimes I would go around, go back in, even with mud around my mouth, having eaten some. And then I would take them in to my parents, treading footprints everywhere and show them what I've made and depending on what I'd used, like newts from my dad's pond or something, I sometimes would get told off and sometimes my parents would be quite annoyed that I'd made such a mess but I had such a fun time. But those days were really the best days of my life.

46 Denise Horn, 'A Bluebell' poem

So this is my poem –
I am a carpet of blue
Moving, drifting but going nowhere
I'm made of many parts
Some you will see, others are hidden and shared selectively
I am heady and evocative
My heritage is diverse
I belong to the forest

47 Nature Nostalgia – Co-created Group Poem

What is this place?
That we find ourselves in.
We're tucked up in it and surrounded by it.
We're burrowing down into it.
Nature.

We've landed safely in the glade,
There's no judgment here.
The songs and the smells of the green reveal
Such sweet sadness inside us.
But there's no need to hide.
We can reflect. We can be still.

How do you feel?
I feel like a duck. A baby rabbit. A furry creature.
A bud waiting to burst open.
The apprehension that I had rolls on like a wave but healing noises surround us. Hello, birds.

I'm grounded and I'm calm and at last I've found the flowers I've been looking for,
In this safe place we call Nature.

Suddenly, there's a gap in the clouds and here it is! We've been waiting for you.

We knew you would come.
Shining on my face, nourishing me, warming me,
Like a dormouse all cuddled up on a spring morning.
It reflects in the pond water and in the rock pool and it sits inside me and
Takes me away.

I can see the Acer and my husband on the bench.

I've gone home to the Surrey trees, the best trees in all the land and I feel calm. Settled.
It reminds me who I am.
I'm a bulb.
And I'm ready to come out.

What else am I, when I am in this place?
I am the sun, coming out from behind a cloud,
I am a bird singing, a newt in a pond,

A spring squirrel excited and ready to play!
My inner child is dancing, like the breeze in the trees.
I was flapping, but now I am calm.
I was stressed, but now I am chilled.
I have sadness, but happiness too,
I felt slightly isolated and a bit flat,
Like a rotting, spongy tree.
But I'm so glad and pleased to be here with you all. It brings out the hippy chick in me!

It's cold. I am cold.
I have cold feet!
But on the inside I am warm.
I sometimes have to force myself out,
And it's nice to see people
I don't see many people,
And now how do you feel?
I feel peaceful.

I was frazzled and heavy at first, but now I am free, Like a small stream, fresh and sparkling
in the sun. We're bathing in birdsong, how delightful is that? What a brilliant, musical
feeling.

Sitting here, listening, makes me feel lovely.
What a great session - I feel so sunny!
The singing, the dancing, I'm a bird and I'm soaring, The bulb has emerged into the light.
I'm energised and I've opened up,

I'm a monkey, swinging through trees, beating my chest, A woodpigeon cooing, light and bright.

I am calm and serene like a tall willow tree, Grounded, strong and present in the woods. Finally, the internal hamster has left it's wheel alone, And is pulling out a deckchair to lounge.

I am sad,
When I leave these trees.
I long to be back with you all.
This unique group, these people, this place, The respect, the camaraderie,
Lifts me up and puts a smile on my face.

We know that the things that seem casual now, Will seem so much more special in years to come. When we look back at this time,
At this nature,
At these women.
When we all sat,
And sang
And danced
And laughed
And reminisced
together.

In the forest.

Nature Nostalgia Creative Team

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