



Living the Weather

Voices from the Calder Valley

Edited by Jennifer Mason

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For all the participants in the Living the Weather study.

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www.manchester.ac.uk/living-the-weather



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In the spring of 2015, Jennifer Mason began a year-long research study of how people in the Calder Valley region of the North of England Pennines 'lived the weather'. A Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester, and a Calder Valley resident herself, Jennifer recruited local study participants to send her regular weather reports, or to be interviewed, about their experiences of living with and in the changing weather across the seasons. She wanted to know how weather was ingrained in and influenced their everyday lives. The participants' commentaries were so full of eloquence and a natural poetics that Jennifer decided to collect and share some of their insights. This book is the result: it conveys a vivid sense of living the Pennine weather, and will appeal more generally to anyone who finds weather - and how we live it – an absorbing source of interest and fascination.



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is a collection of musings about living the weather in the Calder Valley region of the north of England, written by the experts - people who live there. I've always been fascinated by weather and how it gets right inside our lives, shaping what we do and feel, who we see, what we wear, what we eat, and just about everything. I've come to think of this tendency for weather to get ingrained in our lives, and to be something we face and engage with every day, as 'living the weather'. Early in 2015 I began a detailed local research study which would take place over the course of a year, into how people in the Calder Valley were living the weather, and I was lucky enough to be awarded a Leverhulme fellowship for the work.

I've lived in the Calder Valley myself for 20 years, which doesn't mean I quite qualify as a local yet, but I do know what locals know which is that we have some challenging weather at times in these parts – with plenty of rain. At the centre of my study area is the lively and picturesque former mill town of Hebden Bridge, whose quirky tall terraced houses and independent shops nestle at the convergence of valleys, waterways, roads and railway, to form a local hub with a distinctive and much loved character. It is surrounded by spectacularly scenic Pennine hills of fields and moorland, with steeply wooded sides creating lots of small intriguing valleys. The Calder Valley of my study includes a wide sweep of countryside and town (not just Hebden Bridge but other important settlements including Todmorden and Mytholmroyd), many small clusters of dwellings, and despite being called a valley it includes the high ground and moors – often known locally as the 'valley tops'.

I have had the most incredible help from local study participants who have documented their experiences of living the weather by sending me regular personal weather reports across the seasons, or talking to me in interviews. Some lived atop the moors, others in the valley towns, or in small hillside hamlets, or in boats on the canal. It was an eventful year for them to document, with some tropical style early summer storms, a disappointing non-summer of cool and wet weather, a spectacular autumn, a wet and stormy winter culminating in the devastating Boxing Day floods, and then – after what seemed like an eternity – the first signs of spring in 2016.

The participants' commentaries on how they lived the Pennine weather during this period were so full of insight and eloquence that I wanted to draw them together to publish them so that others could read them and be inspired by them, as I have been. This book is the result: it contains extracts from their reports and interviews, which I have selected and curated according to key themes. In some cases I have created poems from participants' spoken words or written prose, because it seemed to me that a poetic form was sometimes the best way to convey the natural lyricism in how people talked about living the weather. The extracts are presented anonymously in the book, to preserve the confidentiality of the research participants. But they know who they are, and this book is dedicated to them. I am enormously grateful to each and every one of them for sharing their experiences of living the weather.

Jennifer Mason, Professor of Sociology, University of Manchester,
April 2016



PHOTO: ANDREW JONES



VALLEY BOTTOMS AND TOPS

It makes a great deal of difference in the Calder Valley region whether you live and spend your time in the valley bottoms or on the tops. The region is characterised by sharp sided and spectacularly scenic Pennine hills giving onto the wooded and more populous valleys below, in a confluence of cascading (sometimes terrifyingly so) waterways as well as transport routes (including transpennine rail routes and the indomitable Yorkshire Buses), and other local services. Nestling in the valley is the picturesque and vibrant former mill town of Hebden Bridge, with its quirkily criss-crossing terraces of grey Yorkshire stone houses and slated rooves. Along the valleys are other characterful towns including Todmorden and Mytholmroyd, all grown out of the sheep farming, weaving and mill history of the area. The hills are sided and topped by farmers' fields, and moors of heather and bracken (and some grouse shooting estates), with increasing numbers of wind turbines peppering the skyline. The hillsides and moors are by no means uninhabited though – they are speckled with villages and hamlets of old stone cottages and yes, the Yorkshire buses get up there too.



The distinctive topography and social history, combined with the Pennine weather, can create conditions where the valley tops and bottoms experience markedly different microclimates, even on the same day. The valleys have the benefit of being somewhat sheltered from the blasting elements of wind and horizontal rain, hail and snow, making life seem less blown sideways, and milder, than on the tops. Yet life up on the moors opens up – literally – whole new possibilities with endless skies, spectacular

cloud formations, and a quality of light and darkness that cannot be achieved in the valleys below. Weather on the tops is nearly always interesting, and often exhilarating. Sometimes everything up there is shrouded in mist. At other times, temperature inversions turn the valleys into misty seas and make islands out of the hills. The snow can be spectacular, with a shifting 'snowline' creating challenges for those living and working higher up. The valleys are more conducive to growing, as the multitude of foliage, colourful flowers and vegetable gardens testify. In any season, little pockets of sheltered sun can open up down there, creating sun traps and a Mediterranean feel. Yet locals also know about 'valley bottom fever' created by living on the 'dark side' of the valleys, which are in shade for much of the day, and indeed in some cases for months of the year from autumn to late spring. And when the floods come, as they did most spectacularly on Boxing Day 2015, the idea that life on the tops is harder and the weather more extreme is turned completely on its head, and valley dwellers yearn for the safety of the hills.



Cool hazy blue above and valleys full of cloud, it was an early autumnal inversion. Midgley moor and the hills above the Aire Valley resembled shorelines rising from a milky sea filling the valleys, small islands dotted across, the line of electricity pylons transformed into the tops of ghostly oil rigs in the white sea. The people on the hills in late summer sunshine, the people in the valleys already in damp autumn.



We felt relieved when we initially moved up here that it was April and the weather was picking up for spring, so we'd begin to appreciate our new surroundings in their best and kindest light before winter fell on us again. We'd worried about what the weather in winter might bring, and the effect this would have on our lives, and our mood. Would it be a constant storm: cold, wet, windy, dark? My husband seemed more optimistic than I felt; he was excited by the hope for a heavy snowfall. However we both secretly wondered if we'd made a huge mistake buying a remote cottage on top of an exposed hill. But as soon as we arrived to live here we realised this wasn't the case, and have gradually decided that - while winter may not be pleasant, as winter often isn't - looking out on the fields, the hills and the animals is going to be many times better than looking out of the window on a winter's day in Manchester. The clouds, the rain and the wind complement the countryside in a way they never will in the city. When we first visited the house it was the first weekend in January and, as we drove up, sleet fell and the wind blew around us. We left immediately after that first and only viewing and decided it was the house for us. We wonder to this day what it was on that horrible winter's day that sold us on living up here but somehow we knew what a difference living here would make to our lives.



Today I went up for a walk on the tops, ending at the Bridestones. It was a lovely clear sunny day and it felt better to look out and wide over the unfolding landscape. But mostly I looked at the sky. Wanting the light and space. The temperature dropped off as I came down to canal level. Tonight I will light my stove. There is a damp edge to the air. I fed bits of bread to the fish. I like watching them stab at the pieces. The fish are getting bigger this time of year, and they feed as much as possible. I watched and waited as a large drowsy fly landed on the water and was subsequently eaten. There isn't enough light hitting the water for me to see the fish. Sometimes it's clear and I see hundreds.



Bottom of a bucket

Living in a valley
affects how people feel.
'Valley fever', we need to get out!
It's about feeling the sky
and having that sense of space.
It feels very dense at the bottom,
not being able to see a skyline.
Even in a city you can see the skyline.
It's like living in the bottom of a bucket.
The only way you can see sky,
is if you look straight up

It goes against something that's in us.
We need to feel a sense of space or light.
Light is more crucial than we think.
Under dwellings and back-to-backs,
can be like the dark side.
You look across to green, sunny, sparkly.
Look back to dark and frozen.
There's a place I know

where they have no natural light
four or five months of the year.

As soon as you go up
it opens you up,
and you shout 'yes!'



This morning our hamlet was sat in a cloud with a fine misty rain. I realise that whatever the weather I always enjoy the start of the day living up in the hills. Compared to our previous life living in a noisy dirty depressing Manchester suburb, it feels less frantic. Even though we live in the middle of nowhere we both feel less lonely. The few neighbours we have are always up for a quick chat whereas in the city everyone rushes around frowning, in a hurry to get nowhere important as quickly as they can. Today's wet weather only affects my mood in a bad way as I descend to the main road on my way to work; more traffic lights, more roads, a dual carriageway, a Tesco, another huge Tesco less than a mile away from the first, and right on cue the radio reports: 'The weather forecast is miserable: persistent rain across the North.'



In the winter when you're on a small boat, for three months in the dark, then you're ready for summer, and for opening up and getting out. You do hunker down in the winter, and that's okay and it's quite cosy. But then you get a bit of cabin fever, and you need to get out and do stuff. You're ready now for the light. And if you don't get it in summer either, you feel a bit like you want your money back then.

A big difference living on top of a hill compared to living in the city has been the winter darkness. We're high up so we do seem to get slightly more light than people down in the valley, but by 4pm it's dark, and living in a slightly remote little row of cottages means we have no street lighting (not that we'd want that, I've never seen so many stars, and last month we saw the Northern Lights on the walk home from the pub, looking north above The Bridestones). My wife walks the dogs most mornings which means I do it in the evening, and when it's pitch black it's not much fun. I can't see where there are sheep or cows on the moor which means I don't feel comfortable letting the girls off the lead, and if either of them did run off it'd be impossible to find them. They weren't getting a good runaround in the evenings and I started projecting my guilt; they started to look really fed up and annoyed. To help the girls get the exercise they need (and to help us stop feeling so guilty) we had a look for a dog walker. Happily we found one at the bottom of the road so now the girls get a good daytime runaround.



For the past twenty-plus years, we've lived on the edges of places, generally on a hillside; generally facing the weather. I'm not sure it was a conscious thing. I like it here because it's right out in the elements and I do like things being on the edge. Before we moved to the Hebden Bridge area, we lived near Glossop on the edge of the Pennines, and that really got the weather in no uncertain circumstances. The house was high up and the view looked over across Manchester. You could see the weather coming in for some time. So it must be in the blood really – find high ground, defend it. Defend this spot. See what's coming.



We've got friends in Hebden who often say 'I just need to get out of the valley'. The sides are so steep, and they just want to see the sky. Especially if they live on the far side, where it's darker; more in shadow. But I never feel like that. I have a friend who has to scrape the ice off her car from about two or three weeks before I need to do mine. And their heating goes on earlier and stays on longer. We're quite fortunate where we are, that even on days when it's not sunny, we just have that light from the sky. I think it makes a huge difference.



Yesterday, I could see from our front window that the clouds were hanging under the hills opposite. It looked mystical. I wonder what it would be like to live at altitude and see that as a regular part of your view. Maybe it makes you feel more 'of the air' and less 'of the earth'.



Someone I know down in the bottom told me there is a point in the year when they stop getting the sunshine in their yard in the day, full stop, that's it. After that they will not get sun on the yard. He knows the date in the calendar, of the first day when the sun is going to come back on the yard. So they count down to that day. It is a real milestone in their life and yet that date means nothing to anyone else. But it is pretty important in their calendar. Sometimes in winter when we get hoar frosts. You go down there, and see some houses covered in frost, and they don't thaw out all day.



WASHING ON THE LINE

A characteristic and much photographed sight in Hebden Bridge and the surrounding towns and villages, and the hamlets on the tops, is that of billowing laundry pegged on washing lines in gardens or more often strung across backyards and sometimes alleys that run between the criss-crossing terraces of gardenless houses. It makes for a picturesque scene, although perhaps less so on those days when washing is hanging in bedraggled clumps in the pouring rain, which can happen when vain optimism has won out over pragmatism in the mind of the launderer. It is a summer sight of course, although Calder Valley residents' commitment to getting their washing on the line in small windows of good and blowy weather, whatever the season, is second to none. All of this I knew already, but what I discovered in the course of my research was the sheer uncomplicated enjoyment and indeed the heights of passion that people can feel about getting their washing on the line. This just gets better and better for people when it is a 'good drying day', so the morning's first load of washing dries quickly, and the line can be reloaded several more times before dark. People are in heaven when they can pile up their crisp and glowing line-dried washing at the end of the day, full of the scent of fresh air. The pleasure is in the process and not just the end result.



We have four washing lines outside in the garden, and I absolutely love hanging washing out up there. I had been thinking, 'what's going on, you middle aged so-and-so, what's this about with the washing?', and feeling self-conscious about it. But now I've let myself fully embrace it! And actually now I just love it. I love everything about it. I love the fact that we've got really lovely garden paths under each washing line, between the beds. I love that it is a really well-organised, and very attractive washing line. That makes me feel satisfied every time. I love being able to hang washing out outside. And oh the satisfaction of those days when you get four lots of washing out and dried!



My husband is a very active person and if the weather is favourable, he will be outside doing things. His big passion is getting his washing out on the line. He is passionate about laundry in general, and if he can get his washing on the line, it is just a winner. When I asked him how he would characterise spring and summer, he said 'it is when I can start getting my washing out on the line.' 'And winter is when I put it all on the radiators!' He likes doing his washing, and getting it out, folding it all, and stretching it, and getting a good breeze. He will spend half an hour pegging out washing, even if he can only get ten or fifteen minutes of good weather. It is cathartic for him and he loves it. He loves doing other people's washing as well!



From above, the homes of Hebden Bridge must appear to be loosely stitched together by a thread of zig-zagging clothes lines, which are shared between opposite neighbours. For the past week, I have been engrossed by the washing line belonging to the family living one house down, and across the backs. This home is occupied by a Mum, Dad and

their three small children, and as a consequence, the washing basket is always full. I like to think that I'm pretty engaged with the planet I live on, and this can manifest itself as an awareness of the skies (limited though they are due to the geographical restrictions in this part of the valley), and the portents of the weather held within them. I feel like I know when the cloudlessness is going to hold, and my senses are equally alert to a drop in pressure, a change of wind direction, a sudden chill - which would signal a heroic and finely timed de-robing of the clothes line before the first fat, summer raindrops have had chance to make their mark on my neatly pegged textiles. The woman diagonally opposite does not seem to understand the importance of this ritual, nor possess any respect for the skies. I am morbidly fascinated by her appearance at the back door in her pyjamas and with a fully laden basket cradled under her arm. It is half past eight in the evening, and the best of the day is well past us. Under the reddening sky, she pegs dinosaur t-shirts, sheets and towels out onto the line. As she re-enters the house and closes the door it begins to rain, but she stays inside, and the increasingly sodden clothes cause the line to stretch and droop until the plastic clothes prop falls onto the tarmac with a dull slap. I hear my frantic mother screaming for help, 'It's spitting! Washing's out! Fetch the basket! Fetch the peg-bag!' She is long-gone, but the urgency with which the laundry must be brought indoors at the first sign of rain remains hard-wired within me.



I get an irrational amount of pleasure in having washing out on the line outside. I absolutely love seeing the washing hanging outside. I don't really know why, or what it is about it, but there is something about seeing the washing out there, and all our things hanging outside. I just really love it! It is not a rational thing. There is just something almost romantic about having washing on the line.



THE FEEL OF WEATHER

An important part of living the weather is how it touches us physically. We know the sensation of a cool spring breeze in our faces and hair, or the biting chill of a winter's wind against our noses, chins and fingers. We understand the luxurious somnolence brought about by the feeling of warm sunshine when it touches our arms, legs and backs, as well as the sticky irritability of having to do too much when it is hot. Weather creates some of the most elemental sensations and atmospheres of our daily lives, because it is always there and always making some connection with the natural and social environments we live in and move through, even when we are indoors. It creates and carries seasonal scents – of cut grass, or bracken and heather on muddy and peaty moors, or of melting tarmac and exhaust fumes, or the smell of fresh air as summer turns to autumn, or winter to spring.

But these physical sensations are not singular feelings. Scents, for example, are also always experienced as sounds and sights and sensations of touch: we squelch and kick our way through the muddy smells and colours of a wet autumn, fingers and ears tingling in the damp chill, noses running in the strong cold wind which whistles and rustles the leaves, our trousers wet and heavy against our legs in the rain.

When people try to explain these kinds of multisensory feelings they are also describing their emotional responses and sometimes their orientations to different weather conditions and seasons too. Some think it is good for the moral fibre or the soul to get out in all weathers, and to let the rain penetrate their clothing.



Others are keen to experience the feel of rain, but from inside a good waterproof jacket and boots so that they stay dry. Weathery sensations of all types are part of us and of how we feel about ourselves and others; about the trivialities of life as well as its major events. Sometimes, feeling the weather is about feeling the meaning of life itself.

The Calder Valley, as with any place, brings its own distinctive possibilities and challenges for feeling the weather. People who live here can find themselves irritated and laid low by perpetual grey flat non-weather days that seem to neutralise and dull the senses. But then they may be arrested by both vibrancies and subtleties in light and colour in the hills, towns, woods, waterways and valleys - greens, greys, purples, blues, whites and the most amazing reds, oranges, yellows and browns in a good autumn. Or they are blown sideways in gusty winds and horizontal rain on the tops, or uplifted by unexpectedly crisp blue skies on the trudge to work.



I feel part of the weather sometimes. This is a physical thing; it interacts with me, pushes me around, warms me up, drenches me. I suppose because it interacts with me it becomes real. This is most apparent when I'm out walking. Either on a fine day with just a t-shirt, or bundled up, I'm still connected to the weather/world/environment. These are all one and the same thing: it's almost impossible and probably silly to think of the weather on its own as separate from the physical world. The wind changes direction at sunset, rain lands on the weather-side of the hills (see it's even in the words - weather is physical, not an abstract construct), snow insulates the land. The weather is life, too. It is birds, plants, ecosystems. I am increasingly finding it hard to distinguish between the weather and any other part of the world. Focus on one weather thing and the inherent range will cover some weather, some biology, some geology, some sociology, some architecture, as well.



Weather connecting

Weather and the environment
are the same.

The valleys shape the wind
The wind shapes the ecosystem.

People try to ignore it
But we're part of it as well.
The way our world works
is designed to ignore it.

Wearing jeans in the middle of summer,
same jeans in the depths of winter
Irrespective of the weather
or of whether they're appropriate.

People in the country
 feel more connected
 than people in the city.
 People around here
 wear big, heavy boots to the pub.
 I wish I had a set.
 In the city, everybody's still wearing their Converse
 all year round
 as usual.

Or America,
 all day in an air conditioned car
 driving to an air conditioned shopping mall
 to an air conditioned office
 then home again.
 Like living in a space station
 there's no weather there.

Here, in the country,
 it hits you.
 it's unavoidable.



Four of us walk home before ten. There is a cloudless sky still light near
 the western horizon and a full moon shines bright in the east. The air
 smells of cut grass and evening perfumes. We all agree how lucky we
 are to live here.



Woke early to lovely light and sunshine. Though I'd planned to be in
 my studio all day, I decided to go for a walk first. I was desperate to
 get going and packed my sketching materials. What struck me first
 was the light and colours as I climbed up out of the valley. The sky
 was pure blue, not a cloud. I looked at the winter light, shadows and
 the colour of the trees. I can identify the trees by their colours and
 shapes. I spotted some larch, which I love by its milky golden hue. The
 oak is slightly behind the beech and birch with more leaves and green.
 I sketched some beech. The colours of the moss and lichen attached
 to the trunk made a contrast with the remaining leaves. I cursed the
 watercolour palette for its limited selection, but it was good to ponder
 shape and form. I spent most of the walk just being mindful, stopping
 and looking. It was good to feel the warmth of the sun. I was looking
 across to the other side of the valley when some sheep were released
 into the field by where I stood; moved down for the winter. I watched
 them move around in a little gang, settling in. Their coats were brilliant
 white in the light against the green of the field and the multi coloured
 background of trees, moors and hills. I walked back down through a
 wood, the light only hitting the tops of the trees and reaching through
 any gaps. I noticed the noise of the road as I got closer to Hebden, and
 also that I can see the canal and boats again now there is less foliage.
 Back in my studio I'm sitting in front of a blank canvas, and am in
 creative contemplation.



Some colours have a profound effect on you, and some don't. The
 colour of heather really does it for me. Heather colour is linked to
 the season, and climate, and weather, and everything. I think it's a
 childhood colour scheme, sunshine on heather. It looks good under
 any cloud, and with any colour. It is grey and purple, blue and purple,
 green and purple, all at once. It is a magical colour.

From inside this house I can't tell what the weather is doing unless it's stormy and the rain hits the window. Sometimes I stand out in the yard just to get my feelings back.



Non-weather day

It is a day which almost has no weather.

There is no wind.

The temperature is barely perceptible, blood heat.

The sky is flat, white and low.

There is no variation in colour or brightness in any direction.

I hate this kind of day.

Even though I am outside

I feel as if I am inside,

stuck under that low uniform sky.

Headache, oppressed and claustrophobic.

There is nothing to look at,

nothing to anticipate.

No clear skies heading this way

to lift the spirits.

No rain on its way

to warrant a burst of activity

to finish an outside job.

This weather makes me feel sluggish and negative.



We lived on a narrow boat in the city for three months. You really were unable to avoid the weather there. It was moored right in the middle of the city, in a redeveloped marina. So we lived on a boat, and we had to carry the loo over to the toilets, where you had to empty them. Buy your coal, and bring your coal in. This was January to March, it just rained, and rained, and rained. But because we were living on a boat, and we had a fire going all the time, it was really quite cosy, actually. It was all kitted out. It had central heating, and everything. Although it was miserable weather, you could still smell and feel spring coming in. You could smell it and see it in the grasses, and the wildlife, in the marina. It was lovely and open, from dawn until dusk. It felt like a really safe space, where you could kind of watch winter. We left before summer when the chavs would be partying until six in the morning.



The painting I did the previous weekend has gone off now (paint touch-dry) and I was looking at it thinking about how different the weather is this weekend. Also thinking about how I'm using different colours with the two paintings. I'm not sure if it's my change of mood or change of light. I used a bicycle spoke to move the paint around on the canvas instead of brushes. I was completely absorbed; the sound of the rain pulled me occasionally, and as usual I didn't stop to eat or drink. The roof drainpipe is on the inside of the studio, which sounds like a stream when it's really raining, but I only became conscious of it when I was sitting to look at what I had done. Time just goes too quickly. I missed not getting out for a walk.



We went to the Lake District a couple of years ago, and we had perfectly dry weather, but it was very hazy. Clear skies, not a cloud in the sky, but really hazy. And all the photos we took were really boring, because there was no depth there. I think the weather brings colour to the picture. Like stereo sound.



The reality of proper heat is always a sensory surprise. It is a physical shock, although a welcome one. However after the initial novelty of mid/upper 30s, stickiness rapidly gives way to discomfort and physical inertia - particularly during the first night - tempered by the thought that 'we'll get used to it soon' and, to an extent, we do. It takes a few days to adapt to the weather, but then I find myself enjoying raw heat for what it is, even if at times I have to escape from and guard against it. I like (in manageable doses) the enveloping sensation of such warmth - its visceral, sensual immediacy - and this gives me an insight into how people can go on holiday just to sit in the sun and roast! But with me I have to be regularly active and it is only after being so can I then really enjoy the lifestyle such weather can bring. Even then, I still can't 'do' sunbathing for its own sake. My daughter, on the other hand, does not like the heat. She actively dislikes the high temperatures and misses rain and cool conditions, but she still enjoys the lifestyle advantages: swimming, lounging by the pool and, her new found interest, snorkelling.



On thinking of the past week's weather conditions and how it has impacted on me, I have noticed that I have sought moments of calm, and a connection with my natural environment. I've also been aware of the energy and excitement wild weather can bring. The joy of seeing the stars early one morning through the clouds as I went to work: just that glimpse was enough to lift my mood. I was lucky enough to see the gathering storm on my drive back. The wind was already gusting, and away in the distance the sky seemed to be loaded with electricity. The clouds purple and red from the winter sunset were held by an electric blue I only see with storms. I felt quite excited. It didn't hit Hebden until later. I couldn't get to sleep.





WHAT ON EARTH TO WEAR?

A big part of living the weather in the Calder Valley is deciding what to wear, and then sometimes regretting those decisions! People are frequently caught out commuting to work with completely the wrong clothing in endlessly changeable weather (four seasons in one day sometimes). In sustained wet or wintery weather, some people go for good waterproof and windproof clothing to protect them from the elements, while others prefer to face and feel the weather more directly, even if that means living with damp jeans against their skin for several hours. Some people find themselves cursing the fact that glasses do not have windscreen wipers, on days that seem full of endless drizzle. Parents sometimes struggle to pack and carry the right range of clothing and equipment to keep their children cool, warm or dry enough.



I have to be sure to have the right stuff with me when we go out to protect my baby from the weather - rain cover for rain (plus cardigan, blanket), parasol/sun cover for the sun (and cool clothes for her). That means that I have to pay daily attention to the weather forecast and have a look outside, to predict what I need - it's a nuisance to carry stuff I don't need all the time, so I only want to carry the right things for the weather. It's not just a case any more of keeping a light umbrella in my handbag and wearing suitable shoes. Yesterday, the weather was so changeable that when I walked into Hebden Bridge from my house I had her rain cover on her pram, and when I walked back to my house, I had the parasol on the pram and I had an ice cream to eat!



Welcome rain

I am glad of the rainy weather.
 With a baby, rain is easier
 than very hot weather.
 Heat makes her fractious,
 makes me worry about cot death,
 if the baby overheats.
 I am constantly checking the thermometer,
 to make sure she isn't too hot.
 Debating with myself,
 looking for advice on the internet,
 what to dress her in at night
 to avoid overheating?
 Just nappy? Nappy and vest?
 Now we have rain,
 and I can put her in a Babygro,
 I don't worry.

It was very difficult being pregnant when it was so hot, very uncomfortable. And then having a baby when it's hot has its pros and cons. She was my first and I was quite nervous. You get told that your bedroom is supposed to be between certain temperatures, but she certainly didn't sleep in a bedroom at 16° because it just was not possible. But I thought well babies are born in Saudi Arabia and survive so it can't be that bad. I think it is central heating that's more of a problem, and we always have windows open. But it is nice when a baby is born in the summer because it means you see more of them, physically, because they spend such a lot of time just in their nappies, whereas if they are born in January or February you have to bundle them up in a ton of layers before you can go anywhere. But it did mean always having to have hordes of sun cream, and making sure she had a sun hat so that she didn't get too hot. And we spent quite a lot of time in an air conditioned car! One thing I found hard was that, when you're breast feeding, you really have to wear two layers, and that got very hot. When I was carrying her and walking around town, we both got really hot and sweaty.



I will quite happily leave the house without much planning. I'll take my chances and if it rains, I get wet: my problem. But if I'm taking the kids out and it rains and they get wet, and I haven't got anything dry to put them in - then they get cold, and they start crying. So I have to think about those things and plan them. And it is the same with the heat. I have to take sun cream and try to persuade them to put on a hat, and to have a drink. That's one reason why I'm not always overjoyed to see the sun, because I have to smother them with sun cream endless times a day.



This summer I have I have been underdressed one day, and then taking a coat but not needing it on another, so I just ending up carrying stuff all over the place and stripping off at work. It is so changeable and it can start off really cold in the morning but then get really hot in the afternoon. When you see someone on the train with a massive anorak on and a jumper, you know they left home quite early, whereas those in their t-shirts obviously went out in the afternoon. It is really hard to get it right for the whole day.



I don't really tend to go for waterproofs on the bike, so I just get wet, but there is a shower at work and I always have a change of clothes. I would rather just get wet and be done with it. If I was on a walk and it was chucking it down, I might put some waterproofs on and get my wellies out. I feel the cold and this summer I have lived in my body warmer. But on the bike I want to be wearing something that will dry quickly, instead of trying to keep the wet out. What annoys me most about the rain on my bike is that it rains on my glasses and I can't see anything. That is a problem. I always have a cap in my bag that I can put on under my helmet to try to keep the rain out of my glasses. That is the most involved weather protection I have - riding my bike with my cap on under my helmet! Somehow it feels as though, if my glasses aren't getting rained on, then I'm not getting rained on!



I usually wear jeans and they take ages to dry off if they get wet. When I commute on my bike, I can't really be bothered to get changed. I'm not one of these who has lots of fancy gear and lycra everywhere. So I might cycle in but if it looks like rain I might leave my bike at work and get the train home.

I've got a really good cagoule that I wear to work, but there is a line where it finishes and then it tips the water on to my jeans. That can be uncomfortable at work for a while in the morning. I haven't accessed a lot of my summer wardrobe this year. I haven't worn skirts and sandals, and I haven't even felt like getting the skirts ironed and ready. The weather is not enough of an invitation.



It was only this year that we got our first Gore-Tex coats. We were on holiday and we got unbelievably drenched. We had set off to do a short walk in the rain, and we literally got a hundred yards and we were soaked to the skin. We came back and went to the nearest factory sales outlet and bought two Gore-Tex jackets in the sale. Unfortunately, they were exactly the same, although we did manage to get different colours. I have often wondered why couples do that. Now I know - because they go to the sales in the rain and it is the only one with £70 off, so you have to do it! That was our excuse anyway. It was a weather-related impulse purchase.



Quite often I will leave for work without a coat even if it looks like it might rain because I would rather be wet or have an umbrella than a coat, and I would rather be cold than too hot. It is only rain, and we are all made of waterproof skin. I feel that once you are out in it, you have to make the best of it. But I hate the rain on my glasses. They get wet and I can't see anything, so I take them off and I can't see anything. Then I go inside and they steam up.

In general, I don't care whether it's raining, or sunny, if I am absorbed and focussed in my outdoor work. Physically I am not bothered if it's raining, but when it's raining my glasses get wet and I can't see. So what happens is I can't see well with my glasses because they are wet, and I can't see well without them. I am suddenly disabled by this rain. Or when you've driven three hours to get to Wasdale in the Lake District for a walk, and you get up onto the mountains - it can be a grey day with reasonable views, but also a good chance of a bit of drizzle now and again - and then you can't see! You've gone all that way, you've sweated and gasped for air climbing up to the top, and your mates are oohing and ahing at the views, and you can't see them - apart from quick glimpses where you've rubbed your glasses on your t-shirt. But you've done that so many times that your glasses are just smearing!



City rain

It was raining
 on my walk back to the station this evening.
 I enjoyed getting wet,
 Opting for rain water wetness
 over sweating under a waterproof coat
 and wrestling my broolly
 through the narrowed walkways
 of Manchester's tramworks.
 I got a gush of muddy water up my trouser leg
 from a wonky paving slab.
 Funny how you never notice them when it's dry.

If my only interest in the countryside was walking then I'd probably have a nice pair of Gore-Tex pants with a merino wool under-layer to keep the moisture from penetrating my trousers where the grass brushes against my legs. And I'd have them neatly hung on a hook by the door. But if you do intense work in waterproofs you'll get as wet as if you weren't wearing them because you're sweating, and it's horrible. You're really uncomfortable, you're restricted, you're too hot. In winter I'd wear something for wind protection more than to keep the water off. I do rough and pretty dirty work so a good waterproof just gets wrecked. But a cheap waterproof isn't breathable. So I'd rather the rain gets through to me and, because I'm working, I'm warm. I remember when we were planting trees in March, taking squares of turf out with a mattock. I'd been doing it for hours and hours and it started snowing, and there were lots of volunteers up there helping us plant, and they were all in their waterproofs and their coats. And I was in my t-shirt with the snow falling, and my back was steaming. It was an amazing feeling; I felt like an ox, steaming!





PHOTO: JENNIFER MASON

GROWING

Although many of the terraced houses in the Calder Valley have either no garden, or only small yards or patches of garden, there is plenty of commitment to, and a high degree of success in, growing vegetables and plants. Clusters of brightly coloured flowers and vegetables sit on the pavements outside front doors. There are many clutches of allotments scattered amongst the dwellings, and there are pockets of 'guerrilla gardening' too, in Todmorden (home of the famous Incredible Edible), Hebden Bridge and the surrounding areas, affording local people the opportunity to pick some fresh veg for tea on their way home from the station in the evening. The distinctive topography and climate, and people's different locations in relation to these, present a range of microclimates and growing challenges and opportunities.



A few years back we were planting in January. You plant all the trees while they're dormant, so they're bare rooted trees with no leaves on, they just look like little twigs. And there was no water on the site. So the trees are coming into leaf in May or June, starting to break bud in the middle of May. And it didn't rain at all in May; there wasn't a day of rain. When you're planting, you put a spade in and pull it back, put the tree in and just stamp it back down. There's 10,000 trees gone in there so it's not an Alan Titchmarsh job where you dig a nice hole and sprinkle some compost and tie it with a red ribbon. And just as they were starting to break bud in May, when they need plenty of water, all the planting slits started to open up. So I had to go round and hand water these trees, I had to find the springs, dig them all out and turn them into pools. I went round with two watering cans, plunged them in, and got on with it. And I set up a few siphons as well into the ponds. But I couldn't wait for it to rain, I was totally desperate. And I do remember the rain coming down, when it first came, and it was one of those kind of June rains where you get those massive raindrops - 'splosh splosh'. It was like the cliché of the African savannahs when the dusts come up in slow motion. And then we got probably two years of rain non-stop!



The sun is out now and my granddaughter suggests we have tea in the garden shed. We spend a happy hour and a half in the garden picking and eating raspberries, strawberries and peas while my husband cooks. I think how lucky we are to have all this. There is a cool breeze now. The sun is starting to leave our garden by 6pm as we are not very high up the hill and there is an old building running along the west side, but in the shed with the doors open we can be warm whilst still being outside. I notice that the sun is just catching our back wall, a very rare occurrence. I wonder if I would enjoy the sun so much if we lived somewhere it shone more often.

Everything goes whoosh

What we're having this year is perfect for growing. Really hot weather early in the summer so plants do lots of photosynthesising. They generate lots of sugars. Then loads of rain, creates a flush of growth. Everything goes whoosh.



I'm trying to work out what will actually grow in these conditions up here, so I've been looking at what the neighbours are growing. The idea is that we would grow vegetables, but there is hardly anyone else growing vegetables up here, although one neighbour has a little sunny area and he has a few nice things. I think we will have a chat with him. It is really a process of trial and error. If you like something, put it in and see what happens. It might thrive or it might not. From the research I've done there seem to be more plants that would be happy in windy, exposed conditions than you would expect. I know there is laurel, and people have fairly hardy little shrubs, and foxgloves. I bought two Icelandic poppies on the basis that if they grow in Iceland they must be alright here!



There are always things to be done in the garden: trees and hedges to cut, landscaping, picking raspberries or kale, hanging washing up, sawing logs. The peak of the activity is in the summer, but there is lots to do in the autumn and other times of year as well. We have a couple

of apple trees so we keep an eye on them, and that's quite a big job to pick them when they are ready.



When you see the wind damage to some of the trees it's frustrating. They survive it, in the winter, because they've no leaves on them, but then they put their leaves out and you walk through on a windy day and they're all getting ripped about everywhere. It's part of their development because they're growing up in a windy place, so it triggers them to put their roots out in the right places. But you just think that if we were in a sheltered environment, low down, on the flat, they'd probably be twice or three times the size they are now! But the problem isn't so much high winds, as winds from an unusual direction. What they do is they put out roots to tackle the westerlies and you can see it in the shape of the tree tops. They call it wind shear: they've got a sloped edge on one side and a square edge on the other. The trees have acted together, to make that shape. So you can just imagine what happens when we get the easterlies instead: it acts like a sail.



WEATHER CHARACTERS

In describing our orientation to weather, we reveal quite a lot about our character. People notice differences between their own and other people's approaches and attitudes to weather, and these can be sources of irritation, amusement and fascination. Different approaches to the weather forecast can be a particular bone of contention, and the source of much teasing. And amongst Calder Valley residents, much fun is poked at the difference between 'softy southerners' who are said to be more faint hearted about the challenges of Pennine weather than us so-called 'hard as nails' northerners (usually said with some degree of self-deprecating humour)!



My uncle visited last year. He lives in Spain. He came over when it was really hot here, when we were having 30° plus weather, but he'd come from 40° plus. And before he arrived we said to ourselves 'he's going to get here and say how he's cold and he's got to put his jacket on. He's just going to be really annoying about it'. And then he arrived and he said, 'ooh I've had to put an extra coat on.' And we just wanted to slap him! He said, 'it's just so cold compared to Spain. It's just always grey here, and it rains all the time'. It gets me down that he complains about it so much when there are so many other lovely things about the place, but he just complains.



I think people can get really miserable about the weather. I try not to. I get grumpy when it's not been nice in the summer, and I want to go out. But sometimes it's an excuse not to do anything, in a good way. You can think on a Sunday when it's raining 'oh, I should go out for a walk, but what a shame, I'll just have to stay in and read my book!' It's swings and roundabouts.



Weather jibes

We laugh at ourselves
 'we can't cope with the weather'.
 That's a very British thing.
 The trains have to go slow
 it is too hot and the rails might buckle
 or there are leaves on the line when it's windy
 or the wrong kind of rain.
 Whatever happens we can't cope with it

and we like to laugh at ourselves.
 Then there is Yorkshire bluff.
 'Softy southerners are visiting,
 Do you know, they can't even go outdoors
 without their fancy kit!'
 We're tough, we go out in our shorts and t-shirts
 whatever the weather.
 We can do it.
 We're hard as nails us Northerners.



My Mum is about an hour and a quarter's drive away. It's only 30 miles. But it's consistently hotter and drier. Her garden is quite a lot ahead of mine in terms of when flowers come out and things like that. And when I ring her up and she's saying 'oh it's looking really nice now, isn't it?' And I'm saying, 'er no, Mum'. It's a bit of a joke that. Actually this year she's had a really dry summer. She desperately wanted more rain. I'm moaning about it and she's really wanting it. But I'd much rather live here than where she lives: just because of the beauty of this place.



I don't cope well with warm weather. What most people call a pleasantly warm sunny day is a trial of endurance for me; I sweat a lot, my mind becomes fuzzy and I feel like I spend a lot of time grumbling. This isn't a new thing. I have memories of being on holiday with my family as a child and spending time running from shade to shade in baking hot Spanish villages, and hiding out anywhere where there was air con. I love the cold and more often than not sleep outside the covers in bed. My wife is the opposite, she loves the sun, and long cold winters really make her miserable.

When I talk to my dad about the weather, it always feel like it's a bit of one-upmanship, because he likes to say, 'oh it's boiling here', 'oh we're sat on the patio', 'it's absolutely boiling'. So I try to steer the conversation onto something else. Whereas my Mum is that age now where she says 'oh it's been dreadful down here, I've not been able to get to the shops'. She likes to live by the weather, and because she's got so much time on her hands, she's got time to think about it, whereas I suppose I haven't got as much time, and I don't think about it too much.



This is the furthest north I've ever lived. We have a lot of friends from the South, and when they come to visit, without fail, they say how cold it is. They complain and they want to turn the heating up, even in the summer. They can't believe how windy and how rainy it is. But I don't see it at all anymore. The weather has to be quite extreme before I comment on it being anything out of the ordinary these days. Our rain comes in horizontally, that's just how it is! We've planted a new tree in the front garden on an angle, so that over time it will stand up straight against the prevailing wind. And I like that. I like living somewhere that's open enough to feel that wind. You have to face it, head on. When you're in a more built-up environment, you're constantly nipping in and out of doorways or trying to find a dry space, until it eases off. But here there is actually no point in doing that. You've just got to carry on, or give up. There's a perverse pleasure in sticking it out as well: digging your garden in the pouring rain. You've done it, even though it was raining – I like that! With friends from the South I'm usually quite smug about it. I find it a bit irritating that they find it so cold, and I'm unconvinced as well, which is quite uncharitable of me I know. But I make them go out in it - perhaps not when it's pouring with rain - but when they think it's cold. Particularly for the people without kids who come and visit in the winter, their idea of a good winter's day is to find a nice pub with a warm fire and sit indoors. Whereas I want to go for a walk in the snow, and so do the kids.

Some people have an attitude to weather where there is an assumption of badness; and about life too. It does annoy me. I'm definitely a glass half full person. People complain about the weather whatever it does. I think maybe they enjoy complaining so I just let them get on with it. I think generally the assumption in Hebden, but I think this might be everywhere in Britain, is that the weather is going to be bad. And then when the weather's not what you expect it to be, then that's probably bad too!



My partner often asks me in the morning about what the weather is going to do, because she knows I'll know. It is possibly something I've inherited from my father. He's a very keen amateur weather data collector, with a weather station in the garden. Funnily enough, he has a decidedly pessimistic view about the weather even though he collects raw data, whereas I take more of an optimistic view. He and I can look at the same forecast, but we read it differently. He is quite a cautious man and perhaps focuses on the negative aspects of it. An example recently: we'd planned a day out at a hill climb, but it rather depended on it being sunny because we would be out in the open all day, and having a picnic. So, it was 'fingers crossed' that it would be nice on the day. We both looked at the forecast at the same time. I saw it was forecasting rain overnight, clearing up in the morning. Ideal, I thought: we'll be there by lunchtime. But then my Dad said 'it's not looking too good though is it? There's rain coming in'. The forecast was very accurate as it happened. It rained overnight and it was a lovely afternoon.



Knowing the sex of the weather

You can get a detailed radar picture
of the day's weather
on your phone.

You can see the rain hovering around
you can see it's on its way.

I don't want to do that.

The weather is one of those things
that is just going to happen.

It's like finding out the sex of your child
before it's born.

I don't want to do it.

I'd rather just go into the day
without knowing about it in advance.

Weather is one of those things
that is about the world as it is.

I don't want to even try
to map and organise the weather.



If we have something planned, I might use the weather forecast on the actual day, but not before. But my partner will start looking a week before, and she will say 'we can't have that barbecue on Friday because it is going to rain.' And then 'no it isn't going to rain.' And then 'it is going to rain' again, and then 'it's not.' But I don't wish to have endless conversations about what the weather might be like on Friday. I think we'll just wait until Friday and we'll see. And if it's going to rain then we'll worry about it then. But she tends to obsess about it. If the forecast turns out to be wrong, and we've spent a whole week discussing

whether or not we should go, and if we've cancelled something that I wanted to do, I sometimes can't resist pointing it out. It's partly because she sets so much store by it, and spends so much time discussing it, so it feels even more like I want to say, 'told you so!'

**We're not made of sugar**

I'm the sort of person
who looks at the weather forecast,
and if it says there might be showers
or a heavy rainstorm

I think, oh showers will be fine
and the rainstorm won't be much.

It's going to be a nice day.

My husband can look at the same weather forecast
and say it is going to be an awful day.

But being optimistic often works.

Sometimes it takes you by surprise
and rains on you,

but then you just get wet don't you?

My Nanna always said to me

and I say to my kids,

'we're not made of sugar,

we're not going to dissolve.'





PHOTOS: LORENZO FERRARINI

GETTING OUTSIDE

For some people, getting outside and having a regular dose of fresh air is something of a religion. It is seen as therapeutic and grounding; good for the body, mind, spirit and soul. Those who enjoy outdoor activities such as cycling, running, walking, and climbing, have a very deep commitment to the qualities of fresh air and the outdoors, but even people who do not see themselves as 'outdoorsy types' say they feel cooped up and hemmed in if they are unable to get out. Calder Valley fresh air, in different seasons and weathers - including the wind and rain - is a potent force to be reckoned with; it isn't the type of fresh air that just sits there! It inspires passion and deep commitment in its many fans. It can cause them to 'fall in love with the place all over again', or to feel lucky and privileged in the contrasts it makes with more grimy urban environments.



When you have two energetic dogs who need long daily walks you have no choice but to face the weather whatever it is doing that day, and whatever season it is, whether it's light or dark. It's one of the very basic points of good dog ownership. You learn pretty quickly that it's easier just to try and ignore 'bad' weather and get on with it. And for doing so you often experience days and times outdoors that you never would do otherwise. Getting up at 6am on a winter's morning I've often seen the most special, secret, beautiful parts of a day, and I have memories of fresh frost, a giant orange setting moon, technicolour skies as the sun rises; just me and the dogs.



Being outdoors has a lifting effect on my mood and physical self. On days when I am tired, hungover, feeling ill or fed up, going outside and getting some fresh air seems to sooth me and clear away the bad feelings, and while I'm outdoors I can get some respite. People seem surprised sometimes at my ability to carry on walking, cycling or gardening on wet and windy days, but being outdoors seems to have a medicinal effect that I can't get elsewhere. It's no surprise then that having moved from a Manchester suburb to the moors, our lives have taken a turn for the better. Being outside in the city used to mean being confronted by concrete, cars, unhappy looking and often unfriendly people, houses, large roads, rubbish and mess, but it was still worth going out. Now we step outside our front door and are greeted by grass, trees, horses, swallows, goldfinches, bats, drystone walls and endless sky, unobscured by buildings. My all-important outdoor experience is vastly improved by the new surroundings, and I can't imagine ever wanting to live in a city again after 20 years of Sheffield, Birmingham, Nottingham and Manchester.



Stuck inside

I've been insulated from the weather this summer,
barely been outside.
Normally we'd be out
several nights a week
to the pub, for a walk,
away for the weekends, out camping
Being out in the weather.

But this year I have been
stuck in a hot car in a queue for the tip,
getting rained on while unloading the car.
Sitting inside
watching the flood gauge
go up and down.
Raining, raining, flood alert.
Sat there all day
watching the river level gauge on my laptop
quietly panicking.



It's partly because of my upbringing that I've developed an insistence on as much fresh air as possible. I grew up in hills and countryside. We were outside a lot of the time and my memories of family entertainment usually centred around walks and barbecues in various places, beaches, caves, on tops of mountains. As a kid I remember being really annoyed about holiday walks in typical Hebridean weather (the local chickens were being blown off the cliffs) when I wanted to stay at home and make up dance routines with my sister. But now as an adult I have fond memories of how atmospheric the weather was when we arrived at the beach, and we spent the day searching for cowry shells and making fires from driftwood by the sea to cook our food over.

It would have to be pretty bad weather to stop me walking. I do have to walk the dog. That's the great thing about having a dog because even on days when you might think 'oh it's a bit grey, I'll stay in', you actually can't. You have to go out and walk, and once you're out, it's always better. It is a good thing for my husband, because he is much more likely than me to not go out if the weather is bad, but we share out all the dog walking so he has to go out and walk the dog.



Today it didn't really get light. Slow start with mist, all the hills swallowed up in it, and nearer to home persistent rain, its harsh shine on cars, houses, roofs and road surfaces, a contrast to the softness higher up. The best thing on a day like this is to go out into it, let the mist swallow you, go high, enjoy the luxury of movement in a still world, take your own bubble of visibility with you and listen to the silence up there, removed from the whole world.



I eat my yoghurt, seeds and nectarine then go for a run. I haven't been running for ages and it's such a lovely morning I'm inspired to make the effort. I wear 3/4 length combats, a loose sleeveless cotton top, a little cotton cardigan and my old trainers. I stride up the cobbled snicket as a way of warming up and stretching my muscles. I can feel my heart thumping by the time I turn on to the flat. I walk quickly along to allow my body to recover, cross the road and start jogging into Nutclough woods and along to the pond. It is ages since I've been here. I can't think why I stopped coming. The water level is very low. There seem to be two or three stepping stone places now to cross the stream. The floods of 2012 brought so many rocks, stones, trees and other debris down that it has changed this area completely. Starting

up hill the paths are somewhat overgrown. I try to think whether it is usually like this in the summer. I manage to keep jogging all the way through the woods and fields and past a terrace of houses. I walk to recover my breath. Once in the fields I start jogging again. It is a slow jog but I feel I am doing well considering I haven't done much exercise lately. I have had to tie my cardigan round my waist and I enjoy the sun. The grass has been cut for hay but there is not much smell from it. I reach the highest point on my route and thankfully start downhill. The path is just visible beneath the cut grass. I think how different it looks from when I was sledging here in the snow. It doesn't seem that long ago. Back through the woods and I make an effort to power up the last few slopes and onto the flat. Then I walk down with my heart pounding. Before climbing up the stone steps to our back yard, I use them to stretch my muscles. The feel of the cool stone in the shade is lovely. Back in the yard I do a couple more stretches then go inside for a warm shower.



Over time my attitude towards my daily bike commute has developed into a refusal to recognise adverse weather conditions, and I'm sure many people see me as slightly eccentric for turning up to the office in thick snow and driving wind and rain. The only weather that really makes me feel annoyed on the bike is a strong head wind (makes it hard work) and fine drizzly rain (falls on my glasses and is impossible to clear or see through) and the occasional black ice (makes you fall off your bike). Normally though, as long as you put on some warm gear and pack a change of clothes it is all fine on arrival. My partner still laughs about the day I emailed him while we were still chatting online before we'd met to tell him the weather had been so bad I'd put on my wellies and a pair of marigolds to ride my bike to work. I felt pretty pleased with myself as I sped past queues of people stuck in traffic on my bike, and arrived at work warm and dry in half the time of the car drivers.

Falling in love on a rainy day

I love running in the rain.

I can fall in love with a place again
even on a rainy day

if I'm doing the right thing in it.

Running is a trancey thing

In the rain it can close you into your own little world.

My favourite rainy run

is Hardcastle Crag, up through the woods.

The clouds are low and it's pouring down

no point in going up.

Absolutely beautiful, in the rain.

Splashing through puddles

is half the fun.

When you're walking in the rain

You're fighting it all the time.

With running, you're wet straight away

but no matter, you're warm.

Might as well get as wet and muddy as you can

and have a bit of fun.



Climbing is very weather dependent. It has to be dry and within certain temperature parameters. Below 10° is a bit miserable and above 20° is too hot if you are in direct sun. Cycling is non-weather dependent and I can go when I like. It doesn't bother me even if it is raining hard, but climbing has to be dry and warmish. You can generally pick and choose places to suit different weather conditions. You choose whether it's in the shade or whether it's known to stay dry or whether it dries

quickly after rain, and how much sun it gets when it gets the sun. All of these factors come into play in choosing a cliff. I see summer as starting when I start going climbing. I climb with a rope, and for that it has to be dry, because otherwise it gets slippery. It is all to do with friction and if it is wet it is unpredictable and you can fall off. Different types of rock have different textures and weather conditions play a fairly critical part in how good the friction is. For instance, the gritstone around here has to be cold for the best friction. But depending on the type of climb you're doing, there are different parameters about weather and conditions.



Running in the rain is fine. You tend to run from home and running makes you warm, even if you're wet. And it can be fun and splashing through puddles. And then you come home and you have a shower and you get in to some dry clothes, and all is well with the world.





PHOTOS: JENNIFER MASON

SEASONS

The seasons permeate our lives in untold ways, and they can move us to strong feelings. The turn of the season can be a highly evocative time, inspiring feelings of hope when the first signs of spring appear, or loss when the last of the leaves fall from the trees. The turn from autumn to winter can foster a feeling of needing to store up and engage in provisioning, to batten down the hatches, and hunker down. Some seasons seem particularly atmospheric – misty russet and golden autumns perhaps particularly so. Some make us more alive than usual to the flora and fauna in our environments, and some seem to make us porous to the lights and wonders of the world around us. Some people have a strong sense of how the seasons should be - an ideal of spring, summer, autumn and winter - and can feel disappointed, uneasy and even a strong sense of injustice when winters are weirdly warm, or summers are unremittingly grey, wet and cold. That uneasiness connects with an underlying anxiety about climate change, global warming, and the effects on the planet of human carelessness and disregard.

People worry when the seasons are weird, wrong, or not properly delineated. The ‘weather year’ of my project in 2015-16 included a late and long awaited warm dry spring; a ‘non-summer’ of disappointingly grey, cool and wet weather punctuated by suddenly soaring temperatures and a tropical storm with golf-ball hailstones in early July; a spectacular ‘Indian Summer’ leading into a vibrant early autumn of sunshine and colours; and then the wettest and mildest winter many can remember, culminating in the Boxing Day floods – the worst floods in living memory in the region.

I like seasons. I'd hate it to be 'scorchio' for eight months a year. And really September has been a minor treat, with plenty of bright days and not too much set-in drizzle. It's those days of endless grey that get you down. The cold isn't a problem for me. But then I'm nothing if not a mass of contradictions about it. Rain makes the countryside green. I prefer the deep greens of northern England to the dusty brown of much of Southern Europe. And when the trees turn there will be a brief moment of golden beauty, which I always look forward to. I need to get out in the weather really, whatever it's doing. Get out and be in it, so new shoes are in order. Not letting it keep you in is key, I think.



One thing I do like about living here, is that I think the seasons are much more clearly delineated. I like looking forward to the seasons. I don't think there is a season that I don't look forward to. Usually about half way through one season I'm looking forward to the next one. I like them all. January and February are the hardest because they are usually the wettest, but there's so much to watch out for. The first flowers or the first leaves, and then it just always seems suddenly to happen all at once. It's like, 'I'm sure these trees didn't have leaves on last week when I drove down this road!'



Seasonal wrongs

It was far too warm,
All the way through
really weirdly warm.
We've got hawthorn in leaf in the hedgerow,
a few days before Christmas
and the grass is actually growing,

actually starting.

Daffodils coming up.
Always makes me feel nice,
there's light at the end of the tunnel.
But it's not been winter yet,
actually hasn't been winter.
This is not good.
Winter may yet come
and damage all the things that are starting.
Hedgehogs are coming out
and what then when it snows and it freezes?
The trees come into leaf too early,
ash burnt by frost
creates dead wood.
Ash want to flush when they're ready to go.
Warm wet winters, fungal diseases
trees get manky.
Makes me nervous,
feels wrong.
Everyone is edgy
what is this all about?

You can't say this equals climate change.
Floods have happened before.
Warm winters have happened before.
But then you think
it's another sign.

Nature doesn't like it.
She likes it when things go right.
I'd like it to be
how an eight year old draws the seasons
that's what I want.

A beautiful start to the week this morning, lying in bed slowly coming to life, my partner shouts up the stairs and tells me to look outside, the valley below is filled with cloud, I open the window to get a better view and lovely fresh cold air rushes into the room. Twenty minutes later when I'm out walking the dogs the mist swallows up the moor too. The fog cleared in a couple of minutes but left behind dew on thousands of spiders' webs, normally invisible, spun in the tall moor-grass. This is my favourite kind of day, although it's not cold and crisp enough yet. But the autumn equinox is still two weeks away. The last few years haven't seen a clear demarcation of seasons, I worry that climate change will result in a homogeneous climate; the idea of a season-less bland uniformity is bloody depressing.



I like all the seasons. My favourite is usually the one I'm in. If I had to pick one, it might be spring, but autumn's lovely and then so is summer. They're all lovely aren't they? They've all got something about them. What I love about spring is that everything's just coming back to life. It's just so exciting when things start. The leaves start to come on the trees and things start shooting up and that's just so brilliant. And May is always so green, it's just fantastic. And the flowers start to come, and all the blossom is out.



I like it when the days start to close in. I like the cosy indoors feeling that you start to get as the winter comes; that feeling of warmth and light inside, and the dark outside. But by the time we get to the end of January I've had enough of it. I like it up to December, and then there's the glitz of Christmas. I love New Year when you clear all that away and you've just got that blank slate in January. I like January, but by the time

you get to the end of January, you kind of feel, 'Can we have March please?' I think February is the one we could do without.



It has been a pretty crap summer. I do remember a couple of days which seemed like the beginning of a heat wave, early in the summer. But other than that, it's been grey, and cold, and windy. Not what it should be. I'm not sure it's ever what it should be. That's probably based on my childhood dreams. But part of me wonders if what I'm seeing now is a change in the climate. I don't know whether it's scientifically true or not, but I have a feeling. It feels like the weather used to be more changeable, and it wouldn't get locked in, either blowing a gale for two weeks, or really hazy for two weeks. Now it seems to rain constantly, and then it will flick a switch and it will be humid for two weeks. I don't know if it's a real phenomenon because of the warming climate; the weather getting locked into a changing climate. It might just be because I've moved up into the hills. But I have a feeling about it.



It's weird because here, when it's really hot, everybody puts their sundresses on and blokes take their tops off and walk around, and people have barbecues. People get that kind of holiday feeling about them, when the sun shines and it's hot. Whereas in South Africa, it's just life. People don't sunbathe, and they don't lie by the pool. Although everybody has a pool, they don't lie by the pool. Kids jump in the pool, but adults don't because they're just getting on with normal life. One of the big shocks for me was going from a beautiful, hot country, and coming back to dark. The first few winters were hard. It was quite a shock to the system really. In some ways I hated it, especially the cold and dark, but in other ways I quite embraced it, and the fact that we

have four very distinct seasons, and that we really enjoy a proper spring here. Over there there are mainly two seasons: summer and winter. And I loved getting back to a proper English Christmas, where it's cold, and the house is warm and everyone is festive. I like going Christmas shopping, and it being all cold outside, and wherever you go inside it's warm. It's the gloomy days that used to get me down and that feeling of being chilly a lot.



Summer

The weather is an event today, putting itself centre stage, calling out insects and beetles, lily beetles, midges, cockchafers, boiling life up until it bursts; but it hasn't burst yet. The storm came in the end, after an hour of lightning, which was almost constant flickering, blue and purple, eventually rain and hail which lasted only for about half an hour, but was briefly biblical in its force, hailstones like marbles. Then it moved on. I stayed up until the storm had passed, went to bed at midnight. Today it's still muggy and warm, even early in the day. The rain hasn't done much to clear the air. There is cloud cover, the plants outside our window are bedraggled, but there's no real sense of a dew-fresh dawn, the world washed down.



Power surge

Sleeping.
Flat roof attic,
woken up.
Somebody chucking boulders!
Look out of the window
can't see hail
just looks like rain.
But sounds different to rain
It really feels
It really sounds
alarming.
Then thunder and lightning
more than I've ever heard.

Bang!
 We've been struck!
 Power off,
 then back on again.
 Didn't sound like thunder.
 Wasn't thunder.
 Dad knew.
 Said no way you could have been hit
 said it blows the sockets off the walls
 when it hits.
 We'll have heard the bang of lightning
 hitting the ground nearby
 causing a power surge.
 The most dramatic weather I've ever seen round here.



More sun, more storms. Yesterday was another hot day, then late in the evening, more lightning, more rain. I walked up from town in a torrential downpour, lightning all around. Then again at about 3pm, it woke me up, huge crashes of thunder, lightning that lit the room brighter than day. Exciting, a tiny bit frightening. And this morning the world is swathed in mist so you can't see even across the valley.



Raining cats and dogs

The dog seemed completely oblivious
 didn't care two hoots
 just slept.

The cats were quite freaked out.
 Quite cross in fact.
 One of our cats
 if you do things
 she doesn't want you to do
 she get's quite a look about her.
 She was probably scared
 but the way it looked on her face
 was that she quite annoyed
 with there being a storm.

They were dashing about
 hiding behind things.
 The lightning had been going
 a long time
 and they didn't seem bothered .
 It was when the thunder started
 when the noise came.
 Hail, really noisy
 on velux windows in the attic
 at the top.
 It just was really loud
 on the window
 on the cars outside.



Hailstone marbles

In bed.
 I could hear the thunder rumbling.
 Just ignoring it.
 Then there was a rattling.
 Somebody's throwing stones at the house!

I got up
I had a look
I went out in it.

The hail and the lightning!
Coming over from Hepstonsall
sheet lightning
the whole sky lit up white,
then fork lightning.
Hailstones the size of marbles.

Just watching it down the street
like a river.
You could see in the street lighting
how fast it was coming down.
Gushing down the street
it was amazing,
impressive.
It was exciting.

I haven't seen a storm like that
in this country before.
It was really fierce.



I live in a big old Victorian house; one side faces the south and one side faces the north. In the kitchen, it's really dark and it can be quite cold. In the summer the house can feel a bit damp sometimes, whereas in the winter time, the heating warms it, so it has a different feel to it. But obviously we won't put the heating on in summertime, we'll just put a jumper on if we're cold. In summer there is a damp smell, like an older house gets, and it can be quite dark and gloomy, and I don't like dark

and gloomy. I cook a lot so I'm in the kitchen and I put the lights on to make it bright, and I light candles, and burn incense, just to make it a happy place. And then at tea time I'll go up into the bedroom and lie on the bed, and the sun just streams through the window. Or I just go and get a glass of wine and sit on the deck, or on the front door step with a glass of wine and bowl of crisps; that's my idea of heaven.



We might get there

One day this summer
I walked through the park on my way home.
It was a lovely sunny day.
It was still windy.
It wasn't quite in the zone
but it made you think
we could get there.
And there were other people in the park
with the same half smile
that I thought I had probably on my face
just on their own, wandering round.
Why don't I walk through the park more often?



I took the dogs out for a walk last night. It was 7.30pm, grey and drizzly and it looked like it was getting dark, in August! I wasn't really looking forward to it. I put on my waterproofs, harnessed up the dogs and we set off. I stuck to the road as it was pretty wet and I didn't fancy getting both myself and my dogs soaked walking through the moorland. It was a strange evening: grey, alternating between drizzle and heavy rain, quite a strong wind and low clouds being blown across the tops

of the hills and through the wind turbines. To look at, it could have been winter, but the air was warm and damp and the evening had a strangely tropical feel about it, reminding me of holidays to faraway places in rainy seasons. Visibility was poor and the countryside faded into low cloud, so I could not see down into the valleys, heightening my feeling of being somewhere else, as if I was on a remote island hit by a tropical storm. But far from being dark, as I had thought before I set off, the colours in my immediate surroundings were intensified by the conditions. August has not been nice, we've only had a couple of days that could really pass for summer. My walk last night though made me realise how much this has passed me by. Until recently I was living in a city, as I had done for the majority of my life. Sunny summer days seemed really important there somehow, and a poor summer made me feel irritated and annoyed. Don't get me wrong, I still enjoy a warm sunny day and blue skies when they appear. But living up in the hills, all of the different weather conditions seem to interact with and enhance the countryside. Each condition brings its own character to the day, and every time I go out feels unique and exciting.



Stupid o'clock

Sanding and oiling garden furniture.

Bike riding.

Cooking and eating outside.

Beer gets colder.

Walking into town.

Feeling the sun's rays on the station platform at 7.30am.

Washing on the line at 5am. And then more.....

Hot summer holiday heat at 9pm.

Getting away from Hebden.

Summer smells.

Feeding the birdies (less than in spring).

Can't see Heptonstall church (because of trees).

Watching house martins return.

Waking up at stupid o'clock because of the light.



The only time I ever miss smoking is lounging around outside when it's warm, on the beach particularly, or in a park - although not in a situation where you're minding small children. It doesn't happen much at the moment. But when you can sit there with a glass of wine outside, that's when I think oh it would be nice to have a cigarette with that.



We sleep in the attic and you get the light coming in from the velux window, so in summer when you go to bed it's not quite dark yet, and it feels kind of nice sometimes. It feels like a treat somehow. It feels like being a child, and having to go to bed before it's quite dark. I go to bed and turn the light out and it's still light, and it makes me laugh. And then when you wake up it's light and you never properly see the dark.



On a working day I get this little window in a lunchtime and then by the time I'm going home, it'll be raining, and that does seem to be how it's been this summer. I feel a sense of injustice and loss. It's almost like we've missed a season. It doesn't feel like we do summer any more, or maybe we do but in scattered bits and at the wrong times. I really feel for the kids when the best weather is in June and then in the summer holidays it's miserable. We need to have big national conversation about moving it forward at bit now. By the time they break up it's all finished.

Very unseasonable

There's a day in every year
 where the air changes
 and it feels like autumn,
 bringing back memories of cold days
 from childhood,
 marking the transition from summer to the colder climate.
 Usually it happens at the end of September
 but we're having a spell of it at the beginning of August.

My favourite days are when it's brisk.
 Frost on the ground, sun shining,
 I'm up early about to set off somewhere new.

Today, the Radio 4 Weather Forecast gives me an apt soundbite
 'Very unseasonable.'



It is less than three weeks till we go on holiday and here we are in the middle of what the forecast promises to be three days of almost constant rain. That doesn't mean it will be raining in three weeks' time in Devon, of course, but it adds to the feeling that this is 'one of those summers'. Or one of those non-summer. Apart from a couple of isolated weeks, summer hasn't really got going. A warm day is followed by a chilly, grey one. Two sunny days on the trot feels like luxury. I think poor summer weather affects me more than terrible winter weather. You're meant to be inside in winter but you're meant to be outside in summer. Especially with young children, who are happy to stare at a screen all day as the rain pelts down, but don't understand the guilt that such wasted sedentary hours evoke in parents. If it chucks it down for a week on holiday and I can't run around on a beach with the kids it will be galling to say the least. So I've started checking the

forecast as far ahead as it will let me, to see if there's any hint of a heatwave, or at least a prolonged period of warmish weather. I don't trust the forecast beyond about three days but I'd quite like the sense of hope a predicted sunny spell would bring. Actually the latter would suit me better. I prefer warm to hot. I'm no sunbather so I don't think I'm asking for too much – just keep it dry and bright for most of that holiday week, just so we can happily be outside. That's all.



Normally in a summer - in a different kind of summer - there is a lot of chatting in the street. Over winter, everyone just comes home and goes in their houses and no-one sees anybody. But in the summer, partly because there are no gardens here, the only place to be is on the street. It's lovely with people just sat outside all the time on their doorsteps, and the kids playing in the street.

**A week of sun, like**

I think it would be very hard
 to live in a place
 where every day was the same.
 But I could do with a week of sun, like.



Every year we have a street party. This year the forecast was shocking. Heavy rain and storm. We were all ready to abandon it. But our neighbour found a better forecast so we said, 'oh we'll have that weather then!' So we slung a tarpaulin up where there is a little bit of a crossroads. We tied the corner of the tarpaulin to each house and spread it in the air in the gap. And the rain did come hammering down! It was stair rods. But we were absolutely dry under the tarp, because it wasn't blowing about too much. There was thunder and lightning all around, and we were about forty people, under the tarp with the sound system and tables full of food! It was great. It was like a teambuilding exercise, because every now and then the tarp would completely fill with water and get really low and we'd all move the puddle by pushing the tarp above our heads, and pushing it off to the side. So we were all on roof duty, and it came cascading off the sides. When it was raining, you couldn't actually hear the music, because it was rattling on the tarpaulin. The tarp wasn't very big and people on the ends must just have been pushing in like penguins. And we were saying 'it's brilliant, no midges!' Midges would stand no chance in those stair rods. I think that will be a memorable one: 'the rain party'. This summer the weather has kept us more in our houses, but then this got us really close, under the tarpaulin!



Despite the fact that my baby needs protecting from the weather, I am still going out, whatever the weather. In the past, I might have been more inclined to postpone trips out in bad weather, but I feel like I need to escape the house every day now I'm on maternity leave, so even in bad weather, I get us both dressed appropriately and we go out anyway. With the weather so changeable, and with me going out even if it's going to rain, I keep noticing the way the pavements smell when it just starts to rain after it has been dry for a while. I have noticed this smell ever since I was a child, but it's hard to describe. I have always

thought that it's something to do with the rain affecting the dust on the pavements, but I just put "smell when it starts to rain" into Google and it came up with 'Petrichor' so it seems that I'm not the only person who has smelled this and it might be more to do with the soil than dusty pavements.



I don't mind the cold, it's the rain that more often puts us off going out. But even so, if it's heavy rain you can make a thing of that with kids. 'Let's go out in the pouring rain with our wellies on and splash in some puddles'. It's the endless drizzly days that are more difficult I think to motivate yourself to get out into.



On the merits of rain

It wouldn't be so green
if it didn't rain
would it?



I find myself having an expectation, despite knowing that this is not always the case, that the Mediterranean is always hot and sunny and the sea is always blue. I feel curiously let down one day when there is a failure on the part of the Mediterranean's weather, despite the advantages of it being a pleasant temperature and not having to worry about getting burnt or parched. The feeling persists until a clearer evening revives the atmosphere and we are treated to a display of meteorites in a now clear sky.

I can't lose that sense of being cheated this summer because we have not had even one whole hot day: the sort of hot that makes you stop and walk slowly and end up chatting to your neighbours. I have missed that heat and the way it changes how you behave. Talking to people, they say, 'oh well there was that few days in June', and I'm thinking, well I must have been at work. Maybe I have high expectations but I'm just looking for a bit more. I remember the sense of being eased into a few sunny days without having to carry huge numbers of extra clothes around. But this summer I've never gone out without a waterproof or a jumper. Just a run of days would be good, so you get the confidence to think, it's going to be nice again so I'll not bother taking my extra layers. I remember when the kids were little and we didn't have any money, so we just went camping nearby every summer. And at the end of the third consecutive wet summer we said 'Oh let's go abroad next summer'. We need some sunshine. We covered the roof rack with a tarpaulin and we went to France, and drove down as far as we could get in the given time, until it got hot. We drove to the sun. It's not about lying in the sun getting a suntan, it is about being slow and being warm as well.



Right now it is raining. That sort of persistent rain that feels like its deliberately not being too heavy so it can put all its effort into just going on and on and on. I'm sulking. This feels personal, a constant undermining, negative drag. I feel cheated. I've been joking about how summer hasn't arrived yet, how we haven't had two consecutive sunny days but it's not funny anymore. I'm fed up with the mixed-up ness of the days. Setting off to work freezing in my sandals, but I will not wear my only alternative - boots - in July? And anyway at some point in the day it'll get so hot and humid, I always have a cardy or a vest or a rainproof that I'm shoving in a bag or rooting around for. This faffing

around makes me feel clumsy, unsettled, irritated. This sense of being cheated is really strong. Partly it's knowing that just an hour and ten minutes drive away my mum's house is in full sun, that Europe's having a heatwave – (I know that's a mixed blessing but it doesn't change how I feel). So in other places summer has arrived and made itself at home, but it still can't get under the bloody cloud that sits on Calderdale. Last year I remember the same growing feelings – it rained so diligently through the winter. It's not a problem for a while, it's just winter, but the day-in day-outness of it starts to grate, I started to joke with friends about why we would choose to live under a cloud, then I started to seriously ask myself 'why am I living under this bloody cloud?' It was the greyness that wore me down. That undifferentiated grey that starts to seep into everything, everything closes in and everything is grey.

But last year there was a day that broke through and changed how I felt completely. I'd gone running early in the morning with a bunch of friends up to Stoodley Pike. It was stunningly bright and clear. Everything was illuminated like stained glass windows with light pouring through. It was crystal clear and the views were so beautiful. It felt like love. I felt so unbelievably lucky to be living here. I took a different route back from my friends so I could just soak it all up as much as I could. When I dropped back down into the valley there was the damp foggy cloud still clinging round the canal. I ran through the greyness of it and thought about the people living on the boats. I often look out of my window at the polytunnel of cloud that sits on the canal and wonder how people can bear living there. That beautiful day changed how I felt though, it completely evaporated the build-up of hurt and disappointment as though some baseline had been reset. Maybe that's why I feel so cheated this year; it's nearly the end of July and I haven't experienced anything like that day. I've had short glimpses of rich blue sky, and soft summer clouds, but nothing big enough or sustained enough to warm me through and burn through the feeling of grey. I'm still waiting to experience sunshine.

Autumn

End of September and already it feels like the autumn has arrived. The nights are drawing in but it's the mornings I'm noticing more. The chill and damp, and the mist over the canal first thing. It's not a lot but enough to notice. And the later dawn. Some mornings I have to drive to work at 6.30am, so I'm already getting up in the dark. I've been feeding the birds and squirrels and I watch them when I get back from work. Soon I will have less chance because of the dark. Today there is some sunshine which I feel I have to grab before it goes. I've swept my chimney and got in wood and fuel for my fire. I'm lighting it every night now, but it won't be long before I keep it in all the time. The leaves are beginning to fall. I usually collect blackberries but this year they are bitter for lack of sun. I might collect some for a batch of jam. I feel like I need to prepare for winter like a squirrel. I have a sense of something quite ancient in the preparation for winter.



What a lovely end of season we've had. The summer has really gone out with those glorious few weeks we had of bright sunshine, and I really enjoyed walking both locally and to work and back in that sun. It was really almost the utopian version of a change of season. It's the one that you always imagine and look forward to but it never really happens, so it was quite nice to enjoy it. I could start to see the trees turning and the colours have been so glorious because, of course, we've had a lot of sun and it's been quite dry, but not very windy, so the leaves have stayed on the trees. The changes have been really lovely to watch.



Me first conker

I saw me first conker
on the ground today.
So autumn's on its way.
And I've seen some yellow oak leaves
on the floor.



I am really sad about the turning of the season! I always hate to see the summer slip away and don't like to feel it getting colder. I wonder if I've done enough with the summer - my baby's first summer - and I'm sad that all the walks and outside activities won't be possible as easily any longer, once autumn and winter come with all the rain. I'm especially not looking forward to colder and wetter weather given that I often breastfeed my baby outside which really isn't going to be possible when it's very nippy!



I went for a quick walk today. Now it seems that summer is really over. It was very autumnal. It was a misty cold day; quite grey but still plenty of light. I really wanted to mark the end somehow so decided to make jam. I made a very small amount with some windfall plums, and took a box with me on my walk in the hope of gathering enough blackberries for one pot of jam. I like these autumn days. I like how the fogging gives a soft edge to things - trees, buildings in the distance. And sound changes too. There is a clarity of sounds. The ground was dry and good to walk on. Soon it will be covered by leaves. The birds are busy feeding and taking the last opportunity to use the light and the abundance of berries and seeds to stock up. It felt calm in the woods. I felt better for taking a moment to appreciate the stillness. I later found enough blackberries to make my one jar. It was hard to find many that were good enough. This really is the end of summer.



Coming round to autumn

A damp and slightly misty start.
 Old Town mill chimney is just visible
 but the hills are blotted out completely.
 This is what I think of
 when I think of autumn.
 White grey damp days.
 Why do people love it as a season?

The tree colours are beautiful in places,
 yet the brown seeds of the mountain ash
 hang in bedraggled drooping bunches.
 But its yellowing leaves
 almost glow in the dull light.

Another tree next to it.
 An ordinary tree as I used to think as a child.
 Not an acorn or conker tree
 but one of those without a special name.
 Yet it has such a range of dark green, gold, orange and russet.
 Its dark wet branches
 coming visible as the leaves start to fall.
 A little rowan tree, thick with bright red berries.
 And there are still flowers
 blooming in front yards here and there.



I have been noticing the colours of the trees. I sometimes think I should try to paint them, but actually enjoying them in reality is such a different experience to looking at a painting or photograph. Out of the bedroom window there are two trees that are rich golds and oranges, two that are almost bare already, a dark green holly tree and others that

are still varying shades of green. In the mirror I can see a slightly hazy sunshine on the yellowing treetops and green fields. The mill chimney is partially hidden by the yellowing green tree in a garden across the road. The trees in the gardens up the other side are still mostly varied greens but the clusters of red berries, brown seeded stems and glowing yellow crab apples give it a distinct autumnal air. I love looking at all of this. I feel so lucky to be here and able to enjoy it.



I am noticing daily now how the light and days get shorter, the nights longer. Getting up for work in the dark, I have a sense of losing time, and an inbuilt inner struggle to be only active during daylight hours. I set off on the drive to work in the dark, towards the east and hopefully the rising sun. Dawn breaks as I climb up and away from the valley. Always the best part of the drive as the landscape opens up and the sky becomes massive. I know I'm going to lose and miss this for the winter months, so I feel I have to witness and store each memory to hold me through, whilst I can. The journey in winter always seems to take longer. The weather conditions change, and I feel the world reduces to the length of the car headlights and windscreen rituals. Today the sun broke through low and red between heavy dark clouds. I could only catch the odd glimpse as the road turned and dipped. But it was enough, and I was happy to see it.



During lunch I managed to get out for 10 minutes. I stood under an oak and watched the leaves falling. There was rain in the air. The odd sound of acorns dropping caught my attention. It was only then I noticed that there were hundreds of acorns around the tree. I can't remember when I had last seen so many. The oak tree where I live only manages

to squeeze out a handful. I bent down to pick up a few. But which ones? There were so many to choose from! All different shapes sizes and colours. (I also thought of the local squirrels thinking the same).



The autumn has been fantastic. I went walking with the children on November 1st. I almost regard this as a bonus time. Clear, bright, sometimes warm days stretching into November make the winter seem a little less endless. I think I appreciate these days more than nice summer days, which come with a whispering anxiety: how long will it last/it will be raining next week/better make the most of it. So we've had picnics and walks in October and appreciated them in a very uncomplicated way – enjoying the moment, unconcerned by what next week might be like. When you can get out in it you appreciate the autumn more, in all its stunning colour. Walking home on mellow autumn evenings is a treat. Even the return of dark nights hasn't been much of a shock. The kids have been excited by spookier evenings, because they've been out in them. Halloween was perfect – still, dry, even a little mist. At the same time we're all preparing for the big chill. But that's OK too. I like cosy winter days – we're getting a new fire put in so they should be cosier this year – but it's nice to descend into them gradually. The lack of endless drizzle (so far) has made everything seem a bit more positive. A proper buffer between summer and winter.



Autumn is the new summer! I've always been very fond of autumn - more so than late summer I think when the season can feel 'tired'; the trees having lost their vitality and look somehow lumpen and spent. A 'good' autumn can have the same energising feel as spring with that range of warmth, cold, amazing light, wet and dry, frost, fog, snow.....

everything really! I associate it strongly with wandering through woods looking for fungi with my parents, and love that musty, organic smell, the dampness underfoot and the clarity of light on a sunny day. From a climbing perspective autumn can be a mixed bag but potentially having some of the very best days out. Good weather in autumn extends the season and that feels like a bonus; conversely a wet one curtails the outdoor fun and makes it feel like the less savoury aspects of winter are already here. Autumn was also the time I started climbing as a teenager and I always get a pang of nostalgia for the Derbyshire gritstone edges and golden birch woods where I took my first vertical steps. This autumn has been amazing but not 'typical' I think. Very dry - and on some days very warm. One day in the South Lakes in particular was extraordinary. Walking through limestone woods, bone dry with the leaves turning to gold and almost hot. It felt more like the trips I sometimes take to Spain and Turkey in winter; that same fragrant dryness whilst obviously not summer. The dry period keeps going on and I realise that I'd settle for this sort of weather more often - a change from earlier years when I was perhaps more bullish about accepting any sort of weather!



November 1st. The last day outside climbing this year (probably!) and I found myself, somewhat incredulously, changing into my indoor gear outside: t-shirt and shorts in November! It was extraordinary, the juxtaposition of 20° plus of heat, late autumn trees and decomposing vegetation. The air smelt of jungle almost - or a greenhouse at the end of a long and productive growing season.



Blue skies and that golden warmth of a good autumn day. What a contrast with the flat, dull day yesterday. Today everything shines and is vibrantly colourful. Sitting in the sun, I am heated through and content with everything; I am purring like a cat! The beauty of the day means that just being outside feels purposeful - watching the birds, reading, sitting by the pond all feel like just the right thing to do. The sun makes me feel energetic. Everything I think of doing - so long as it is outside - seems like a good idea. So different from my mood induced by the dull day yesterday, when I felt stifled, sluggish and negative. Today the power of the sun makes me feel cheerful, alive and lively. Everyone who passes the house comments on the weather and the mutual enjoyment just adds to the pleasure of the day.



Started the day with a run across the fields and along the river. There was mist hanging in the fields and the yellows and reds of autumn shone through and it was lovely. Later it got really warm, like proper summer t-shirt warm, and we went for a walk up the hill. When we left at 3.30pm the mist was creeping back. As we headed north it got thicker, hanging in thick swathes across the fields, the tree tops poking through the top. The sky above was yellow, pink, then orange, as the sun sank, and it was like driving through a dream. Later, the motorway thickened with fog, the lights forming stunted cones of yellow, failing to penetrate the gloom. My son said it was mysterious. It was atmospheric. It was difficult driving. There's a moment, when you're driving back from somewhere in the dark, when you come off the motorway and onto the bypass, you come under the bridge, and the lights of Elland are below you, and it's beautiful, and it's a sign you're nearly home. But tonight there were no lights. The fog so thick there was no sign of them, nothing. Then, at Copley, the fog cleared. A few wisps over the canal, but otherwise bright and clear. How strange.

What a beautiful Autumn day! At this time of the year the sun feels like an extra, unexpected gift, lighting up all the startling colours. There's a nip in the air and a bit of a breeze. I was happy and amused to be putting washing on the line on October 26th! I want to be busy today. The sun means I have to be outside when I can, but that nip in the air means I have to keep moving, be active. I feel really alive when I am outside - but cross and resentful when I have to do inside things and feel I am missing out on the gorgeous colour show. Today we had breakfast outside again. I keep thinking this will be the last time but it keeps coming, this amazing extra great weather. I feel so lucky to be around during the day to be part of it!



Autumn has well and truly arrived. Either side of work the days are dark, I need to wear more clothes out, the landscape has turned red and orange and the air smells of smoke from people's fires. I've also discovered we live in the cloud quite a lot of the time up here, and a thick disorienting fog has become the norm. Dog walks are now often in the dark, though last weekend's clock change means I'll get a bit more light on the morning walks for a few more weeks, maybe if I'm lucky until December, when I'll have to resign myself for eight weeks or so to my annual countdown to the return of the morning light. This week I've been lucky however, treated to a few final spectacular sunrises, which make the 6am getting up time worth it. I was sceptical when my partner bought an expensive new head torch, as we already own several, but actually being able to see some of my surroundings and my dogs, now wearing reflective collars, when out walking in the dark makes it a less disorienting and spooky experience, on a fog free night at least. A benefit of the change in season is that the majority of sheep have now been brought down from the moor to lower fields for the winter, meaning I can let the dogs enjoy running free off their leads across the moor without fear of them chasing the sheep, which is more

fun and interesting for them and an easier, more relaxing walk for me. I was a little sad when we first arrived, that the moor was often off limits for off-lead dog walking as there were so many sheep and lambs grazing there, plus the ground nesting birds, so walks were limited to the lower sheep free fields, where the sheep have now moved for the winter.



Autumn not allowed to fade

Back home
after a week of fantastic landscapes
and dramatic open skies.
Back to the dark enclosed land
of damp and grey.

It didn't help
that the clocks had gone back
arriving home in the dark
early next morning into work.

I felt I had been transported
without acclimatisation
into another country.
And I had.

I am irritated
each time the clocks are messed with.
That gentle adjusting to the change of season
bashed by losing that hour.
Suddenly it's winter.
Autumn not allowed to fade.

Today, the first day of November, was like a return to summer and we went out for a long walk around the local hills to try to soak up as much as the sun as possible before winter kicks in. I opened all the windows for the day to let the fresh air in, and put out what is perhaps my last lot of washing that will dry outside. Despite this I am looking forward to next spring already - only November, December, January to get through and then things will start to feel a little more hopeful with the return of light and perhaps some greenery in February.



Winter

Another week dominated by the weather. The drive to work has been challenging. Rain and flooded roads and fog. All in the dark. It's hard whilst concentrating on the road to notice the sky or the landscape, but I try. I sat in a traffic queue and watched the leaves flying around and dancing on the road. The beauty of dark pylons in contrast to the grey sky. I try to notice my environment. On one journey home I noticed all the colours of lights: the traffic lights reflecting on the wet roads. The distant lights of conurbations from high up above Elland.



Water world

Light struggling to penetrate the grey.
Rain getting on me from all directions.
Small leaks becoming bigger
and the noise of water invading my sleep.

Unseasonably warm.
Talking to people who believe it is a fair exchange for rain.
I disagree.
The threat of flooding again at the weekend
always adds tension and anxiety.

The road by the station
now permanently a stream
difficult to negotiate.

Last night the rain pounding woke me.
It seemed to be coming from all directions.
Eventually it eased enough for me to drift back to sleep
10 minutes later it started again.
I cursed the rain.
It's so constantly there
in so many ways.
Sound and sight.

Today there was some blue sky.
Nice to feel I'm on a planet
instead of some underwater world of grey.
Nearly solstice when we're at the darkest.
Nearly halfway through winter
it's been hard work this year.



Good for nowt sums up the recent weeks' weather. I may have started off thinking about the weather in a insouciant 'I don't really care what it does' way but that's all very well when its mostly dry and it doesn't stop you doing what you want to do - or threaten life and limb! The seemingly relentless cycle of rain, wind and occasional cold has made many outdoor pursuits unattractive. I'm still not too bothered what the weather does if I'm in the office or otherwise engaged but I do like to get out...but not be too discomforted it seems! It's a combination of dislike of getting wet plus the advance of Raynaud's syndrome and an assessment of whether the weather (!) will allow me or the family to do what we want to do.



The mist hangs heavy over the town. Like something huge pressing down, oppressive. Not heavy, but it still traps you in, like someone pushing a balloon in your face. It's not hard but it's still there, blocking your vision, making you a bit claustrophobic.



I think we need everything in our lives. I like having a rainy day, because I can just potter around the house, and not feel like I have to go out, or make an effort, or put any make-up on. I can just stay in the house, and potter around, and do jobs, and cook or look at recipes, and that kind of thing. I'm quite self-indulgent, and I like days like that. And that's what I like about winter as well. Having a day when you're tucked in, and you've got the fire lit, and you can just stay in, and bolt down the hatches.



Bored of rain

Driving to work was hard,
the flooding on some roads hard to see
until too late.

Blasting through water like a speed boat.

I arrive tired and frazzled.

And it still rains.

There are gaps when it isn't raining.

Though brief, I feel I grasp the enjoyment.

The odd glimpse of blue sky.

The stars and, earlier this week, the smallest sliver of moon.

I'm bored of rain now.

A lot of hail today, some snow. Very windy with sudden gusts, some of them full of hail which gets thrown against the windows, cars, houses, like a toddler has taken charge of the weather and is having a tantrum.



We're now in the depths of winter. It's still always dark before and after work, and seeing our home, garden and surroundings in the light at weekends feels special. The dark has now become the norm, and it doesn't seem as alien as it always does in late autumn each year when it first becomes the predominant state. I've adjusted, and now taking the dogs out and riding my bike through dark nights is business as usual. I've become reliant on lights, torches and reflective fabrics, both so that I can see and can be seen. Animal eyes stare brightly back at me in the dark on walks, helpfully alerting me to the location of my dogs and sheep.



I made my first full roast dinner of the year. The first of many. I enjoy cooking, and winter foods that involve roasted vegetables are my favourite. Mediterranean summer food has now been swapped, and festive pickles and cheese can be consumed by the bucket. Food cheers me up when it's miserable outside. Potatoes make me happy anytime.



It should be cold now, but today it's 9° and I drove to work with one of my windows slightly open. It's the middle of December and I've only had to de-ice my car once so far. The cold has not really arrived yet. We did have one weekend of light snow, the first we've seen since moving up here, and the countryside looked magical.

Listening

Last night's storm kept on waking me.
 Rocking and banging into the tyres on the moorings.
 The wind howling and gushing.
 Rain pouring and lashing
 from all angles.
 A new window leak went onto my books.
 I put down newspaper and listened to the dripping.

Rain makes different sounds as it hits parts of the boat.
 Rain on windows lighter than the roof.
 My battery's still causing trouble.
 No water pump.
 Brought water on to cook and wash.
 I left my pots.
 Too tired with the effort and misery of 19th century life.

I yearn for ease and comfort,
 laugh when people talk about loving the olde worlde ways.
 The simplicity of design.
 Candles and wood burners.
 The romance.
 Yep I'm living the dream.
 And I would swap it for economy 7 and 100 watt bulbs
 and a bathroom.

Stayed in bed as long as I could today.
 I checked the fire
 and snuggled under the duvet.
 Listening to the wind and rain
 thought of the jobs I should do.
 Chopping wood was really a must.
 But not in that weather!

Finally went up the hill
 to my friend's house for a bath.
 Got drenched on the way
 but what joy to have a hot soak
 then sit and WATCH the weather instead of being in it.
 To be high up watching the rain and clouds
 without moving about on sea legs.
 I got drenched coming back.

I'm sitting listening to the wireless
 watching my wet coat swing above the stove.
 The boat is moving and the wind and rain
 still bouncing around me.
 Every now and then, the thud of the hull against the tyres.

Bits of wood, plastic bottles
 and random rubbish
 get trapped between the boat and the moorings.
 Plastic is the worst,
 makes a horrible noise.
 It gets squashed as the boat moves.
 Wood makes a hard dragging noise
 and a banging.

All the leaves have fallen now
 And I have a clear view of passing trains.
 I love to see and hear them pass,
 I know what time it is.
 Now it's dark I can see the people.
 I wonder if they see the lights on my boat
 and think about how lovely it is, all cosy and olde worlde.



December was not a good month, windy and wet, making walking and riding hard work. The majority of the time there is a headwind on my morning ride to work, and on days when the wind is strong this makes cycling hard and frustrating, and heavy rain in addition makes it a pretty miserable experience. Each day took extra planning, what else to wear, was it going to be ok for cycling, should I drive, or should I get the train in and ride back when the forecast looks better? The New Year however has provided a couple of weeks' respite, with little wind and dry crisp conditions that have refreshed my enjoyment of the ride.



The wrong kind of rain

Trains delayed and cancelled
due to weather.

Feels a bit pathetic,
an excuse.

It rains a lot.

Maybe the classic leaves on the line.

Dull and grey today
people dressed in black coats on the train
makes me think of Lowry.

I'm very late for work.

My mood similar to the air pressure.



A couple of nights ago I turned all my lights off to fully appreciate the ride up the unlit road home. The sky was clear, full of stars, and the moon nearly full; hills silhouetted into the distance, with low cloud lying in the valleys. This was a rare opportunity; there haven't been many nights this winter where I've felt inclined to leave the house, due

to the cold, rain, wind and dark, but that night we walked to the pub to enjoy the evening's weather.



We've finally had some cold weather and the conditions our new neighbours warned us about have arrived. The roads seem fairly well gritted most of the time. The previous owners of the house said the council pay one of the farmers to grit the roads up on the moor but we've seen the gritting lorry work its way around some of the small windy roads too. My usual route to work over the causeway has a very steep descent to the main road. If it feels like there's any chance of ice I use the alternative route; it's slower and tedious but there's only a small steep section as the two roads meet to worry me if the conditions are icy. The four-wheel drive with winter tyres I bought when we moved up here is proving a good car choice.



Out and up

Normally I don't mind,
but this year the dark and the short days
seem to be cramming me into a small space
and the mist, although it is beautiful,
adds to that.

Maybe it is because of not walking the dog,
so not getting out.

Out and up is what I need I think.

I don't wake up properly until after 8am. It is light and not foggy as forecast. There seems to be enough snow to go sledging. I put on my outer clothes and feel so hot I change my sweater for a zip up fleece. I wear salopettes, waterproof, hat, ski gloves, walking boots and have a thin buff round my neck. I take the sledge that I got on Freecycle and walk through the woods to the field we usually sledge in. The river seems to have changed course again. It now spreads over part of the footpath on the far side as well. There are a few children sledging. The field is not as well covered as I'd hoped. I think there have been cattle here when it was very muddy and the ground has been churned up and then frozen so there are rock hard bumps all over the place. It is quite uncomfortable sledging down. It is not as fast as usual and I never make it all the way to the bottom without falling off. The children are not faring any better. I decide to walk on to find a better places. I join several people sledging nearby. It is excellent. A shorter run but fast and smooth with a pronounced bank at the bottom to aid stopping before the drop to the field below. I play there for quite a while.



A brief return to cold weather felt like a break; a holiday from the relentless damp and was enjoyable for that alone! The first free moment and we were all up at the slopes above the village sledging, snow-balling and building for all we were worth. It melted but I decided to go looking for some more in North Wales and headed out one Saturday to find some 'proper' snow in Snowdonia, climbing up a ridge to the top of the Glyders with ice-axe and crampons. How to dress for severe weather is part of all of this and there is a measure of satisfaction when you get it right!



This time of the year is always generally quite miserable to be perfectly honest. I think it is for most people. It's just the long haul. Sunny clear days like today are great but they are few and far between. By the time Christmas came, and the floods, it was like 'oh my God', and it's just been grim forever, for as long as I can remember. It's always a tricky time of year because everyone's spent too much and eaten too much. And they're not getting enough daylight to get done what they need to do.



I went out for a run one winter a few years back, over the moors, and there had been a phenomenal snowfall. You could run over walls! In fact you could hardly see where the walls were. I ran back down and it must have been 20 foot high, so I fetched everybody, said 'come and have a look at this!' It was awesome. Just incredible. It had snowed a lot and frozen on top so you could quite happily walk over these places you hadn't walked before, and you could just walk over walls. You'd be walking on the top bar of a gate! Really random things you could do. The boys were doing crazy things. They were special days. It lasted for weeks.



Spring

February and already the light is changing. I notice each day how the dawn breaks earlier and the day is longer. The drive to work may begin in the dark but as I climb up the winding road away from the valley the sky suddenly becomes massive and I am greeted by the sliver of light as dawn breaks. I stand in the car park and look at the trees on the skyline and the sky before going into work. Over the last week I've noticed the sky and clouds as the sun sets on my return journey.



Classic spring

Back on our bikes.

Start to come out of hibernation.

Chat to neighbours again.

Play with neighbours' pets.

White wine suddenly tastes nicer than red wine.

We go to Cornwall and unwind.

Fresh air and waves make us happy.

Husband starts to put his washing on the line.

Days get longer and brighter and full of anticipation.

Feeding the birdies.



I've been enjoying the cold bright weather. The colour of bare trunks against blue skies lifts your spirits. Grey can have its charms, but I've had enough of that kind of charming for the time being.

I've begun to feel a bit of optimism about the signs that lighter warmer days will be coming. Tips of daffodils and crocus are appearing in our garden, and sheep are back on the moor, red markings on their backs indicating they will be lambing in a few weeks' time. The prospect of spring makes me feel happier.



Chipping bits off the air

A lovely bright and cold day
with a thick frost
and crystal clear air.
You feel you could chip at it.
Break bits off
and keep them in your freezer
to look at on greyer days.



It feels like a very physical form of relief, when my body picks up the signs of spring. It is like my whole body and soul saying 'phew, thank heaven for that'. Each year, I forget that spring is possible, and that it will come, so ground down am I by the bleak grey misery of January and February, which has been so much worse this year after the floods. It isn't even the daffodils and crocuses, and the lambs in the fields, although I love them all. I think it is to do with the birdsong, and also that there is something in the air – perhaps not a discernible smell – but an evocation of something, that finds me dropping my shoulders, breathing deeply, taking in the air and absorbing the sense of hope, possibility and renewal; a greater lightness of being.



I walked into town first thing in beautiful sunshine, along the canal - geese honking, reflections of sky in the water, pastoral, idyllic. The guy in the shop said he was working until 5pm so he hoped it would be sunny then. I'm not sure what it was doing at 5pm, but by 7pm it was snowing. Well, maybe more like sleet down here, but snow on the tops. We went to Todmorden on the bus and the hilltops were white. A wall separated white from green. Proper snow. April can't make up its mind.



FLOODS

The Calder Valley has a long history of flooding, but on 26th December 2015 it suffered the worst flood in living memory. A massive wave of flooding swept across the north of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and parts of Wales, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. In the Calder Valley, after around six weeks of seemingly endless rain, the last straw was heavy rainfall in a 24 hour period from Christmas Day into Boxing Day. This sent water, which was unable to be absorbed by the already sodden and waterlogged moors and hillsides, crashing down into the populous valleys and swollen waterways below. Hebden Bridge marks the confluence between rivers, canals and other waterways, and the town suffered badly, with flood waters rising to shoulder and head height, inundating homes and the many small independent cafes and shops that characterise this bohemian place, as well as more than 2000 houses and hundreds of businesses in towns and villages up and down the valley. The landscape and environment was transformed overnight by waters crashing down hillsides, turning the rivers into raging torrents, displacing rocks, destroying flora and fauna, uprooting trees, demolishing structures, scattering debris. Many residents and business owners had only recently rebuilt their lives after the summer floods of 2012. Then a couple of near misses in November and early December of 2015 had made people feel twitchy and unsettled.

The sheer scale and devastation of the Boxing Day floods was totally shocking, and created misery for many. But at the same time, in the weeks and months after the floods, we have witnessed the

unleashing of the most incredible sense of community spirit, with seemingly boundless mutual support, as well as the generosity of strangers, and a passionate loyalty to the town of Hebden Bridge and other local communities. This was characterised by rousing slogans and crowdfunding efforts like 'Calderdale Rising' and 'Hebden Bridge bounces back'. However, no-one doubts that the floods changed the atmospherics of the place, and people's relationship with the weather – especially the rain – possibly irrevocably.



In 2012 it came over the bridge all the way down Keighley Road, and it could easily have come this way. The fact that the road was just a river was truly incredible to see. It is one thing to see the bottom of the valley flooded like a lake, but to see a raging torrent going down the road was incredible. A couple of days later, quite innocently, we ended up coming down through Nutclough and we didn't realise that it had all been taped off at the bottom. It was unrecognisable. The valley was so much wider. All the stones in the stream were cream coloured. All the dark mossy stuff had gone. It was a different colour scheme. All the stones that had been there for all those years, in twenty years of living here, had been replaced by this bright stone that looked like it had just dropped out of a building site. It looked really bad. And then the ground level at the bottom – there is a bench that has been standing on the ground for years, but the ground was seat height, and the bench was part-buried. It was like being in Pompeii. I was thinking 'well I came down here last week and I ran past that bench and it was a bench'. You can't really take it in. That millions of years of landscape change had just happened in a day. Totally mind-boggling.



My experience of the 2012 flood was being at work, and feeling completely helpless. I got a call from my daughter, who said, 'I'm walking home from school, and I'm wading up to my waist in water'. And I thought, 'what are you doing?!' It was an awful feeling of being completely helpless. In Manchester it was completely dry, and there was nothing, looking out of the window, and it felt surreal. I was worrying about her safety, and saying, 'Get back to school! I don't know who let you leave school, but you need to get back and get to safety!' Thankfully another parent picked her up and they went up on the tops and back down home. It was awful. The video footage of so much water pouring down the road. It was like a river. Just pouring past the houses.



The whole centre of Nutclough woods was completely rearranged in the 2012 floods. It was completely unrecognisable. After the floods it was just astonishing. It moved everything. Scoured vegetation off it. What had been a valley full of moss and all sorts of stuff growing was just bare rock. And some big stepping stones across the river that had been there forever, as long as anyone can remember, they just vanished. They're just gone.



December 2015. Cumbria flooded, and I was aware how close Hebden had been to that particular band of rain. The ground was saturated. The drive to work was consistently difficult. Water that had gathered on the roads was hard to see in the dark or fog or rain. The moorings were muddy, sodden and pools of water collected everywhere. The river swelled, and the sirens went off, but somehow Hebden didn't flood. Everyone seemed tense. I began to think it was fairly inevitable Hebden would flood, but didn't talk about it, and tried not to think about it, and hoped that it wouldn't.



They tested the flood warning siren in the week. It always seems eerie and laden with historic warning. I resist the temptation to run around shouting 'We're doomed!' I was at a party when it went off for real on Saturday. It was a bit surreal having fun when potential weather drama was happening outside. Fiddling whilst Rome burnt came to mind, but it was the wrong element. It was strange as I walked through town afterwards. All the shops had sandbags by the doors. I could hear the rivers. There was no traffic on the Burnley road. It was quite peaceful. Just the rain and the noise of water.



Absorbing the sound

When the flood siren went off
 I was meditating.
 Such an odd experience, sitting there.
 That apocalyptic noise
 of war and terror
 and registering it in a peaceful way.
 Feeling every hair
 on the back of my neck
 and up the back of my head
 just prickle up.
 And then that sick feeling
 'Oh, those people.'
 If was quite an experience
 just to sit there
 and absorb this sound and what it meant.



More rain and still it rains...and I've had enough of it to be honest. When it is not threatening it is either unpleasant or boring...usually both! It struck me this morning that my first daily experience of weather is immediate and, if not literally in my face, it is the first thing I see. Our bedroom is in the roof and it has Velux windows. As is their wont, they look up into the sky, that is how I first see what the days is like. But of course with skylight windows you hear it too and get a good idea of what is going on before you see it. Downstairs the view is more restricted and more sheltered so the weather is less obvious, unless you make a conscious effort and go and look for it. It strikes me that's this echoes our location in a village on top of a hill; we 'get' the weather here, and often dropping down into the valley can seem like entering another, calmer, less meteorological world. That is until

there are catastrophic effects in the valley, in which case the position is reversed.



Driving to Sowerby Bridge we pass through many large puddles and a couple of mini floods. My grandson loves the spray and I remember urging my own father to make more spray on such occasions. Going through the worst section, which is surprisingly halfway up a hill, the car slows down and I think I am going to stall. Changing down a gear gets us through though. There are workers out trying to clear gutters. There is a flood at the top of the lane. The workmen are clearing the drainage holes that let the water run off the main road and down the cobbled lane. As I drive down it there is a stream flowing down the other side of the road. It skirts the gutters that are blocked by leaves. I wonder if the workmen will be coming down this road but I doubt it.



Boxing Day morning, and our guests go down to look at the town as they haven't seen it much before, and we ask them to buy some potatoes. They return some time later telling us of the floods and showing us their photographs. I have been oblivious to the constant rain over the last couple of days and we haven't had the news on. We look online and see the devastating floods just a hundred yards from our house as the crow flies. Those poor people. We get some potatoes from a neighbour. She saw the park was a huge raging river first thing this morning when she looked out of her attic bedroom window. I realise that we are quite low on fresh vegetables. It will be a while before any local shops are open. No doubt we can survive on cake, nuts and crisps.

On Boxing Day the flood siren woke me up in the morning, and I was suddenly wide awake. It was tipping it down with rain, the flood siren was going off, and I thought 'what's going on?' So I got up and went into the woods and it was madness in there with the amount of water that was coming through. Down at the bottom of the woods where it comes out, where they have done lots of flood defence work, it was just a big lake. I think the flood defences worked there because it stopped the water going out onto Keighley road, which is what it had done before. But they were certainly tested. It is quite exciting and exhilarating to see that amount of water and that power of water - it feels like something really dramatic and spectacular is happening. Then I walked down into town to see what it was doing. At that point the water was a little way up Bridgegate and Crown Street, and it was obviously flooding. It was still tipping it down with rain and it was forecast to carry on. It was obviously going to be bad. I came home and looked at Facebook and people were posting saying 'please can you come and help us move our stock upstairs to higher levels'. I felt like I wanted to be helping everybody, and also I needed to be doing things at home. Suddenly you feel like you want to do everything.



Trapped

The strange thing was
we were trapped.

I was watching on social media
seeing where the floods were.

There was a landslip on Long Causeway
and another on Widdop Road.

Hebden Bridge and Todmorden were blocked off.

That was a really strange feeling then.

I like the freedom of being outside
being able to get in a big space
when I need to.

The claustrophobic feeling came over me.

I could not drive out in any direction,

the only way to get out would be to walk.

If I needed to get out, I couldn't.

Full stop.

A strange feeling, an odd feeling.

Instinctively I started planning escape routes.

I don't know what we needed to escape from exactly!

But thinking, could I get out by that road?

and then over there,

and over there?



My daughters both found out about the floods by seeing it on the internet before they got out of bed. So they knew that we were flooded before they even realised it was raining. I don't think they had been woken by the flood siren.



The devastation was just incredible. The piles and piles of belongings. There was a warzone feeling in the first few days with all the devastation. It was just a shocking thing to be around, and weeks afterwards you still get that shock looking in the shop windows and seeing no floors. My kids went volunteering in the early days and that was the really joyful bit, with people helping each other. It was a joy to see. But I

was really disappointed that the young Muslims didn't seem to get a mention in the press. The Hindu people were fantastic, and the Sikhs were too, and that was recognised. Where we live is very monocultural and it was such a joy to see people coming together like that. But the Muslim youth groups didn't get the same recognition in the press. But that wonderful collective effort almost makes this long slog afterwards harder, because you have that lovely coming together with people there and helping, and then that crunch bit passes, but your shop still isn't open. It's like somehow it's over, but it is so not over. And that depression amongst people who are still fighting all the consequences; reeling from the impact of having to organise all the stuff that needs doing. Psychologically there are so many people that are being hit by that. It is awful, what a massive legacy it is.



The sun shone this morning. The weather warm, yellow and benign. As though it had done nothing wrong. The town looking at itself, assessing the damage. Not just Hedben of course, right across the country. York under feet of water. Here, everything covered in thick mud, and people emptying the contents of their shops, their flats, their lives, out into the streets in huge sodden piles. All ruined. The town turned out in force to help with shovels, brooms, buckets, everyone working together to tackle the mess. And the sun shone, as if to make things better. Really, weather is not in itself to blame, it is a natural phenomenon, it would be like blaming a volcano for erupting, pointless. But today's sunshine felt a bit like the flowers and chocolates brought by an abusive husband in the morning to his wife who is bruised and broken from the night before. Almost a mockery. But really, that is ridiculous. The sunshine made the cleaning up work easier, and for that we should be grateful.



I am tired even when I wake up. Having looked at so many flood pictures and not entertaining anyone today I go down to the town hall to offer to help. I am asked to go up the canal with someone and check that all the canal boat people know what help is available and are OK. We have a form to fill in for details of anyone in need of help and leaflets to hand out. We walk along the canal where we can and along the road where the bank is not passable. The Canal Trust has been out fencing off dangerous sections. We see that people at the river end of the streets have had water three feet deep in their houses. They are clearing out. It is so sad to see their belongings on the pavement waiting to be taken to the tip.



We set out up the hill through the woods. The higher we go the windier and wetter it gets. Higher still and the rain blown onto my face is positively painful. I put on my hat under my hood and that protects my forehead. I also put on my gloves which means my hands are warmer but it is more difficult to get tissues out of my pockets. I keep one in my hand as the wind is making my nose run. I have run out of dry tissues anyway. Inevitably people are talking about the floods. Many of them have been helping most days with the clean up. This walk is not the enjoyable escape into the countryside that I hoped it would be. I'm fed up with seeing water streaming through walls, down fields and across roads. It is muddy everywhere but at least my feet are comfortable, warm and dry.



David Cameron's wellies

I didn't watch the news a lot.
I saw clips and bits now and then.
To begin with it was focused on the army
and David Cameron in his wellies.
But the coverage that people want
is about the amazing community spirit,
and how we're fighting back
and how we're working together
and the kindness of people.
That is starting to come through in the news.
But it didn't, to begin with.
And the Muslims were hardly mentioned in the news.
No one even mentioned all the many Muslims
who came to help,
and gave so much time and effort and care.
That was an 'interesting' political choice I thought,
in the news coverage.



What a difference a week makes. Pontifications on the ability of the weather to interfere with my hobbies now seem a selfish luxury compared to the destruction and misery brought about by the Boxing Day floods. Residents of our village, by virtue of geography, escaped any serious effects but our community extends beyond the bounds of the village and the whole mood and vibe of the valley has taken a heavy blow in recent days.



Because of us

We've been aware of climate change
for a lot of years.
But this has changed
what I feel about the weather.
Normally whatever it's doing
it's there and it's natural.
There's part of me that tries to tell myself
I like getting rained on or being cold,
because it's real
and I'm part of the planet.
and this is what the planet's doing here at the moment.
It's natural.

And now I don't think it is anymore.
It's not happening because of the planet anymore.
It's happening because of us.
This isn't just a natural system anymore.
This is a messed up system.
And this is what we've done.



After the floods our relationship with the weather is bound to change; no longer, at worst, a thing to grumble about if it causes mild inconvenience, but a threatening presence as we experience its more devastating effects and anticipate those yet to come. We tend to forget easily enough if past events become relatively distant but perhaps one of the realities of climate change will be to change perceptions of our weather climate - a necessary change in all probability but one where the long term, comfortable relationship with a largely benign companion sours and changes for good. The divorce can then go either way: a permanent dislike and mistrust or, more constructively,

a new respect and acceptance of the changed reality? In the weeks after the floods it feels like there's a nervousness around as people anxiously look at the skies and check the local news when it starts to rain again – and rain again it has! A new vocabulary is being used in everyday conversations: hydrograph, grip-blocking, land management and, increasingly, climate change. When the weather is changeable - miserable even - but free of inconvenience, it's a lifestyle choice but when it brings suffering and danger it becomes a more solid and threatening presence. It assumes a persona and not one we like that much.

**The time before**

A mild autumn.
It seems like The Time Before.
Since then there have been the floods,
and there have been other things.
Christmas, David Bowie dying, other things.
It seems like the world's a different place
than it was in the autumn.
There have been grey days, short days.
Not oppressed but feeling hemmed in.
which I don't think I normally do.

It doesn't seem like a memory of autumn
it seems like a memory of summer.
Beautiful weather, walking into the evenings.
Lovely low sunshine,
mists hanging across the fields.
Incredibly beautiful.
Ethereal mist became thick fog on the motorway home.

In memory it is a gradual move
from bright September
to this dark, grey place in January,
and maybe that mistiness was
part of that journey.
I don't know if that's really the way it was.

I like the bright lights and colours
against the darkness of winter.
Christmas lights
nice coloured jumpers
bright shiny stuff against the grey of winter
makes it not seem grey.

Clear away tinsel, clear away Christmas
New Year is a fresh start.
Cold and frosts.
I kind of like that freshness.

This year it's been more difficult
to find that joy against it.
This year has been more grey and hemmed in.
So much mess left after Christmas.
Getting to that new, clear fresh start.
Doesn't quite feel I've got there.
But I'm fighting to get there.



MAGICAL AND REDEMPTIVE WEATHER

Sometimes weather can seem to pierce through the mundane and touch us in magical ways. A shaft of light, a cloud formation, the ethereal qualities of air and colour, the scents of autumn, the cacophony and drama of a storm – these can create moments in us that are potent and alive with meaning. Sometimes the magic happens in particular seasons, or times of day – in the secret early morning time, or the dark of a winter's starlit night. Magical weather can make us feel connected with the environment in ways that feel elemental, visceral and primeval. We experience such moments not cognitively but more directly with our bodies, spirits and imaginations. Weather, perhaps like nothing else, can be redemptive – so that we can't help but forgive it for its sins, or see beyond our own everyday troubles and trivialities in its presence. Calder Valley weather can be challenging, but it can also create the purest and most brilliant moments of rejoicing.



There was more light today. The feelings and emotions brightened the day, clarified the autumn air, seemed to bring more illuminance, more lux, more light into me. It is not the same; different and specific emotions filter, amplify and shift the sky, make the light loud and full. An autumn day, just the summer side of the equinox tipping point, we had a journey and goodbyes to do today. The transitions of the season, the transforming trees, the warm shifting light all provided the setting for a day of change. Each familiar view today, the autumn coming to the valley, weighted with valediction, stored and fixed for the time away, the times apart. The soon-to-come partings gave a significance to each long view as we crossed the high Pennine plateau, each turn opening a new chance, a fresh opportunity. I felt each angle and plane of the sunny landscape was weighted and potent.



A lovely bright day walking above Todmorden and Hebden Bridge. A bit cold on the highest parts and needed to wear a hat to prevent earache but great to be able to see the views and feel the warmth of the sun. White shorn sheep, fluffy bog cotton and rock-strewn green hills against a blue sky. All seems right with the world. Sat in the garden when I got home to recover and get the last of the sun before it disappears from it at 6pm. The washing is dry which is always good.



I'd had a full on week. Two early starts, two dawns and two sunsets. The first dawn was just a slice of light through the rain. A flock of birds flew like a black shoal of fish in front of me. Perfect. The second had the colourful warning of rain, which hadn't quite arrived. I sketched it when I got to work. The rain was held heavy in the clouds with a fray edge of dark grey. It looked beautiful and I wanted to hold the feelings it gave me during the stresses of the day.

I was on my commute over the moor in the dark when I caught the sun rising in my rear view mirror, there'd been a little snow and it was a cold crisp start to the day. On a whim I pulled over in a lay-by at the brow next to the entrance to the wind farm and went for an impromptu little walk before work. For that half hour my usual cynical nihilism fell away and was replaced with a feeling of what the religious would call transcendence.



The sky was beautiful today. I was inside, but in various rooms, through the day, looking out of the window at the sky and winter trees on the horizon, there was a clarity of light which you don't get in summer, or then it is different. Blue, some pink, some gold. The stone of Hebden Bridge shone gold. Glowed. In the evening the moon was bright, a thin crescent, but the whole of the moon was visible, black, mysterious, in a clear sky of stars.



I was lucky to get a day in the mountains just before the Lake District flooded. I was rewarded with a day of exceptionally beautiful weather and landscape - ones which are few and far between in terms of impressiveness, quality of light and atmosphere. There was new snow on the tops which were cold and icy. Cloud came down occasionally but with clear skies around and strong sunlight. Cold, monochrome, landscapes, limited to a few metres' vision one minute then giving way within seconds to brilliant light and huge views; the cloud and snow giving scale to what are, in reality, very small mountains. And in the distance, the sea. Painfully bright to look at but adding to the hyperreality of the light and landscape.

This morning was utterly beautiful. The valley was full of mist, which gradually burned off, in stages. So from a vantage point you could see parts swathed in white mystery, black chimneys and winter trees silhouetted, stark against an ethereal backdrop, other parts glowing clear in warm sunlight, and in places the sun shining through the mist, making beams of light amongst tree trunks. The sun, when it came, had warmth in it. The trees in the sunshine shone green with lichens, yellow with reflected sunlight. We went for a walk up through the woods where mist still filled the valley and sun shone in from above, and the trees stood firm, their beech limbs dark against the columns of sunlight. A day for rejoicing.



Since we returned from our holiday to England it's rained pretty much non-stop. Three days, three soakings - why do we live here? Then this lunchtime while I was out, the sun came out to join me, and all is good with the world!



The City Pond

In a lunchtime
I'm forced to leave the building
in search of food.
There's the lovely city pond in Bradford
I ab-so-lute-ly love it.
It brings so many different people
together
to share that space.
Phenomenal. An incredible place.
To think they were going to put a shopping mall on it!

When you see it
 on a really sunny day
 not even a sunny day
 full of kids.
 I love it when the Asian women are rolling up their pants,
 getting in there.
 It's so enticing.
 Sometimes I get this little window
 in a lunchtime
 and by the time I'm coming home it will be raining
 or so it seems.



Earlier in the month we had a string of those temperature inversions we get so often up here. These are magical mornings, often initially foggy and then the fog lightening, dispersing and suddenly lifting from the village but often leaving the valley still full. I was leaving for work on the first of them and saw the cloud in the valley and quickly headed down to look and met with another admirer who asked me how they formed. I heard something interesting on the train later that week that made me think: two passengers saying how unusual these inversions were and I wondered if they lived in the valley rather than on the tops where it's a common site to see the inversion 'in action'.



A tree temple

Up here
 in the mornings
 when the sun's above the trees
 on a sunny day

you get these beams of light
 coming through.
 It makes it look like a temple
 through the trees up here.



Mist filling the valley, everything is white, beautiful, atmospheric, unreal. It feels as though you can't trust anything except that which is near. Everything else is uncertain, doubtful, might not even exist. Not a day for long term plans. Walked up the hill. Cars come out of the stillness, apparating from white, lights first, their engines dulled and purring. Children's voices at Old Town school cut through, straight across the valley, sharp and slightly menacing. Houses, trees, animals, walkers, are all dark shapes which come into focus slowly, hazed with white, eventually seeable and coloured. But that is momentary. They vanish back, are swallowed into whiteness, return to unreality. Today, we exist only where we are, can only live in this one moment. The mist turns us into Buddhists.



The atmospherics of fog

Fog this morning.
 Damp chill.
 Typical autumnal morning.
 Not much air pressure
 fire took ages
 to wake up.
 Hope it stays in.

Train late

waited outside looking at the trees.

Noticing.

Fog light is quite bright,
holds colour.

Like being in a cloud.

Everywhere looks more emotive somehow.

Atmospheric, I guess.

Shapes and shadows,
blackish grey outlines
trees and buildings
loom out.

Then into work.

and from out to inside head.



Today the weather provided me with a much needed metaphor. Up there, with views in both directions, quite a strong breeze, the clouds were moving fast, and I could see the bad weather coming in from the east. I could see the rain in the air, the yellowish tinge to the clouds. Could see how fast it was approaching. But with that perspective, the hills the same as ever, it was possible to see it as just weather, that it would come but that it would also go, and the hills and valleys will still be there after, and there will be sunny days to come. As in weather so in life. Then coming back down the hill, sleet in the air, there was a rainbow: only faint, but there. The symbol of promise. It made me remember how much I love it here.



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An engaging and atmospheric collection that appeals to the natural poetics in how we live the weather.

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