

Resilience

A Year in Pictures

*A personal journey,
through the pandemic*

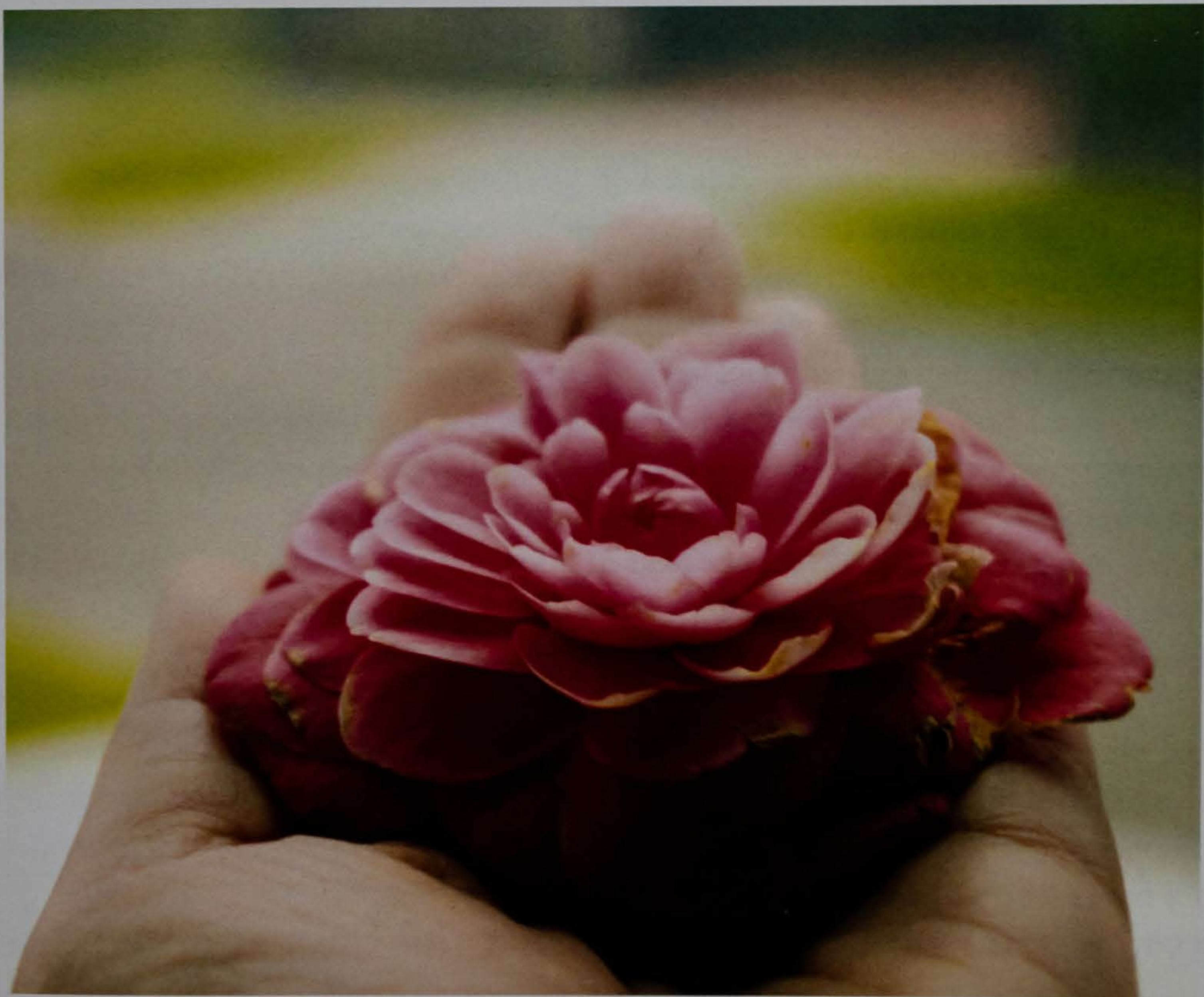
SAM TENCH

Dedications

*For everyone in Australia who has battled with the grim realities of 2020.
You were never alone.*

For my family, for whom I continue to hold close and keep safe.

*In memory of family overseas. COVID-19 took two family members from us
but they will forever be in our hearts.*



About Me

"Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again."

— NELSON MANDELA

Following a lifelong secret struggle with a malicious and debilitating eating disorder, in 2019 I made a potentially life-saving decision. I'd felt disconnected for too long; and life was passing me by. The time to surrender was now or never, it was time to let go of my false illusions of well-being and address an underlying feeling of a life without purpose. At the age of 38, I had no idea why I existed. I thought I was a waste of space. I wanted to know what I should be doing with the life I'd been given. To find out, I needed to find a sense of inner strength. A sense of inner toughness to confront and silence that relentless, compelling and destructive voice that had lived inside my head since childhood.

That bad voice was my eating disorder. It was time to make him squeal in excruciating pain, just as he had made me squeal for years. However, I faced one major difficulty. Only I could be responsible for making this happen and this would be no small task. How could I find the courage? After all, this voice had always told me *I was the weak one*. If that wasn't enough, I was taunted by daily messages that insisted that everyone else was superior, thinner, smarter, insert any other words here you like and I can guarantee they will apply. Nothing about this decision would be easy; I was confronting my ultimate challenge. A challenge I wasn't even convinced I was up for. As a first step, I knew I would have to succumb to fear and face the truth. In February 2019, I admitted myself into The Geelong Clinic and its medically endorsed inpatient program that treats eating disorders. For 42 days and nights, my life would be on constant watch by others and I would be confined to the white walls of a hospital.

Following my discharge from the clinic, I was fortunate to receive a new Nikon camera from my family as a gift. My husband, Giang, had always believed I had an eye for photography and that I appreciated the work of others. Little did he know how significant this gift would become. I began taking photos immediately and soon discovered a new healthy passion, filling a void that had long been missing. My name is Sam, but you may

know me as '*The Picture Healer*'. I own a website of the same name that showcases my photography and writing. I began creating the website in late 2019; and despite the difficult learning curve, I have persisted, knowing this was the right thing to do for my well-being and potentially, the well-being of others.

The Picture Healer went live in early 2020 and gave me what I hadn't been able to find elsewhere; something to lose myself in, to feel passionate about, and a platform to reveal my developing photographic skills. Writing and photography have led me to a safer and far more productive place mentally. The site has given me a sense of life and purpose. *The Picture Healer* was never just about me though. My biggest hope was that by helping myself and sharing my journey with the world, in turn, I might also inspire and be a positive influence to others who find themselves in challenging positions. I would feel my experience was worthwhile if I could help just one other person see that they deserve more out of life than hospitals and force-feeding. If I could help another person with an eating disorder see that a new path is possible, I would feel content. There are many positive roads out of the black hole that is an eating disorder; you simply need to find something that works for you.

When starting *The Picture Healer*, I intended to write solely about my experiences of overcoming an eating disorder. However, the events of 2020 caused my journey and focus to take a rapid turn. I began writing about the newly enforced way of life that we all had no choice but to accept. As I witnessed the spread of COVID-19 worldwide, each week, I wrote about how the pandemic was impacting not only my life but also the lives of those around me. Writing became a type of coping tool and therapy. I developed a voice and wasn't afraid to share the messages that rang true to me. Crucially, my healthy-self voice was beginning to be heard.

Through my blogs, I passionately expressed my views during a time of unrivalled change on a global scale. Meanwhile, despite the challenges presented by lockdown, I continued to take photographs, and my subjects began to reflect something very different from my usual photography style. Increasingly, they demonstrated my ongoing persistence, and a growing sense of resilience in the face of adversity. The word resilience is significant. Not only has my sense of resilience become stronger, I also now have the consciousness to identify it as having being part of my life for a long time.

In the 2021 English Oxford Dictionary (online), resilience is described as:

the ability to be **happy, successful**, etc. again after something **difficult** or bad has **happened**:

Other related words;

flexibility, strength, ability to last, sturdiness,

strength of character, toughness, adaptability, buoyancy, ability to bounce back.

This brings me and you to where we are today. Resilience defines this book, my life's path, probably your life's path; most definitely all of our life paths throughout 2020. We've all faced similar obstacles, we've all been climbing the same steep, obstacle-riddled mountain. The path has been tough. But through perseverance we start to feel a sense of happiness and accomplishment. Why? In climbing and dodging obstacles, we have been dipping into our own reserves of resilience, all year long. In fact, each of us who has emerged on the other side has done so thanks to our sense of resilience. We've fought each day, despite probably wanting to throw in the towel many times. We've had good days and a generous serving of bad days. We have got through. This is resilience, the ability to keep fighting even when it feels impossible to do so, and this is the defining link that underpins this book and 2020.

The Picture Healer was my voice throughout 2020. My photographs logged my self-growth and progress during a period of isolation that could have caused a reversion to my eating disorder's prison. You don't need to have had an eating disorder to relate to my story; we all experience our own struggles and battles. If you identify with any thoughts and feelings that I express here, I invite you to connect with me at www.thepicturehealer.com

A few words about Sam

Originally from the United Kingdom, I immigrated to Australia at four years of age with my parents and brother, and settled in Geelong, Victoria. I've lived in Geelong ever since. Now 40-years-old, I am married and have two children, aged eight and six.

Dictionary reference; <https://www.lexico.com/synonyms/resilience>



Introduction

"Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning how to dance in the rain."

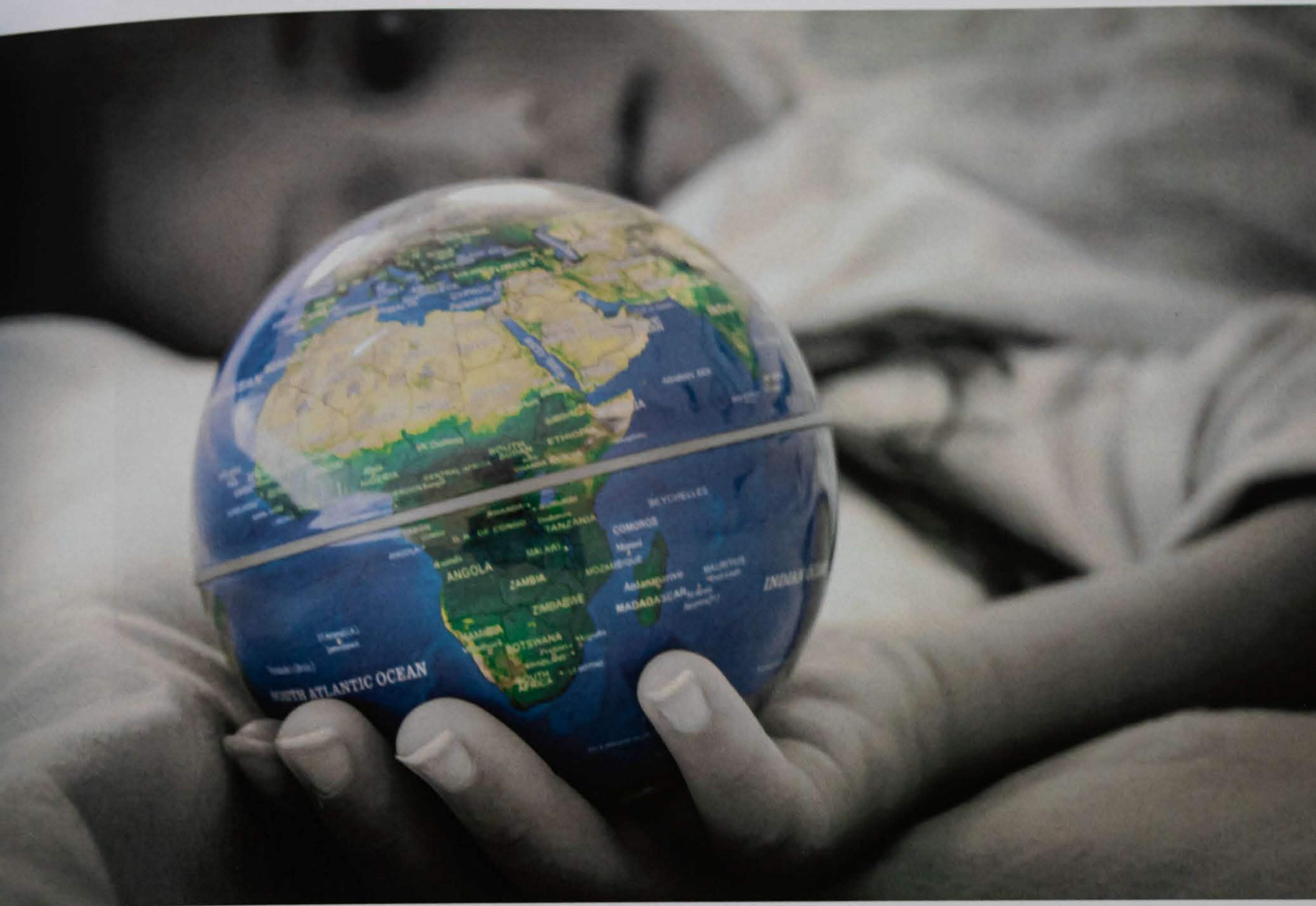
— VIVIAN GREENE

2020 was a challenging year for the entire world. Closer to home, in Victoria, Australia, horrendous bushfires in East Gippsland preceded the onslaught of COVID-19. I spent much of 2020 worrying profusely about things like my children's interrupted education and staying safe. I asked myself why this year unfolded as it did and began photographing random subjects in and around my home with no real sense of purpose. I mean, who wants to see pictures of reflections shining on my floor?

Then, on New Year's Eve, 2021 an idea came out of nowhere. I wasn't prepared for it, but something within me knew this was an obvious step to take. This idea would present a massive challenge that I had to take on.

But first, a second opinion. Despite thinking I might be onto something; I didn't trust my judgement. Wasting no time (thank goodness for social media), I went straight onto Facebook Messenger and wrote to my friend and mentor. June Alexander agreed that this was a task I had to take on. Boy, I had no idea of the magnitude of the path I was embarking on!

On New Year's Eve, 2021 I stumbled upon an idea to produce a book in relation to the events of 2020. Similar to a bolt of lightning, the urge struck me with such force, it was impossible to ignore. This was something I had to do. Yet, I didn't want to produce a book that was solely about me and my experiences throughout 2020. Rather, my intention was to create a book that everyone could relate to on some level. Seen through my eyes, this book is a journey of survival and strength of character. It showcases Australians (or Victorians to be more precise) bouncing back following a year none of us saw coming. Few of us can claim to have come through unscathed; we've struggled and we've made mistakes. *Resilience -- 2020 The Year in Pictures* is not merely about my year and how I dealt with the uncertainties. Rather, this is a reflective book, looking back at the obstacles we've all overcome in a short time. My journey is your journey and I hope you will identify with my experiences.



Looking back at life in 2020.



Once thriving restaurants struggled to stay afloat. Many businesses had to diversify by offering take-away and shop-front coffee outlets to keep their doors open for business.



We captured the magnificence of the moon.