

Sit with us for a moment and remember: Summer

Thank you for joining me on this bench today.
We haven't got long.
I'm sitting here with you now.
I've always been here.
Watching this place.
I've seen it change. Like the seasons.
I've seen the water ebb and flow.
I've seen the leaves come and go.
I've seen images of this place.
I'd like to describe them to you.
I'd like you to imagine them with me.
Perhaps you could picture yourself there.
When they were taken. It is 80 years ago.
It is Summer in the 1940s. The sun is out.
After the second world war.
The air raid siren on the building has fallen silent.
You can hear laughter behind you. Up the hill.
They are sitting on the grass between lectures.
A group of students enjoying the sunshine.
Sunbathing on blankets and jackets.
Sleeves rolled up. Socks rolled down.
Some in deckchairs. Their feet on the wall.
A man laughing. His friends smiling at the joke.
A woman has her legs outstretched. Hoping for a tan.
A student on his own is lost in a notebook.
Others talk. Some seeking sunshine.
Others seeking shade.
There is a couple lying on the grass.
Underneath the tree to your left.
They look across the water.
Past the people boating.
Past the park benches.
Down the path. Through the gates.
Past the statue of the man who built this.
Towards their future.
Another couple walk towards you.
Into the sunshine. Down the hill.
Heading for a bench where we now sit.
They will hold hands here.
And imagine a future when anything is possible.
Maybe they will return when they are older.
And when they are gone a bench here.
Will remember their names.
Like we are remembering them now.
It's time to visit a new photograph.
I'd like to describe it to you.
I'd like you to imagine it with me.

To your left, over the lake.
Past the ice cream van.
Past the playground.
Where the gallery is now.
There used to be a lido.
Built in the 1920s.
It was the biggest in the country.
Children flock from miles around.
To swim in the water.
Pumped from the lake.
But over time it becomes too costly to run.
Too cold to swim.
So they close it down.
This image is of the last season.
It is summer in 1980.
It is overcast.
Only a few bathers left in the water.
Three serious swimmers.
Doing lengths of the 300 ft pool.
And one boy on his own. His back to camera.
Pulling his goggles down. About to hold his breath.
Ready to go underwater.
The bell tower, a campanile.
Casts a shadow across the water.
Rippled by the waves the boy will make.
There is a woman on the poolside.
Perhaps his mother.
Holding his towel. Folding his clothes.
Keeping an eye on him.
Waiting to go home.
Shivering in the shade.
The photographer stands behind her.
Documenting the scene.
The water is blue. The sky is grey.
This is the last season.
The lido will be filled in.
The bell tower will be knocked down.
The campanile stood where the gallery entrance is.
The tramline runs across where the pool once was.
The boy in the photograph has now grown old.
But maybe he comes back here. Sits where we are now.
Looks across the lake and remembers that moment.
The blue water, the grey sky, his mother... waiting.
Thank you for joining me on this bench today.
Sit with us for a moment and remember.