

The space we keep.

Marine and Natural History Photography

Courtney Walker-Thompson

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MNHP - Chapter One
Courtney Walker-Thompson
Skovbørnehave. 2026

MNHP - Chapter Two
Courtney Walker-Thompson
Beyond the Classroom Walls. 2026

MNHP - Chapter Three
Courtney Walker-Thompson
The Weight of Gilded Armour. 2026

Project Overview: The space we keep.

Skovbørnehave and both *Beyond the Classroom Walls* and *The Weight of Gilded Armour* explore the ways time spent outdoors can positively impact wellbeing, mental health, and personal growth. Across these projects, I examine how connection with green spaces and natural environments can provide respite, reflection, and resilience in a world increasingly dominated by technology and societal pressures.

Skovbørnehave and *Beyond the Classroom Walls* focus on children, highlighting the importance of stepping away from screens, exploring green spaces, and developing habits that nurture both mental and physical wellbeing. Inspired by Forest Schools and the Scandinavian Skovbørnehave model, the project emphasises outdoor learning, play, and independence, showing how exposure to nature can counterbalance the challenges of classroom environments and modern technology.

The Weight of Gilded Armour shifts the lens to men’s mental health, exploring how adults cope with emotional burdens and societal expectations. Through activities like wild camping, allotment work, and football, the project documents strategies men use to regulate emotions, find calm, and reconnect with themselves in unpredictable and overwhelming circumstances. It reflects on the quiet strength that emerges when individuals reclaim space for reflection, movement, and grounding outside.

Together, these projects highlight the transformative potential of the outdoors. They reveal that whether for children or adults, time in nature fosters resilience, mental clarity, and emotional balance. All of these projects serve as a reminder to reclaim our connection with green spaces not only to care for the world around us but also to care for ourselves.

Skovbørnehave

Freddie is a different child when he is outdoors. Like me, this is his happy place. He loves the freedom of the woods and cannot resist intertwining his hands through the brambles (ref. “What are these little green things?”), Constantly asking questions and wondering why things are the way they are.

He dips his hands into the icy stream (ref. “I wonder what’s under this stone?”), watching the small creatures scatter as he lifts stones to see what lies beneath. He touches every tree he passes, trying to figure out what type it is (ref. “How old is this one?”), often asking questions I do not have the answers to. The one he returns to most is, “How old is this tree? Is it older than you?”

His attention is focused and full of curiosity, completely absorbed in his surroundings. He makes sure to touch everything and take in as much as he can, engaging all his senses. Snowdrops remind him of snowflakes, and at one point he tells me he could stay out here forever (ref. “These remind me of snowflakes” and “I could stay out here forever”).

Freddie also likes to make things while he is outside, often imagining situations where he might need them. On this occasion, he wanted to create a sharp, pointed rock to attach to a stick, so we could find food and protect ourselves (ref. “This might take awhile”).

I completely understand his sense of wonder in these moments. His senses are stimulated and alive. Being outside with him allowed me to reconnect with my own childlike curiosity, asking simple, instinctive questions and enjoying time spent outdoors with others (ref. “Time together”).

Children’s lives today are increasingly stressful. Alongside rising academic expectations, social media places growing demands on their time and attention. Many face pressure from multiple directions, including peers and performance. Spending time outdoors offers a simple and accessible way to relieve this, helping both children and adults feel calmer, more present, and less overwhelmed.



“What are these little green things?”



“I wonder what’s under this stone?”



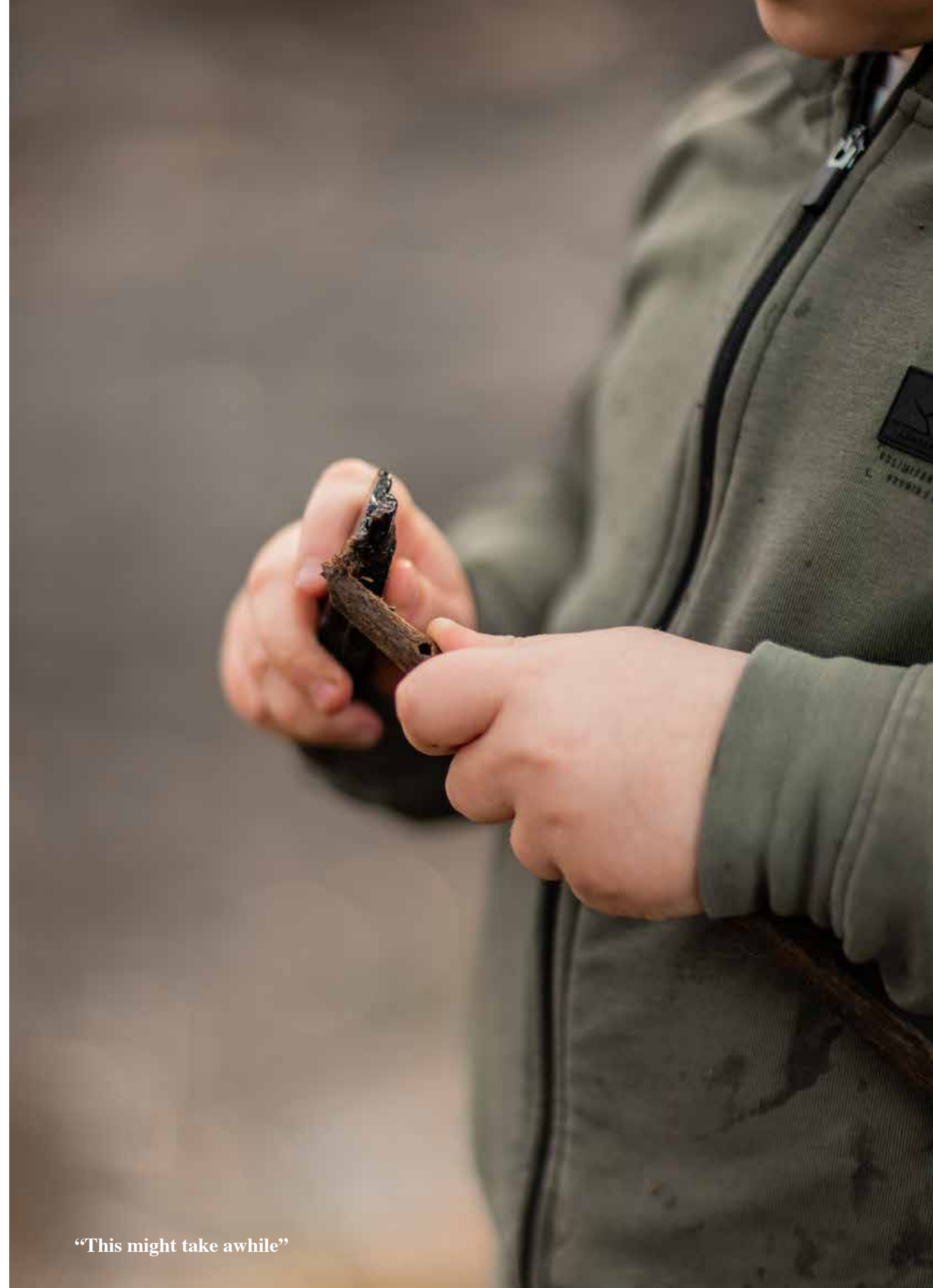
“How old is this one?”



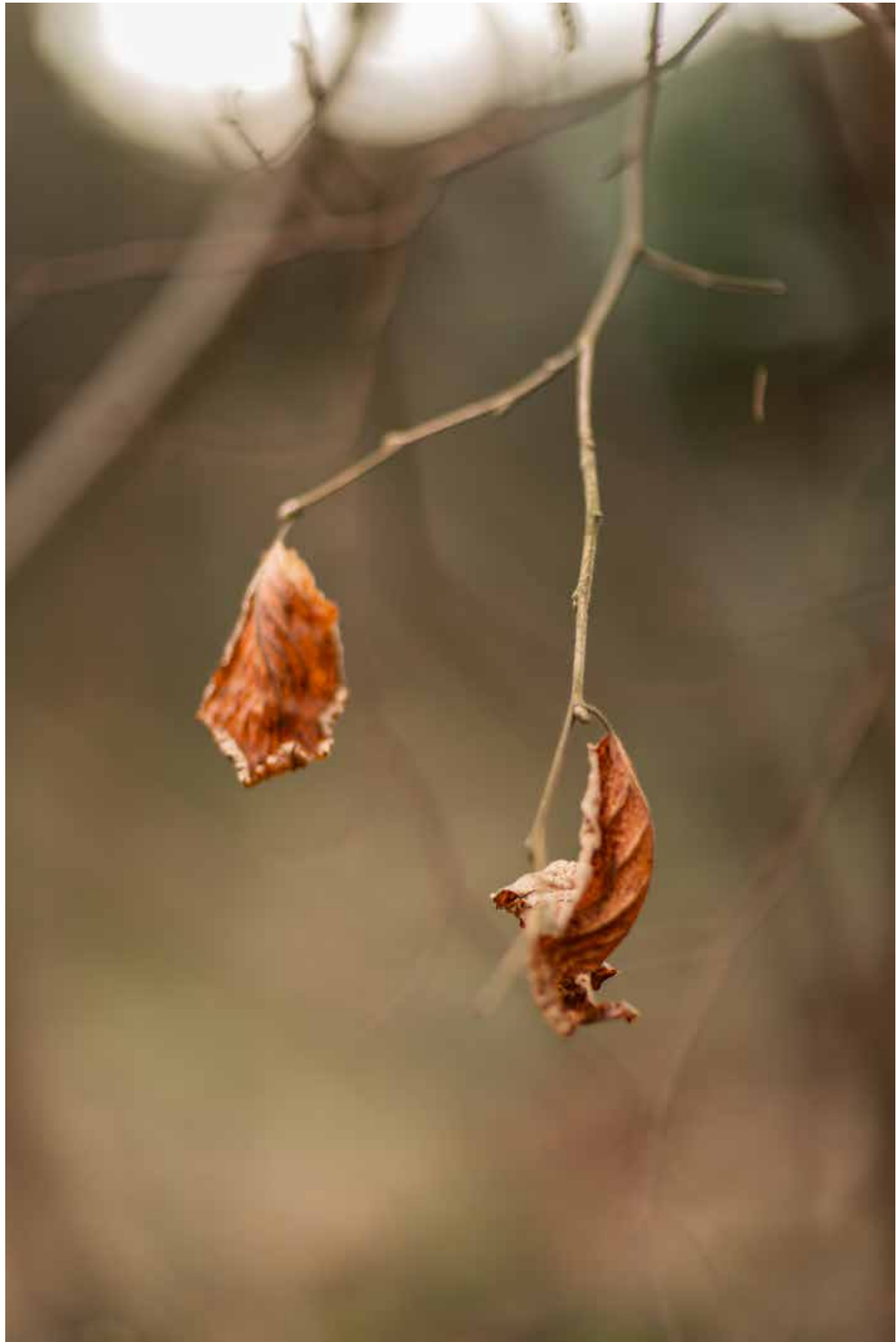
These remind me of snowflakes.”



“I could stay out here forever”



“This might take awhile”



“Time together”





Beyond the Classroom Walls.

I am currently sitting in a pub, surrounded by 25 odd strangers, with my laptop open on my lap and headphones in, my favourite band playing. Despite this, I am still getting distracted by social media on my phone and struggling to concentrate on editing images or adding to this PowerPoint document.

It makes me realise how much of a hold technology has on us. It affects our attention spans, creativity, imagination, and even how we view the world and form opinions. It shapes how we perceive things and absorb knowledge.

I am no better than anyone else. As a 21-year-old surrounded by technology, I am probably the last person most people would listen to on this matter. However, I want to try to make a difference by creating images that encourage people, and their children, to get outside, step away from screens, and enjoy and care for green spaces. The least I can do is use the medium I know best.

My younger brother is a good example. He is eight years old, has ADHD, and struggles in a classroom environment due to a less stimulating and structured environment. He can easily become consumed by technology, but he also has access to a large green space at home where he can explore and spend time outdoors.

In developing this project, I have researched Forest Schools and the benefits they provide for children. My initial inspiration came from looking into the Scandinavian Skobørnhave model, which emphasises outdoor learning, independence, and connection with nature. These approaches reinforce my belief in the importance of giving children space and time to engage with the natural world.

This project is not just about encouraging people to care for nature and the future. It is also about taking care of themselves. Learning to enjoy time outdoors and finding a sense of calm is important. I want children to build that habit early, because life can be difficult, sometimes overwhelming to the point where it feels like you are drowning. Being outside can offer a genuine breath of fresh air.



Beyond the Garden





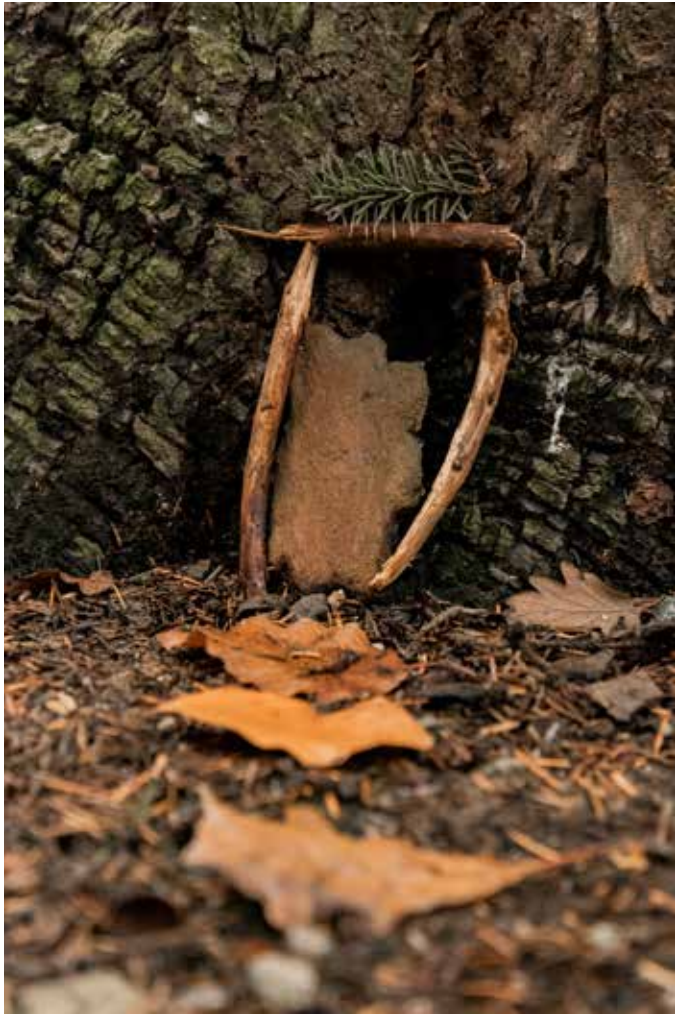
Adventure Assist



Addiction



To Dream



To Create



To Collect



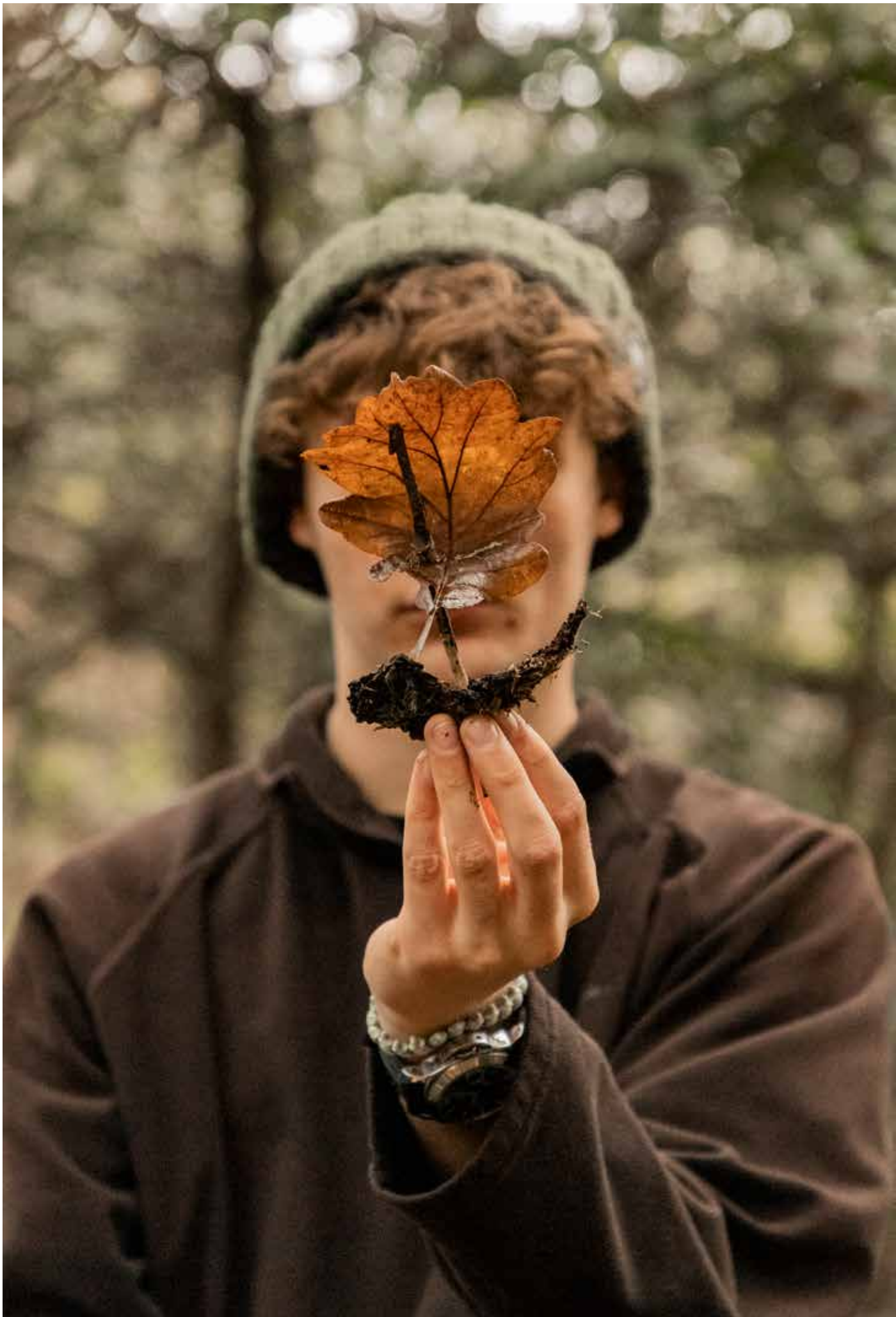
To Imagine



A Little Hand



Nostalgic Moments





Moments Like These



Quiet Moments

Treasure



Curiosity



Treasure Hunting



Re-Build

The Weight of Gilded Armour.

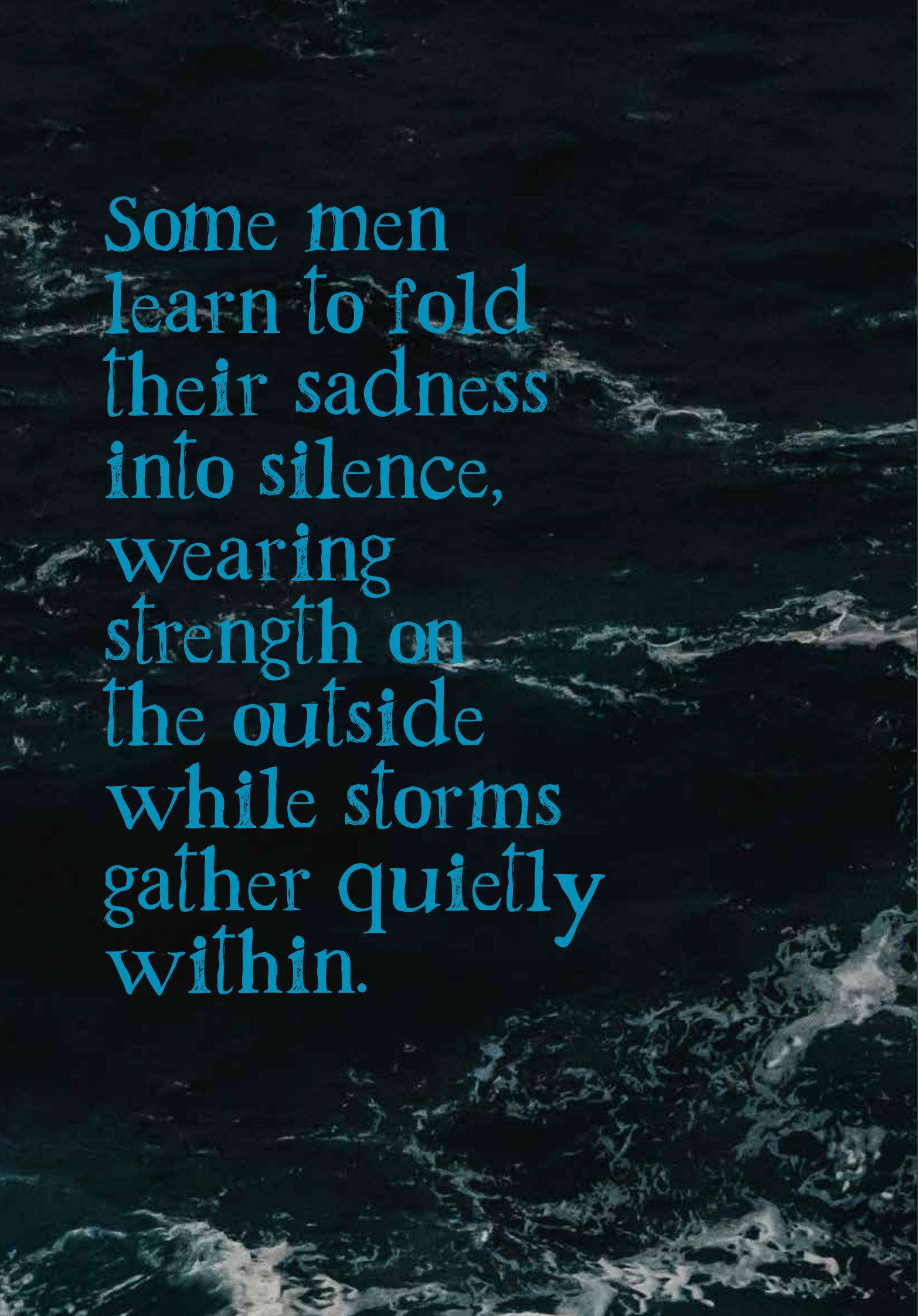
You often hear others say blue is calming and peaceful, which I remember having a lecture about in my first year. We were told most people go to the beaches to find this sense of calm that can be found “in the blue”. It is so vast, constant and slow moving.

Blue is calm.

But for me, the big blue isn’t calming, nor does it spark much curiosity. It is daunting, out of control and unpredictable. It scares me with how unknown it is. For me, the blue is sad and washes back upsetting memories, making me feel small, not calm. It is so vast and open, completely unknown, I find it quite terrifying.

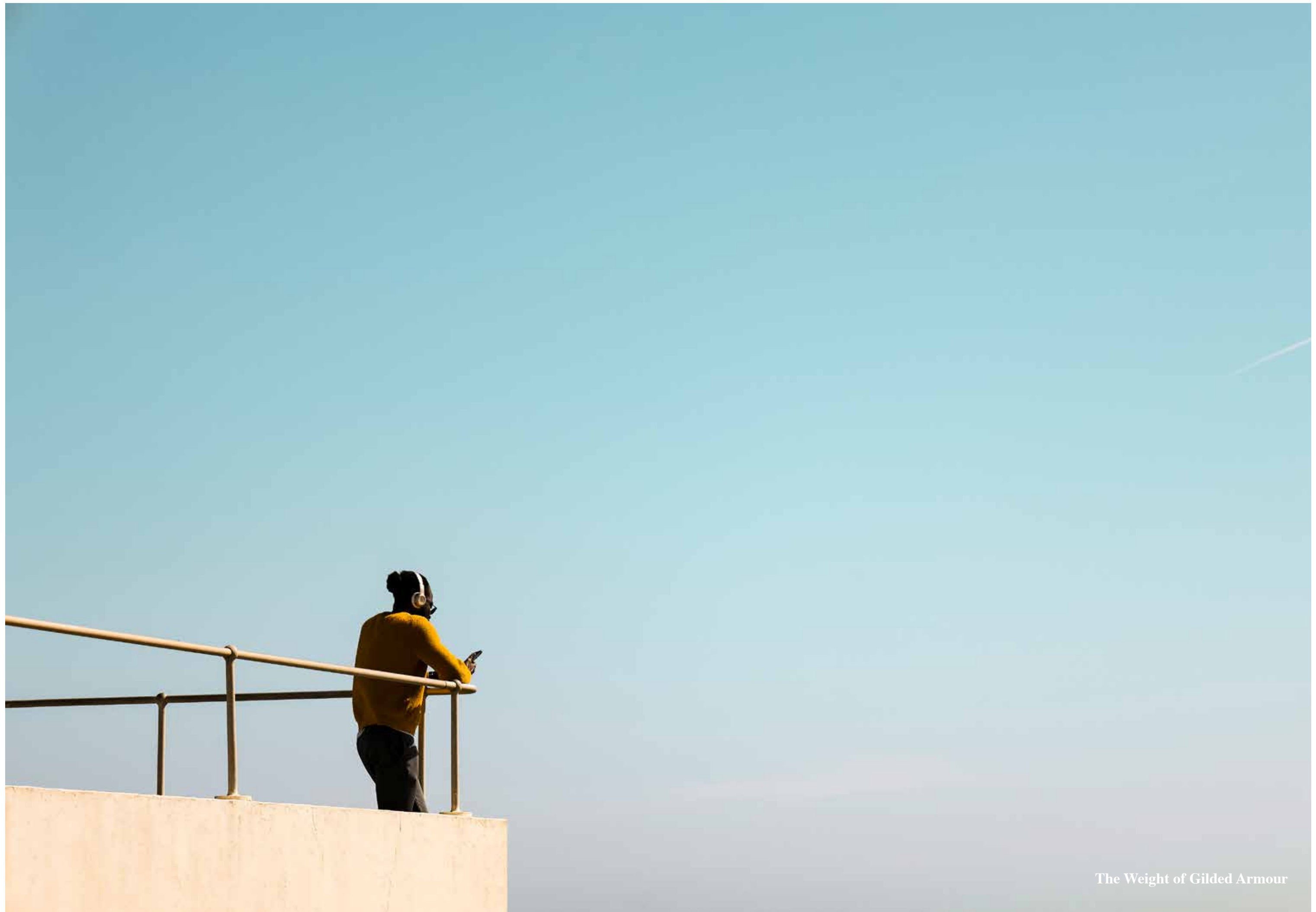


I think,
I prefer
green.



Some men
learn to fold
their sadness
into silence,
wearing
strength on
the outside
while storms
gather quietly
within.

This project explores men's mental health, showing activities some men do to regulate their emotions and prevent further issues occurring. From wild camping and working on an allotment, to fast paced football matches, all activities as such are done by the individual to ground themselves, finding something that makes them feel calm. Reminding us all to take a moment for ourselves when the world can be such a chaotic and unpredictable place, and to find our calm colour.



The Weight of Gilded Armour

“Surround yourself with things that make you feel free”



One step at a time

Consuming thought



The silence is louder out here



Escape



It doesn't always have to be messy



Not everything needs fixing, but a gentle touch



Support is there even if you don't think you need it



Take a step back before you charge forward



Distance, not answers



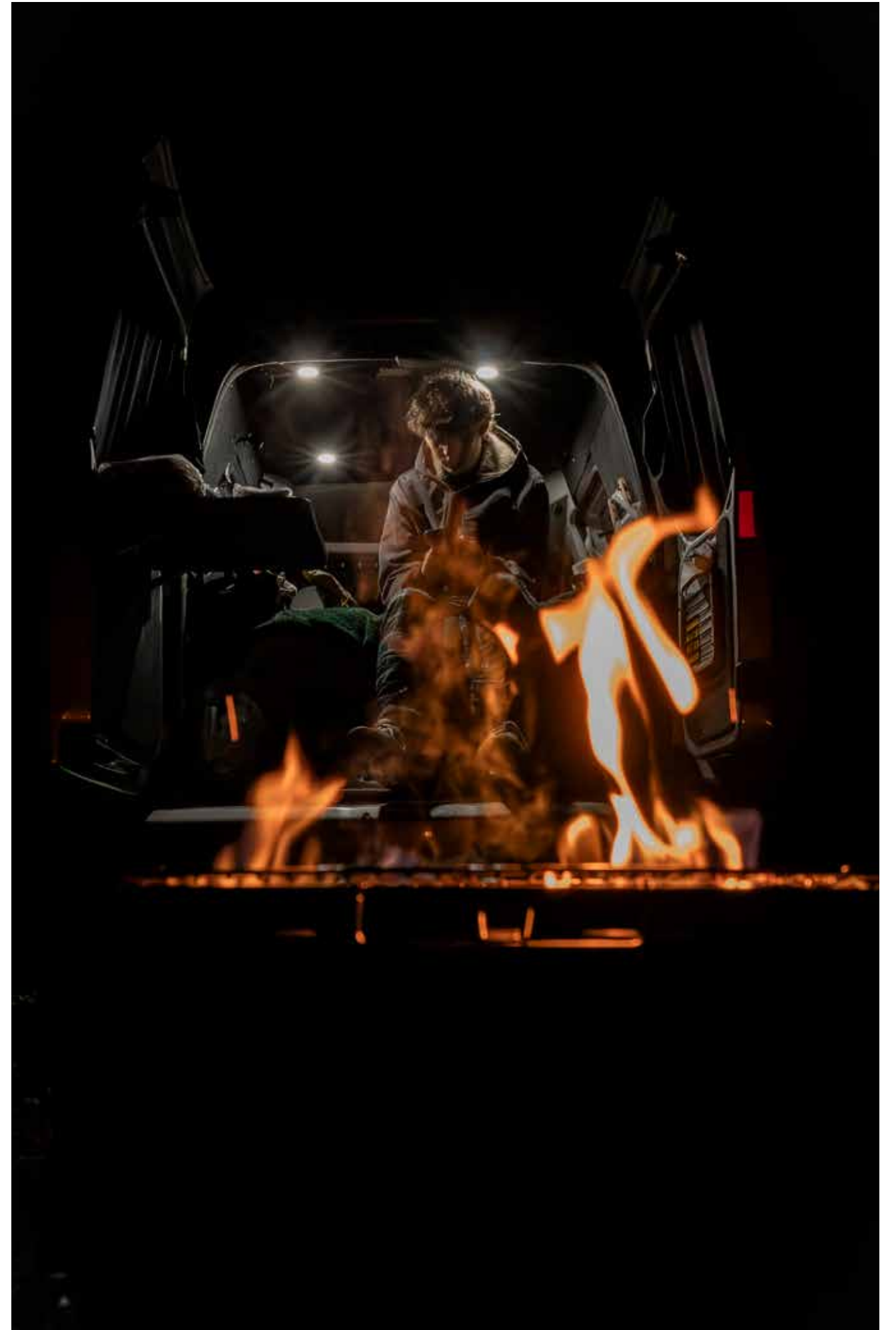
The armour can be heavy alone



Sit with it



A Helping Hand



hello

Courtney Walker-Thompson



07860 792 426



courtney.wt@hotmail.com



Instagram



Portfolio

