

Stay Safe, Stay Alert, Stay Writing!

Issue 20

May 2023



WRITES

The visible hand of friendship

Bill Petherick

A Great Man for Scotland and the World

**It's Eurovision
Time!**



**Film Review:
Serendipity**

**The Station
Cat**

'Growing up in 60s

OCH - AYE - THE - NDO!

**IPA Section UK Writers Group
and The Global Writers Forum**
www.globalwritersforum.co.uk



Content

The 2023 Prize Drabble Competition	6
The Jaws of Freedom	7
Game On!	11
A Question from My Son	13
Bill Petherick (1948-2022)	16
Auschwitz with Anxiety and Anger	25
It's Eurovision Time!	27
The British Oversea Territories Entry	29
Film Review: Serendipity	30

Content

Serendipity	32
‘Around the World in 80 Ways’	34
Africa	34
That It Should Come To This	40
Growing up in the 60s	42
Tales from Madeleine`s Patch	49
The Station Cat	53
Quirky Quicks	54

The Editor Writes.....



Welcome to the new look 'Writes' with a big thank you to Helen Myhal, our new graphic designer, for helping to turn this around into a more usable format. This is our twentieth issue of amazing writing and as we enter our fifth year of existence the intention is to re-start the magazine on a more regular basis: it has been a long time returning but it does take an incredible amount of my time and effort, however enjoyable!

But the group, a combination of the IPA Section UK Writers Special Interest Group and The Global

Writers Forum has grown strongly of late with the new website mastered by Andy Gregory proving a driving force. The union with 'IPA Writers Spain' and the welcoming of new members from around the world means we now exist in five continents with the new itinerary-based fortnightly zoom sessions promoting some very inspiring writing. And debate. For those who find it an easier form of instant communication, we now have a WhatsApp group: 'IPA Writers Group and Global Writers Forum': please join if it suits you. Thank you to everyone for making all this happen, a great collective effort and I hope you are as proud to be a part of it as I am.

There is much to celebrate, much to say; many new books have been published since Writes 19 last Christmas, we have many new members and have of course said farewell to others, dear Bill Petherick being one of them and his obituary appears within these pages with a retrospective revue of some of his wonderful contributions. How much is he missed!

Activity also takes place that does not appear within our usual outlets but is well worth a mention: I receive invaluable publishing assistance for example from Clare Christian, formerly of Red Door Publishing; knowledge that I am very keen to share with the group. Two of my current pieces of work have benefitted in this way:

'Twenty-Two Letters from Ukraine', another supporting effort from my publishing house, has with her guidance been typeset in India. She has also recommended the 'eBook Partnership' for its distribution online: I will be reporting on the success or otherwise of both these ideas in a future issue. Another work, a facsimile production of a truly staggering set of a Yorkshire farmer's first-hand diaries has benefitted from her advice.

We relaunch the 'Fifty Shades of Blue' project this month, a sad casualty of recent times. If you have not contributed to this book, please can I ask you to consider it; we have writers from around the world contributing and it should be an important collection for policing services globally, tackling much needed mental welfare issues.

Other activity sees our seminar series continue at IBZ Gimborn in October, concentrating this year on written English usage. Three of our members are attending a writers' course in Mallorca in November with other gatherings of members occurring outside the general collective and this is brilliant: anything that promotes the written word has to be beneficial in my view. If you do anything writing wise, please feel able to share it with us: we would love to celebrate, to benefit, to enjoy it all. Gimborn is coming up quickly now so we hope that some of the group will attend again this year. Please join us.

Finally for this issue, there are exciting plans afoot: we are looking at the possibility of delivering an IPA Arts Festival at Portmeirion in North Wales next year; we will be the prime movers but it will embrace all of our collective creativity: many of us have more than one set of feathers in our quiver.

Most of all keep writing friends, as I said recently: the ability to write is a gift, a privilege, a joy: we should not waste one word!

Best wishes as ever to all,

David

The 2023 Prize Drabble Competition

drabble ^{verb}

ARCHAIC

1. make or become wet and dirty by movement into or through muddy water. 'clip off the down at the tail to prevent their being drabbled' (OED)

or in the case of writing...

2. 'A **drabble** is a short work of fiction of precisely one hundred words in length. The purpose of the drabble is brevity, testing the author's ability to express interesting and meaningful ideas in a confined space.' (Wiki)

Entries for this year's prize Drabble Competition closed on 1st May but we have had entries that are exciting, thought provoking and interesting. These have now sent anonymously to the independent judges as we go to print. They will score these equally independently and return their scores to the editor who will collate them and announce the three winning entries. All the entries will appear in the next edition of 'Writes'. The last winner was Doz Hughes:



The Last Celt · Mar 15 · 1 min read



Winner of the prestigious Gimborn Drabble Writing Competition 2021

We all look for the hero within us; heroes in those around us, but in the wildest most terrifying times of our lives, we often lose our way. Trapped in a life that is born to die, we hide in the shadows of our darkest dreams, where heroes elude us. So, stumbling in our blindness, we hesitate and trembling like new born kittens, we wait impatiently for life's light to shine upon us.

We must step beyond the distorted reflections of our timid dreams, break free from death's sentence, struggle out into the light and rise above our fears.



The Jaws of Freedom

by D. Osbourne Hughes

Holidaying on an island in the Indian Ocean, the health and safety briefing on the first morning was memorable for only one line, 'The most dangerous thing on this island is a falling coconut'.

The island had a 'House Reef' and I was eager to explore its sights, but I had never snorkelled in the Indian Ocean, nor on any kind of reef. On the first afternoon, I walked to the top end of the island and waded out into the warm water. Heading towards the gap in the reef, I began to snorkel.

It was incredible; the sun blazing through the crystal-clear ocean, reflecting off the sand and coral, rippling and glistening all around me, like some psychedelic light show. I continued toward the 'Drop off', the place where the reef drops into the deep ocean. Something caught my eye, and at my side, I saw a lionfish. Smaller than I imagined, but very beautiful; swimming along, much the same as me, minding its own business.

'That's poisonous...isn't it?' I questioned myself.

It was the first of thousands of different tropical fish I encountered that holiday and not, by any means, the last danger I came face to face with. Entering the coral reef was like swimming in a tropical fish tank with a gaudy, glittering, phosphorescence of living colours swimming all around me. My senses were overwhelmed and I paused momentarily to take it in. I could see I was only on the edge of this incredible sight. My eyes searched the furthest reaches of the reef with a myriad of fish swimming all around me.

Edging forward, about halfway down the gap, protruded the rather large head of a Moray Eel, which seemed to comprise of nothing more than a great set of jaws containing countless razor-sharp teeth. Again, I paused, evaluating the situation; I had watched, 'The Deep', with Jacqueline Bisset, so I knew what Moray Eels were capable of. The huge eel certainly looked capable and more to the point, it was looking capable in my direction. It took several minutes before I moved, with no small amount of trepidation and I gave Jaws a wide

birth; so much for falling coconuts.

Emerging onto the far side of the reef, two things struck me. The first thing was the incredible expanse of living coral, teeming with every type of shell and fish imaginable, and so much more. However, the second thing gripped me more; the 'Drop off'. Out in front of me was a blue/black nothingness; like a television screen before you turn it on.

Of course, it isn't 'nothing', I am nobody's fool, I had watched 'Jaws' and I knew what was out there, in the deep. Staring straight ahead, I contemplated my position, when, from out of the huge television screen emerged a large black eye staring back at me. It was like a scene from 'The Lord of the Rings' as another eye illuminated, and then a third, and a shoal of six giant silvery Tuna appeared before me. I didn't know if Tuna were dangerous. They certainly looked scary enough.

Slowly disappearing into the murky mass of water in front of me, my fears subsided slightly, but I pondered the wisdom of swimming along the 'Drop Off' that day, in fact, any day. Maybe, I would spend my time lounging by the pool, soaking up the sun. Remaining motionless, my eyes began to search for further dangers. Looking down the sheer underwater cliff of the 'Drop Off' into the dim expanse of the deep ocean, something moved. Focusing, I could see its slender body swimming, apparently without effort, towards the bottom of the cliff, thirty or forty metres below me. Meeting the cliff, the seven-foot shark began to swim up the drop-off directly towards me.

The thought of running crossed my mind several times in the next fleeting moments, but I knew, no matter how large my fins or how fit my legs were, the shark would easily catch me, with a flick of its tail and mouth wide open; after all, I had seen 'Jaws'.

So with gathering lucid thoughts running through my mind, I stared menacingly back at the shark, but it just continued on its path of certain confrontation and no matter how I reasoned with myself, I was about to have a close encounter with 'Jaws'.

Most people prefer safety, comfort and the 'Easy Life' as opposed to the exhilaration, and freedom you feel on the drop-off. I constantly wonder why some of us yearn for a life cosseted in swaddling from

birth to shroud. I do not remember learning how to walk, but I remember the almost palpable exhilaration of both my children taking their first steps, surrounded by table edges, hard floors and fireplaces. The freedom they gained from the risk they took was evident in their excitement for more. I do remember the hard grass and later, the course tarmac, as I vigorously peddled my older sister's bike, but the sense of freedom I gained, learning to ride, outweighed any cuts or grazes to my knees and elbows.

In my teens, at school, I was walking arm in arm with a girl I liked, when the bully of the 'metalwork queue' came up behind us, trying to trip me, poking and prodding his constraints on my life. Overcoming my previous fears and the restraints I had allowed him to place on me; I swiftly dealt with his tyrannical reign. Queuing for Metalwork, on his return to school, he tried to establish his dominion over me once more, but it only took a few words to end his rule forever.

As a police officer, I have constantly stood up for individuals as they have struggled between their desires for freedom and overcoming the fear that keeps them bound, often only to watch them crawl back into their tyrannical torturer's castle.

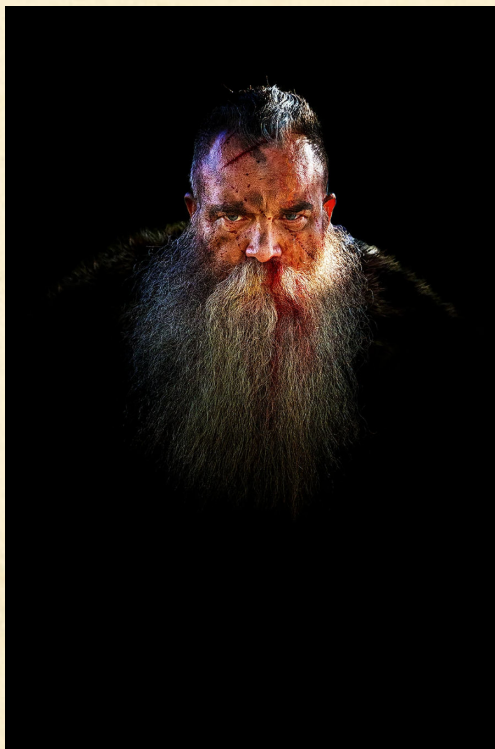
Following a particularly vicious attack on someone's freedom, I once said, 'A large enough pack of Hyenas can take down a Lion; it doesn't make the Lion any less a Lion.' It gave him just enough impetus to step forward with some resolve, but a few days later, he walked back into the Hyena's Castle.

Increasingly we seem to live in a time when too many individuals are fragile and overwhelmed by their apparent vulnerabilities. It is a time of exaggerated fear and helplessness in the face of, sometimes even the most trivial of threats or dangers. We have grown used to celebrating mediocrity, where quitting is praised as a strength. When we submit to our fears, instead of rising above them, all too often our vulnerabilities rob us of precious freedoms and if we give up our freedom we submit to someone else's set of rules as we resign ourselves to living in someone else's castle.

I could have stayed on a sun lounger next to the pool instead of facing down 'Jaws' as he swam towards me, but he soon realised I was not his prey. I could have sat around the pool with a drink in my

hand instead of feeling the exhilaration of three large black-tip reef sharks circling around me. I could have paddled in the shallows instead of swimming in the deep ocean, with barracuda, turtles, angelfish, parrotfish and yet more sharks. The sight of eagle rays and manta rays swimming out of the blue/black nothingness is a memory I will carry with me forever.

Overcoming my fears has brought me some incredible experiences and facing my fears has brought me much freedom on the 'drop off' of life. If we do not have significance and freedom in our lives, have we ever really lived? Overcoming our fears, we often buy our freedom with a little bit of courage in each step we take.



**`The Last Celt`
by D. Osborne Hughes**

Game On!

On the dark art and mysteriousness of fly fishing for trout...

by Mark Thompson

'As no man is born an artist, so no man is born an angler.'

It was that most famous fisherman, Sir Izaak Walton, who, in 1653, recorded these prophetic words in his legendary work *The Compleat Angler*. I know of no other book that has a hotel named after it.

Perhaps never a truer word was written, for there are moments when the fly-fisher, a man or woman of singular determination whose flexible rod only the day before had landed six fine fighting fish and seemed to possess a magic all its own, has the following day such bitter disappointment, and perhaps more use for that rod as a curtain pole to hold up a light pair of kitchen gingham, or as a tool for fishing lost keys from behind a hot radiator. For this, dear reader, is a dark art, and no child was born to the dark arts, save perhaps for Aleister Crowley or the Marquis de Sade.

In truth, like any dark art, its mystery is a creation of devious minds. Created by those whose purpose is to cloak a simple mechanical process in an unfathomable complexity, all coated with pixie dust...

Truth? Let's try to be truthful here, a trait which fishermen and fisherwomen are renowned to bypass, as 'the one that got away' is clearly based upon a mathematical formula; something akin to length times girth multiplied by whisky, gin, chilled beer, or other intoxicating refreshment, dependent on the season of course. As Izaak himself observed '*Angling may be said to be so like the mathematics that it can never be fully learned.*' And therein this fanciful knight of the realm sprinkled a first large handful of dust and began the process of coating the art in magic. Truth, that arbiter of honesty, in the world of fly fishing can be difficult to determine for, as most notable feats require a witness, this is often a solitary pursuit, and by its lone nature that truth, or any grain of it,

is in the memory only of the tale-teller. For any fish that gets away is, without doubt, a spirit-fish, possessed of limitless cunning, guile and quick-witted artifice. A creature, in fact, with supernatural powers.

For how can a brown or rainbow trout be anything other than magical? What other than a supernatural being could cause the fly-fisher, a person often of great merit in other fields, to rise at some ungodly hour in winter and summer, to head out before birdsong, trudging to a lonely spot on a river or lake bank as the sun rises up through whispering trees, and smoke-like mists float in curls above the water. Then, with trembling frosted hands, this love-struck being, for dear reader it is love, slots together a hopeful rod, to which is fastened a reel of washing line, to the end of which is added some thinner line, apparently intended to fool the fish that it is invisible, and to that is further added something which no right-thinking observer could believe would attract or cause any fish, cunning or otherwise, to believe is food. And let's face it, would you dear reader, be enticed by something which carries the title 'Woolly Bugger', 'Kaufman's Stimulator' or 'Booby Nymph'? They sound like something eleven-year-olds would snigger at, so how is the trout, the supernatural magical being of incredible guile and cunning, going to be fooled by such ridiculous things? Seconds later however, the spell-bound angler, full of anticipation, launches the line to drop a fly where the fool believes a fish may be.

Four hours later, without so much as a sniff, and a good two hours past the fly-fishers promised deadline (for there can be no going home with only a story about 'the one that got away'), and with a final last pleading cast, the line whispers out through liner rings, flies forty feet across the water, and the fly lands softly, silently, without a splash, as delicate as any eye surgeon's lance, and, as our desperate fly-fisher draws his line gently tight to take up the slack, the fly suddenly disappears and the rod, the magic wand, bends double as the fly-fisher, taking up the fight, whispers 'Game on!'

A Question from My Son

by Anthony Granger

Chris: What was your dad like when you were a child?

This is a good question, Chris. The problem with growing old is that you think you have a memory of something, but it's actually repeating what someone else has said. My early years from birth to around the age of 7 were spent in Worcester, South Africa. Then we moved to Southern Rhodesia where my father was born. My father married late in life (36)! My older sister Melanie Anne was born in 1948 (she died a few years later from a hole in the heart), and he was 40 when I was born in 1951 and my mother 26. Dad was slim and wore black rimmed glasses and had wavy hair. I remember more of my mother growing up. Dad was away a lot, but we had marvellous family holidays, mainly at Palmiet, in the early years. Dad was born Denis Rhodes Granger, and named after Cecil John Rhodes who was a friend of his father Joe. Rhodes had persuaded Joe and his brothers to go to Rhodesia and they were true pioneers.

Joe Granger was gassed at Ypres in WW1 and was told on his return that he had to live near the sea and not at high altitude and the family had moved to Cape Town. Dad, however, was sent to boarding school at Wynberg Boys High in Cape Town as a youngster and matriculated there in 1928. He then did legal articles with C & A Friedlander attorneys before starting his own practice in Worcester, Cape. He was very active in theatre and wrote his own plays, and he met my mother Isabeau Luckhoff, a reporter on the Worcester Standard newspaper at the time, when she auditioned for one of his plays.

Living in Worcester was idyllic for a young boy and I would often wander off into the veld behind the house for hours on end, exploring. We had an old retainer named 'Oupa Charlie' whose job it was to follow me at a discreet distance to make sure I was OK. Once, in a huff, I said I was off to join the Foreign Legion (age 4), and my mother made me a pack of sandwiches tied in a dishcloth which I



carried at the end of my pole. Off I set and Oupa Charlie duly followed me. When I returned my father asked me why I was back and I said, 'There's no jam in the Foreign Legion!' which became a bit of a standing joke in the family.

I guess both my father and mother gave me quite a bit of leeway; but Mother was always the disciplinarian. I cannot remember my father ever beating me - he as a lawyer used the powers of persuasion. So, when my mother used to say 'Just wait until your father gets back - he will give you a good spanking' for whatever misdemeanour it was at the time - I kind of knew it wouldn't happen. Much the same happened with my own boys - Joy would issue the same threat and then confront me with it when I arrived home.

Spankings seem better in the heat of the moment rather than a dish eaten cold.

I think another reason was because of my really bad stammer, picked up from the boy who lived next door, that my folks went easy on me. However, just like Max and Theo and Zara before me, I had learned how to push the boundaries. My folks got a call one day to say I had been seen riding my tricycle downtown (age 3) and had they lost me? I was exploring as usual. I guess my abiding memory of my father was that he was mostly immersed in reading and was not to be disturbed. He had a photographic memory and would learn long masonic texts for his lodge.

Later, when he returned to Rhodesia in the late 1950's he had the largest law library in Rhodesia. He was kindly and generous and very much a family man. Later at high school he would drive the 70 miles just to watch me play rugby, and immersed himself in everything I did. He had played provincial cricket and rugby in South Africa and was a Bisley shot, amongst other accomplishments, and always encouraged me with whatever I did. I did cause him concern I guess from time to time as a child - for example, when I let the handbrake off the car and it careered down the hill into the Gamsu's swimming pool one Sunday afternoon with me as the driver aged about 4 or 5. I managed to get home and crept back into the house and pretended to be asleep when the police were called as the car had disappeared. I never did own up to that then and my father would always put a brick under the tyre thereafter to prevent a recurrence! Nowadays we have photos of everyone recording every occasion but then there was not very much to record life events. Precious memories.



The Global Writers Forum

The IPA Section UK's Writers Special Interest Group

Chair's Report of the **5th Annual General Meeting** *Held by Zoom on the 12 April 2023*

What a momentous year! Despite the shock of losing our wonderful friend, Bill Petherick in the autumn and a convergence of conflicting demands upon our members, we have ended our fifth year on a real high. With the brilliant response of our members to the interventions of Andy Gregory and the committee we are now well-set to expand our involvement in 'all things writing'.

Before recounting the successes of the year as well as some of the challenges, I will take a few lines here to record my own appreciation of Bill.



Bill Petherick (1948-2022)

Bill was a giant of a man, a larger than life, huge-hearted member of ours, a compulsive writer, a caricaturist of incisive brilliance, a collector, a sage, a wit, and a friend. He came to us with a lifelong background in the IPA, he was the rock of IPA Irvine, its prime mover and the man IPA Scotland looked to for knowledge, advice, and help. Bill was a former President of Section UK and his photograph lines the stairway at Fox Road together with all the other past Presidents to remind all who pass of his time here amongst us. As a writer he was a novice when he joined us, but a would-be poet of persistence and incisive social commentary: he could hit the spot of any event with an accuracy and an insight highlighted by his wonderful artistry. At his funeral, the group of loyal locals in Kilmarnock he called 'His Crumblies', escorted his coffin to its last resting place from a chapel packed with his many admirers and friends; it was a moving day as we lay him in the Scottish soil a few feet from his fellow lover of all things Kilmarnock, the Chief Constable, Sir John Orr. They were equals. I hope that once the second family tragedy that has hit the Petherick's has passed, we can produce a proper obituary for Bill; a thank you for his continued legacy and those oft-stated words of his of how much this group meant to him and how it had saved his life after the passing of Winnie, his wife. The plan is to publish his two children's stories in their honour and it will be our honour to so do. Bill became a friend, an inspiration, a mentor to me and to many of us of all that is good in human nature. He will not be forgotten.

And so to the rest of this past year: a year that has seen our membership steady at around the 50-mark, of whom 20 are active within the group, attending Zoom meetings as they can, seminars and generally contributing to our life and continued existence. During 2022, we suffered greatly through the commitments to work and domestic demands of the central committee members, but in January we decided to re-launch the group with a new, fresher look. Andy Gregory stood up and his logical, methodical, and brilliant sense of order and technical know-how has seen us prosper once again. We owe him a big round of thanks and I record them here for posterity. We now have an annual, fully planned itinerary of meetings, a brilliant new living web-site, a re-launched and successful Saturday Seminar series, and a highly re-motivated core

of regular writing members. During the year our members published a collective work, an anthology called 'Sunflowers for Ukraine' as a private initiative to help Ukrainians coping with the war and to date 320 copies have been sold raising over £4,000 which has been distributed to Ukraine. Thank you to everyone involved and to the generous members who sponsored its production.

The new development of the Special Interest Group focuses on the role of 'The Global Writers Forum' and I would like to say a few words about this. 'The Global Writer's Forum' originally came about because of the situation presented to us by the Gimborn Writer's Seminars of which this year's will be the fifth. These are open to non-IPA members and to date, four people who are not IPA or police associated in any way have attended. They cannot by IPA governance be members of the SIG.

To embrace them and others who might wish to identify with us, such as our loyal IPA members from outside the UK some of whom have also attended our Gimborn seminars, we created 'The Global Writers Forum'.

The Forum has been complemented of late by the membership of several members who, frustratingly and illogically, cannot be full IPA members. We are honoured to be able therefore to include them in the group which we are increasingly seeing as the central body: a body sitting within the Special Interest Group's parameters but capable of 'lawfully' existing more widely within the IPA family globally, hence the name. As chair, I have sought to honour the founding principles of the writers' group which were agreed way back in 2018, in brief; to support each other and our writing in whichever way possible, to help market our member's work, and to promote the idea of leaving the legacy of our writing for future generations. In this way I continue to nurture the wish for us to expand our work and outreach globally. We already have members in five different continents, Europe, America, Australia, Scandinavia, and Africa. In March the Vice-Chair, Ann Cumberland and I were invited to Madrid in by IPA Spain to take part in their 'ArtIPA 2023' event and were warmly welcomed and brilliantly treated by our hosts, forming a partnership with their writers which we hope we can cement and develop in the coming years.

For the immediate future we are hoping our members will attend this year's Gimborn seminar in October, we are re-launching the 'Writes' magazine as a monthly publication, together with a 'Best of Writes' annual soft-cover hard copy edition for sale. This is almost ready in the design stage together with a Retrospective Edition of Issues 1 and 2 by persistent popular demand. It has been quite a technical challenge but we are nearly there now. We will be resurrecting the much needed 'Fifty Shades of Blue' mental health publication as soon as possible as well as continuing to develop the new website. Probably one of the most exciting ideas we have had is in Andy and I's minds, a proposed Arts Festival for 2024 at Portmeirion in North Wales, a place many of the group know and love. We will keep everyone posted on how this starts to come together, as yet it is a much hoped for wish only and we await various agreements before progressing.



Finally, I offer my heartfelt thanks of everyone, to everyone, in this amazing group of ours, to the committee, to Andy Gregory for all his work, to Ann for her continued support and encouragement to me as chair, and a big thanks to Helena who as secretary works persistently away for us, sending out my missives and generally keeping us on track despite her domestic

commitments. Thank you to Fizz for sorting the AGM out. Thanks also go to Yvonne MacGregor for her support as Vice-President Culture and to 3 Region, Section UK and to Bill Lloyd its treasurer for their continued support. In summary, a year of challenges but a year in which we have now risen to new heights and with exciting plans and ideas for growth for the future. Bless you all, writers of the world.

***David B. Lewis Chair, Section UK Writer's Group and The Global Writers
Forum April 2023***

Farewell Friend

Such tears we shed for you our friend,
Your life has graced our pages,
With smiles and laughter, joyfully penned;
A heart for all the ages.

Your care for us, like flags unfurled,
In rippling winds rebound
For friends across our fractured world
Your love will now surround.

Farewell, dear fellow, friend for all,
Sound son of Scottish soil,
Rest now your head upon the sward;
Your gifts will never spoil.

Two Works of Bill Petherick, ('Will Henry P.') Writer, Artist, Sage, Friend

Bill was a persistent poet, a beginner and still a little raw around the edges as you can see, but always he was sincere, full of heart and generous to the last. Perhaps 'Us Yins' says all we need to know about him? A very fine man indeed.

Us Yins

by Will Henry P.

Stevie from the USA plays the Saxophone,
So does our Sean but as he says, he just sucks and blows.
Eleni is editing her book, Fizz is working on mime,
Ann's book is being launched soon and not before time.

David who looks after us was busy as usual,
Checking on all our work giving it approval.
An artist of immense talent in Doz, without any fetter.
As for me I am still practicing on how to get better.

The others in the group were doing as they like,
Helena was on holiday, Neil out on his motorbike.
Oor Ian was still in the far North somewhere so remote,
His next-door neighbours, a Highland Coo and a Scottish Mountain
Goat.

So, there you are, we happy group, of poets, painters, and writers,
Who meet every second week and there are some cheeky blighters?
But they give advice, encouragement, and Friendship to each other,
Like a family should, they are after all, my adopted sisters and
brothers.

The Tears and the Brick

by Will Henry P.

The tears ran from my eyes down my reddened cheeks,
Around the edge of my mouth they flowed, then to my chin did
creep.

They pondered on the precipice of the stubble on my chin,
Before falling to the floor below, splashing an empty tin.

Others quickly followed taking the same watery route,
This time on falling they landed on my foot.

Why am I crying you may ask, isn't answer clear to see?
I have just stood on a LEGO brick, and it is painful, believe you me.





Bill's funeral at Kilmarnock.



The moving wreath from the group is at the foot of the grave. It contained various flowers and fruits associated with Bill and with Scotland.

**The first Zoom of the new plan asked us to
bring writing about Africa.**

Africa

by D. B. Lewis

One night is all my memory needs;
the bright Askari-ed fire: aromatic, pungent
wood-smoke
seeping up to nostrils wide
with eager expectations
as there we lay.

As there we lay;
looking up: stars in clear dark skies
that gave our freedom blessing,
hand in hand our naked hearts
leant warmth to dawn's dark slumber.

And there we lay;
as night noise knows, creeping round
our boma-thatched reed-bedded sleep
that brings the smell
of wild free life with air like champagne wine.
To us.
In Africa.

For we have found eternal pleasure here
as joy throws off propriety
we embrace the stillness of the night
breaking free
to taste a fleeting impulse bringing rare delight.

For Africa was in our soul
that night we lay there naked,
blood red soil
seeping through the toes
that dug their marks in deep,
like Zulu spears weeping red with lust.

And there we lay once more.
As day threw off the impulsive night
the waterhole no longer full
of life that limped off from our love.
Of Africa:
Their Africa,
Where freedom longs still to be free.



A March Zoom meeting asked us to consider the 'Letter 'A' Here are some of the offerings.

All A

by Udo Lauterborn

Akward arrival at an Austrian asylum,
alligator avalanche, ahoy,
auditor's abacus abanded, algebra aboard,
at admirals agency another anker alarm.

Artificial allowance and amateur angels,
African anthology aware and asleep,
American arrogance ablaze and adorable,
ambitions abolished.

Angry avocado artillery amplifying arising appetite,
audible, anticipated, arson arising, ambulance absence,
average auditorium activate all-saints-day anniversary,
asthma accomplished.

Archive.

(Priceless Udo! 'Angry avocado artillery...' is now in my favourite quotations book! But this is a very clever piece indeed: great work.Ed.)

A is for Apple

by Janet 'Fizz' Curtis

A is for apple
The one of my eye
I love you, I love you
You make my heart sigh

A is for apple
The one in my throat
I hate you I hate you
You silly old goat



Auschwitz with Anxiety and Anger

by D.B. Lewis

Auschwitz. Over the years, many people have suggested I should visit and so, at last, I booked. A £31 day trip from Krakow. Tourism or a Pilgrimage of Respect? I had hoped the latter.

How did I feel? Anxious. That is how I felt. I had cried at 'The Killing Fields of Cambodia' a year before; a shocking crime scene still with bones protruding from the ground beneath my feet, clothing still attached, and I had imagined I would cry here. But I did not. I came away from the camps chastened but disturbed, as much as the commercial nature of the mass tours that allowed little time to reflect and the crush of the crowds. In this perhaps there was a sense of the horror within. If I go again as I shall, it will be alone or with a friend.

What had worried me most before going was being angry. Angry at our ongoing inhumanity one to another. I have always hated being angry, since I was six years old. A sense of fear, of powerlessness, that someone else has taken away my ability to be calm, logical, rational; happy, like at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The inmates there. Were they angry? Were they anxious? I had always thought that they must have been even if most had no idea what was in store for them. But now I think differently. Once the gates closed what point was there in being angry? None. No point even in being anxious. But with the visit I learnt things I had not realised before. That the inmates had been told they were going to a far better life, with work, and good food, and housing. All lies. Most were to die within hours of arrival. I didn't know that.

I have spent a lifetime, over sixty years, wondering why the inmates did not offer to resist. Now, I have come to know that their resistance came long before, in the ghettos, in the fierce small arms fighting in Warsaw, Krakow, a hundred different places where the brave fought on to their death against tanks, machine guns, and a brutal, merciless army intent on 'The Final Solution'. By the time the survivors realised the reality of the concentration camps their lives



were effectively over: they would lose their families, their possessions: their souls, when all had gone, all hope, all reason, even their suffering stolen from them, what better then, than to die?

When I was young, a Dr Landau came to stay at my mother's guest house in Stratford upon Avon. She was a Shakespeare scholar. And she had been in the concentration camps. The story was, that aged 17, she was waiting in the queue for the gas chamber when an officer spotted her and took her away claiming she was his relative. She survived but only she knew at what later cost. In my visit I discovered such girls were selected that way to breed with SS men to create a pure Aryan race. She seemed, not surprisingly, a little strange to a young boy playing with his soldiers on the doorstep under her bedroom window. It was the day she was asked to leave that this young boy first met the awfulness of human nature when the good Dr Landau opened the bedroom window and tipped her night soil pot over his head. Horrified, I heard how kind I needed to be because of what she had suffered. It was then I first heard of Auschwitz. I was anxious. I was angry. I was six years old.



I took many moving images away from the camps, perhaps this one, from a hut at Birkenau, provides a poignant reflection from the visit.

Eurovision: The Iceland Entry

by Andy Gregory

So now I have two weeks off work,
Time to fly and listen to Bjork,
And the weird sounds from this Viking land,
Covered in lava and black ash sand,
Is at odds with the air, so clear, so pure,
Breathe it in – an asthma cure,
With longer days and shorter nights,
And the dancing rainbows of the Northern Lights,
Waterfalls, geysers, mountain summits,
Be careful at night, the temperature plummets,
And there's sure to be plenty of rain,
As you explore this endless, rugged terrain,
Volcanic sulphur occasionally taints the air,
But please don't worry, don't despair,
An eruption could happen any day,
But that's no reason not to stay.

In this beautiful country, across the sea,
The thermal pools were just right for me,
Relaxing in the milky spa seemed quite strange,
As I surveyed the distant mountain range,
Outdoor lagoons and heated lakes,
I really hope they don't have snakes,
Sheep-a-plenty, they're everywhere,
Buy your woolly sweater at the Reykjavik fayre,
Dolphins, puffins and minke whales,
Paddleboards, boats, yachts and sails,
A staple diet consisting of lamb and fish,
And a really pungent fermented shark dish,
We drove for miles it's barren and vast,
My holiday's over, the time went fast,
If I had the chance, I wouldn't think twice,
And return to the land of 'Fire and Ice'.

Eurovision: The Switzerland Entry

by Tony Granger (nil Qua)

Ooh la li hi lo
It's off to milk we go
Ooh la li hi lo
Yodel all the way
Give the cows the hay
Whilst they munch away
Ooh la li hi lo
Singing along without a song
We can win this all day long!

(You had to be at the Zoom session entitled 'Eurovision' to fully appreciate Tony yodelling this poem to our absolute delight! Ed.)



The British Overseas Territories

'Nil Point' by D. B. Lewis

Little Willy Bell never wanted to be a Eurovision winner. Never. When he was at school all his classmates called him 'Big Dick', but he never knew why. Willy was an innocent. That is probably why he's up there now singing for Eurovision, the entry for the British Overseas Territories. Just because he'd been to Gibraltar on a day trip from Spain with his mum and dad when he was ten and apparently his mum said that counted. When the talent scouts were in Clacton looking for a suitable candidate and no-one could be found, Willy fitted the bill. It seemed they had heard him rather the worse for wear on the karaoke at The Nelson's Arm at Butlins and thought it would make a great novelty act. Willy had called himself *Nil Point*, that was, well actually *The Point*. So bad it was good if you follow? But life has a way of following art, hasn't it?

Willy never saw things in their true light until it was too late. Take the time when he was asked by a complete stranger to take a sealed pack of gourmet cheese through customs at Dover to avoid the ban on dairy products being imported into Europe. His reason of being told it was to avoid Mad Cow Disease spreading had not gone down too well at customs. Bit like the cheese, as it turned out to be two kilos of coke. As the customs were at pains to point out. *Nil Point in fact*. Do not pass go, do not collect £200.

Willy in his time had fallen for just about every pub prank in the book from the phone call to Mike, to buying out-of-date scratch cards. When he had come up with the *Nil Point* entry at Butlins he was at his lowest ebb and had deliberately made his performance as bad as he possibly good by drinking seven neat Vodka shots and four Jaeger Bombs straight off. To say he was plastered would be to give the decorating trade a bad name. The performance ranged somewhere between a cat caught in a tumble drier and the sound of a broken attack alarm with the instruction sheet missing. The campers loved it: six encores and each given another shot, and another. Tears streamed. The scouts knew they had a winner.



So, the Overseas British Territories entry *Nil Point* hit the screens with a song specially written for Willy, 'Spotted Dick and Custard'. With little change from Clacton. Come the day in question the advertisements led with 'Little Willy, with his Spotted Dick'; and still Willy didn't get it. Kitsch wasn't in it. More kitchen.

But up he went anyway, almost as plastered as at Clacton and again the audience loved it. But the Euro judges, being dedicated music lovers, sadly did not. Slowly but surely the leader board totted up the scores; The Overseas British Territories; *Nil Point*.

Film Review: Serendipity

by Andy Gregory

Serendipity is a 2001 American romantic comedy film directed by Peter Chelsom, written by Marc Klein, with the main stars being John Cusack and Kate Beckinsale. The film grossed \$77.5 million on a \$28 million budget. Not bad, for a movie described by some critics as 'typical American candyfloss'. It has a great supporting cast of Molly Shannon, Jeremy Piven, Bridget Moynahan and Eugene Levy, he of American Pie and Schitts Creek fame.

The story follows characters Jonathan Trager and Sara Thomas, who have a chance meeting while Christmas shopping at the glove stall in Bloomingdales Department Store in New York. A mutual attraction is felt and although they were both in other relationships, the plot examines whether 'Love at first sight' can truly happen. Sara explains that she lets fate's little signals determine her life path and life decisions.

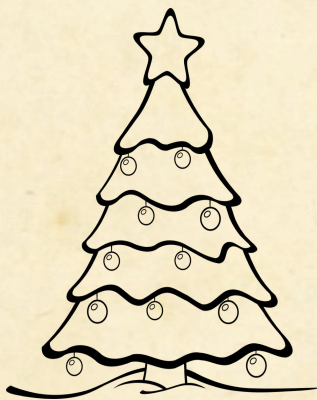
Trager writes his phone number on a five-dollar bill, while Sara writes her number inside a copy of her favourite book and promises to sell it to a bookstore. The bank note and book are both sent off into the universe and if either Jonathan or Sara ever find the other's number again, then surely it is meant to be? The two main protagonists also share a glove apiece from the last available pair on the Bloomingdales Christmas stand, where they were served by Eugene Levy's crazy character.

Some years later, Jonathan finds his single glove at home, and although preparing for his wedding to fiancée Halley, he is determined to try and trace Sara again. Meanwhile, and coincidentally also now engaged, Sara is becoming stressed with her wedding plans to musician Lars. She decides to try to locate Jonathan and the two nearly cross paths many times.

The rest of the film follows the ups and downs of both lead characters in some touching moments. However, like many of these rom-coms, there are some pretty unbelievable and rather silly scenes – for example when Jonathan has located a house he believes to be Sara’s, and his best friend is being dragged along through the snow holding Trager’s ankles, to try and prevent him from looking through the window and being devastated, as he could see a couple kissing inside.

The saving grace for the film is the brilliant soundtrack. As is often the case, the researchers piece together the various scenes using some famous and some obscure numbers that bring out the feel-good factor.

Serendipity has long since finished its run at cinemas across the world, but is a regular feature on UK TV screens around Christmas time, along with ‘Love Actually’, ‘Four Weddings and a Funeral’ and ‘The Holiday’. So, keep your eye on the 2023 Christmas TV schedule, open a bottle of wine and enjoy the schmaltz. Will they, won’t they ... wait and see!



Serendipity

by Eleni Cotton

Lewis stepped back and looked closely and with obvious pride at the divider that he had built. It separated the sitting room from what was to be my study. I joined him and we both pointed out the features that we liked, the neat lines, the open space at the top for light and ventilation and finally, the piece de resistance, the sliding door with its patterned coloured glass!!

I moved forward to pull the door open to the side and then push it shut into the stud wall.

Lewis started forward. 'Careful!' he said.

I looked at him questioningly.

He smiled sheepishly. 'Well, the thing is that I couldn't find a stop strong enough to prevent the door sliding and disappearing into the stud wall. I know how anxious you are to move in so I bought a weaker stop that was available but must warn you not to push it too hard when you close it!'

A few days later, I found that the door was sliding open when I wanted it to stay half shut. I would need to do something about that.

Got it! I rummaged around my medicine cabinet, found a box of Paracetamol tablets, removed the tablets, squashed the box flat and tried to push it between the door and the stud wall to keep the door where I wanted it. The space was very narrow, 3 or 4mm., and I was about to iron the box flat when it decided to stay where I had put it and keep the door in place. Great, I thought, feeling very pleased with myself.

Two days later, still flushed with victory, I pushed the door open firmly and it shot into the wall taking the Paracetamol box with it. There was still enough of it in the open that I could grip but I now had a door that would constantly threaten to disappear into the stud wall, with dire consequences like having to take the stud wall apart to retrieve it. Or I could just keep on sliding ironed boxes into the narrow space between the door and the stud wall thus anchoring the door.

Or... I had a cunning thought. If I could push the Paracetamol box to the end of the door that was lost in the darkness of the stud wall and IF I could find something long and strong, very thin and with a hook at the end, I might be able to coax it to make a right-angled turn and lodge itself behind the door and stop it disappearing into the stud wall. All problems solved. Or so I thought.

A kitchen skewer didn't do the trick. On my knees and with torch light, I tried and tried to get to the box but the skewer was far too short and not surprisingly, it couldn't make the box do the right-angled turn anyway...

With a sigh, I got to my feet, my elbow joggled the part of the door that protruded into the room, I lunged to stop it, missed, and watched it gliding into the stud wall. That's it I thought in horror! But wait. There was a hissing, scraping sound and the door stopped exactly where it would have done had Lewis placed the stronger stop.

I grabbed the torch, got back onto my knees and peered into the darkness. Where was the box?? Aha!! Only a tiny corner of it was visible; the rest of it was around the corner comfortably holding the door where it should be and from where it could venture into the wall no further.

Serendipitous, or what?

'Around the World in 80 Ways'

This occasional Zoom inspired writing slot throughout the year features different countries. The first was writing about Africa where each attending member presented a short piece or poem or something of writing benefit to the Zoom based on the word, 'Africa' which could have been a poem, an article, biography of a writer, a writing object, a travel piece, a piece of reportage. There were some excellent entries, here are some of them.

Africa

by Andy Gregory

So, I thought about perhaps doing a slot about Toto's song 'Africa' or even Jaluka's 'Scatterlings of Africa', both prized singles from 1982 in my huge record collection; but then thought I would tell you about my trip to Cape Town in 2014.

One afternoon at work I mentioned to a colleague (Tudor) about my cousin Mark living in South Africa, and said that although he often came back to the UK, I had never visited him in Africa. Now I say 'cousin', but actually we are second cousins (or first cousins once removed), our fathers are first cousins, and our grandmothers were sisters growing up in Birmingham. Tudor basically said I was daft and asked why I had never been to Cape Town?

He said he would have been out there in shot, given half the chance. So that night, I came home from work, spoke to my girlfriend Joanne (now wife) and asked if she fancied a trip to South Africa. I called Mark, booked flights and three months later Joanne and I were flying out for a 16-day holiday of a lifetime.

Now I thought about telling you about our two-day safari, photographing elephants and lions, or visiting the ostrich and crocodile sanctuary, or going out paddle-boarding, over a mile out

into the Atlantic and thinking we could see sharks, or our first night in Cape Town after 26 hours travelling and Mark getting drunk at a rugby match, so I had to drive his 'Baccy' 15 miles through Cape Town, exhausted and with a visual migraine, or the day in Langebaan when I rode his scooter/moped, towing him on his skateboard at 30 mph ...but I thought they could wait for another occasion, and today I will tell you about the day we ended up in Pollsmoor Prison.

One thing I haven't told you is that Mark's father John, was also a Police officer in Birmingham, and when he retired in 1975 their family emigrated to South Africa and John set up a security company. After John died a few years ago, Mark started in the security industry and now runs one of the largest companies in Cape Town and Johannesburg, called Grinnell Security. The other little nugget that I forgot to mention is that although he is hugely successful in business, he is a little crazy! I mean that in the nicest possible way. To be in the security industry in South Africa takes some nerve, and the need to be brave, stupid or crazy ... or a little bit of each. Mark is one of the bravest and toughest people I know. I am 57 and he is 55, but how he made it past the age of 18 is a miracle. He is a speed freak, races cars, is the fastest South African windsurfer and at one stage a few years ago he was the World Champion and World Record holding Speed Windsurfer (in Namibia). He is often seen running at speed and jumping off Table Mountain, thankfully with a parachute attached to his back!

Whilst we were there, Mark was a perfect host, we shared his home on the Atlantic Reach Golf Course in Melkbosstrand for the duration of our stay and if he wasn't driving us around in his baccy showing us the sights, he loaned us one of his company vehicles so we could explore the area ourselves. On the third day of our trip, he drove us around Cape Town, so we saw the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront area (and did some paddleboarding), the huge Cape Town Stadium that was built for the 2010 World Cup Final and various other amazing sights. He then took us around the 'other' part of Cape Town on the outskirts. Now most tourists are told to not stray into those suburbs, for fear of never returning. It certainly opened my eyes to the differences in the world, from the amazing properties and huge wealth in certain parts of the city, to the tin shacks and pallet-homes just a stones' throw away in Khayelitsha shanty town.



Having toured a few of those streets, Mark drove us past one of his old houses where he had lived some years ago and as we turned the corner, we could see the huge fencing and walls of Pollsmoor Prison.

If you've never heard of Pollsmoor Prison, it is a 'Maximum Security' prison about 15 miles from Table Mountain.

I remembered that Mark had previously told me tales of his days living near to Pollsmoor Prison and occasionally on a Sunday morning, if they had run out of milk, he would walk down to the prison, speak to the guards and be allowed access into the prison stores (in the grounds) to buy milk and a newspaper.

During our stay in Cape Town, all the main television channels were playing back to back coverage of the Oscar Pistorius case. Pistorius was a famous Paralympian sprinter who was being tried for the shooting and murder of his model girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, on Valentine's Day in 2013. The court trial had just started a few days before we landed in Cape Town.

A few hundred metres along Steenburg Road, Mark did nothing more than swung his baccy hard right into the entrance driveway of Pollsmoor Prison, turned to Joanne and I and said, "let's go and see if Oscar is home!"

Now I've been in quite a few prisons in my time in the police, to collect and drop off prisoners and to interview offenders, and to be honest, very little phases me; however sat in the back of a baccy, with my beloved Joanne in the front passenger seat and my crazy cousin winding down the driver's window to speak to the armed security guards, I was becoming a little concerned. It was a scorching hot day in Cape Town and although we were in an air-conditioned car, I could feel the temperature rising somewhat on the back of my neck. An armed guard stuck his head through Mark's open window and a conversation started, part English and part Afrikaans. The guard did not take his eyes off me as my dear cousin showed his security ID Card and said "I've brought some VIP guests from the Police in the UK to examine the prison".

I gulped a little as the guard pointed his automatic rifle over Mark's right shoulder towards me and he said to Mark "Are they carrying

any guns”, to which Mark replied “No, no guns, well, not big ones anyway”. There was a horrible pause and then Mark said he was joking, and that my bags only contained cameras and lenses.

The guard studied me for a moment and then turned to look at Joanne ... after a few seconds, he muttered something to Mark in Afrikaans and then doffed his cap at us all and said, “Have a good day”. He quickly spun around, whistled and shouted to the other guards about twenty feet away and ordered them to raise the barriers. Mark drove forwards and after about forty metres that was it; we were now inside Pollsmoor Prison and tootling along the inner roadways leading to the grounds. We drove another fifty metres or so and turned right and now found ourselves heading past a number of huge grey prison buildings. When they say ‘Maximum Security Prison’ in South Africa, they clearly have a different description of ‘Maximum Security’ to what I was used to!

We could now see literally dozens of prisoners in their orange jump suits tending to the grass verges, flower beds and generally maintaining the roads inside the prison confines. For a while we drove along one road with another Ford baccy in front of us. There were four prisoners in their Pollsmoor issue jump suits standing on the back of the baccy, being driven along while holding garden forks and spades. Mark still had his window open and as he drove along, he was waving at the prisoners as if he was royalty. Many of them waved back, while others stopped and stared at this vehicle containing three unknown people driving through their territory. Poor Joanne in the front seat was now looking a bit shocked and didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. The prisoners had probably not seen a woman for years.

After a few minutes of touring the grounds, I asked Mark where the shop was that he used to visit and he replied that he thought that had closed many years ago and the public access had stopped, due to too many members of the public visiting the prisoners. It was at that point, on his car radio the Talking Heads track ‘Once in a Lifetime’ started playing. I had to laugh, as this really was a “Once in a Lifetime” experience and as David Byrne belted out the famous line “How did I get here?”, I really was thinking exactly the same thing!

For a while it felt okay, and then I started thinking to myself, how I would explain to my Superintendent at work that I was stuck in South Africa, liaising with the British Embassy trying to organise my Prison Release! With an unblemished police service record of twenty-seven years' service and less than three years until my retirement, I politely tried to explain to Mark that I felt it was about time we made our escape. With that, we turned another corner, and I could see the entrance and exit gates thankfully coming into view. I turned and looked through the rear window and the last few orange jumpsuits were fading into the distance.

After a few more seconds, we breathed a sigh of relief when we passed through the first set of gates into the safe zone, prior to the barriers being raised and we were outside and once again free! The guard that had allowed us access walked over to the car to speak to us and Mark quipped through the window "You've passed with flying colours, my guests will let the President know". The guard raised his hand and we started to leave. At that stage Mark put the car into reverse and manoeuvred back a few metres. The guard looked quizzical as Mark called over to him "Sir, just out of interest, how many of those inmates are murderers?"; the guard laughed loudly and shouted, "In that compound, all of them Sir, but many aren't serial killers, just one-time murderers". With that Mark sped off and my stress level dropped dramatically. I told Mark in no uncertain terms that that if he played anymore tricks like that, he would then be considered my cousin, 36 times removed!

Pollsmoor Prison has housed many famous prisoners during its lifetime, particularly political prisoners from the ANC and other such organisations. Nelson Mandela was famously incarcerated at Robben Island Prison, off the coast of Cape Town from 1964 to 1982. However, many won't perhaps know that he was subsequently kept at Pollsmoor Prison until 1988, when, after being treated for tuberculosis, he was transferred to Victor Verster Prison near Paarl, until his eventual release in February 1990.

Visitors to South Africa can book tours to Robben Island and visit Mandela's cell, something we didn't have time to do; however, I can say that I have been in the same prison as Nelson Mandela, even if just for a few minutes.

The next two weeks went along without a hitch, apart from:- our trip up Table Mountain and splitting my head open on the hire car door, the day I snapped my hamstring water-skiing at Langebaan for the first time in 22 years, the last evening of our holiday, where Mark took us for a trip round the Atlantic Reach golf course and his golf buggy caught fire on the 17th green!

And I said the rest of the holiday went without a hitch, well it did actually have some sort of hitch as I proposed to Joanne on Easter Sunday on a deserted Melkbosstrand beach, the day before we flew home..... and even though my cousin did inadvertently try and kill us or get us imprisoned, we have now been married for nearly six years! Mark is still alive and well, although he nearly missed our wedding in 2017 due to having a heart attack a few months beforehand, windsurfing in Namibia (thankfully he was fit enough to make the flight to the UK). We speak regularly and he keeps inviting us back to South Africa so, our dilemma is, do we go again or, as in the words of Talking Heads, do we just remember it as 'Once in a Lifetime'.

Oceans Deep

by Geoff Jackson

Our love is deeper than most oceans,
And stretches further than our sky.
At times our oceans become rough
And our skies sometimes cloud over.
However, as with our earth,
The seas calm and the skies clear,
But our undaunted love remains true.

Take my hand my love and walk with me,
Let us to the ends of the earth go,
Share with me the wonders of our world.
Stay beside me to let those wonders unfurl.



That It Should Come To This

by Janet `Fizz` Curtis

Awakening to the ways of the world, I am startled to clearly see the thoughts of those around me, those in power, those who desire to control my soul. 'Cast away your depression. Come with us, you will be safe with us. We are safe, you are safe. Come.' But I cannot follow them on their inglorious pathway to the sun.

Pushed into my awakening through the death of the nurturing mother of all of us – the death of very Nature herself, I wake to see that greenwash is lying abed with a foul squatter. They have birthed a powerful sustainability: a sustainability of atoms. Oh duplicity, thy name is greenwash.

Corrupt energy from the atoms of the earth has been forced upon our fragile sphere, smothering opposition into silence. It is accompanied by the repulsive promise of extermination - like ants beneath the ogre's foot. But break my heart, for I will not hold my tongue.

That it should come to this, Oh God! God, such things rank and gross in nature, the very winds of heaven cry their tears into the stale seas. That it should come to this. That it should come to this.

Commentary:

This has the same title as the Drabble entry and is the same theme of duplicity – it uses the story of Hamlet to tell how some politicians (e.g., EU Commission, Tory Government) have re-labelled nuclear energy as 'sustainable'. There are two sides to every story, and this piece is written from the viewpoint of a protestor. In this piece, I have tried to use some Shakespearian-type language to fit in with the Hamlet idea, including a play on the famous 'Frailty, thy name is woman' quote. With 'greenwash' being the lies told by the duplicitous politicians. Also, at the end of the piece I have used (or mis-used) some quotes or phrases from Shakespeare.

(Ed.: I like the idea of a commentary in pieces like this where the meaning is not so obvious as it helps the reader to understand the intention. Good one Fizz!)

A New Day
By Geoff Jackson

A new day dawns
Sunrise is bright
Blows away the night.
Sunrise becomes dulled
Blotted out by smoke and fire.

Rockets and more
A deliberate act,
Part of a pact,
An evil desire to ruin a world.
On goes this futile conflict
Set by a pathetic mindset.

Many nations align to help,
To provide support
Against the unfair assault
On the people.
How many more innocents
Need to die
To justify
The magnitude of this war.



Growing up in the 60s

‘1966’

by Andy Gregory

At our first 2023 Saturday seminar in April, we were asked to write about ‘Growing up in the 60s’ or a particular memory. I couldn’t decide which to share with the group, so I presented three short pieces – ‘*The Shovel*’, ‘*The Teddy*’ and ‘*The Nickname*’.

The Shovel

Back in October 2022 I started helping my son Oliver clear his back garden and re-design it. We laid some railway sleepers for raised borders and cleared the old paving slabs, smashing them to use for a hardcore base for his new patio. A few weeks ago in early March, we started laying the new slabs. Oliver had never taken on such a big task and aged 26 he had recently bought his first house with his girlfriend Dorrie (Dorothy). I agreed to help them and pass on my experience of laying many paths and patios at various houses I have owned over the years. So, on a drizzly March afternoon, I found myself shovelling sand, ballast, and cement into the wheelbarrow, while Oliver was turning the mix with a large spade, so we could lay the first row of pristine new paving slabs that had been delivered the day before. I forced the small hand shovel into the large brown bag and pulled out a nice, clean, amount of cement on my utensil. As I tipped it into the wheelbarrow, I could suddenly smell smoke and ash. I closed my eyes and held the metal hand shovel up near to my face to smell it. I stood there for a few moments and Oliver, knowing how I suffer from occasional bouts of vertigo and regular tinnitus, tapped me on the shoulder, asking ‘Are you okay Dad?’



After a few seconds I replied, *'Just reminiscing son'*.

I paused, then opened my eyes and asked if he could smell smoke or ash coming from the small hand

shovel I was holding? It would be clearly impossible, as you couldn't even see that the spade was made from metal at all; it was caked in the cement that has built up over the years (note to myself – I should clean my tools after using them!).

I then explained to him that when I was a little boy in the 1960s, this very hand shovel had belonged to my grandparents at their house in Hay Mills, Birmingham. They had an open fire, and the shovel was used to load the glistening lumps of coal onto the flames and in the morning, whoever was first out of bed had to use it to clear the ashes from the ashpan and hearth. Later, when my grandparents finally had their first gas fire, the shovel and coal scuttle were passed to my parents. My mum and dad had lived with my grandparents while saving for their first home and when they bought it in 1964, that too had an open fire. I was born in March 1965, and I recall when I was aged three or four, I would help my dad in the morning shovel the ash from the ashpan into the sacks that Dad kept in the garden. He saved the bags of ashes for use on his allotment, a true recycler indeed! Dad swore that the vast amount of ash he dug into the rows of potatoes, cabbages and carrots helped keep the slugs and snails at bay, as well as putting copious amounts of cheap vegetables on the table when times were hard.

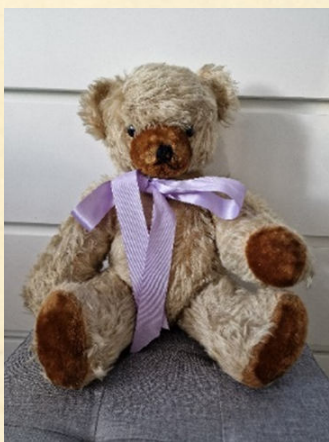
Oliver was now looking quizzically at me, clearly thinking something he has thought for many years ... that his beloved father had finally gone mad!

I always find it amazing that a piece of music, or an item, such as my small spade, can take you back to another time and place, or evoke another memory, such as a smell from over fifty years ago. Isn't the mind a wonderful thing?

I have decided that when we have finished the patio, I am going to mount the shovel on a small plinth and present it to Oliver, formally handing it on to the next generation to cherish ... and hopefully lay plenty more bricks, paths, and patios.

The Teddy

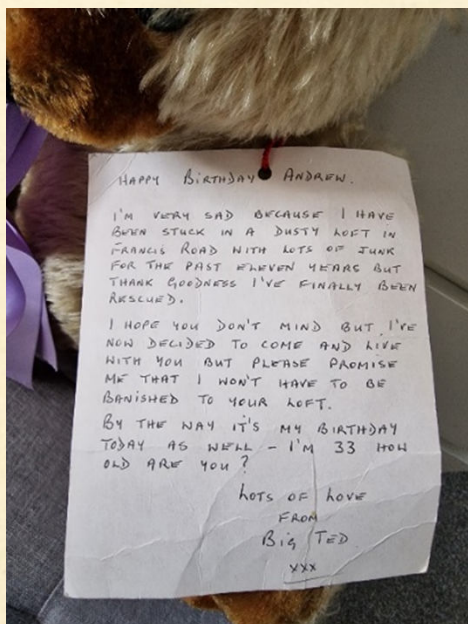
On my first birthday in 1966, my dear parents gave me a wonderful teddy bear and named him Big Ted. Whether it was named after Big Ted on BBC's Play School I am not sure, but I know I carried the bear everywhere for the first few years of my life. Like many bears of that era, it had a mechanical growler inside it, so every time I turned it onto its back, or upside down, the bear gave a little rumbling growl. As I grew older, through my childhood my choice of toy changed, and my poor bear was relegated into a box in the wardrobe.



When my sister Jayne bought her first house and moved from the family home, she took all her bears with her. I recall giving her my childhood bears to take with her, as it was no longer 'cool' for me to have any teddy bears in my bedroom!



Many years later, on my 34th birthday, my mother handed me an unusually shaped gift to open. Imagine my surprise and delight to find my favourite childhood teddy bear Big Ted inside the wrapping. It was now adorned with a new ribbon around its neck, along with a gift-tag and message in my Mum's handwriting, which read:



'Happy birthday Andrew, I'm very sad because I have been stuck in a dusty loft in Francis Road with lots of junk for the past eleven years but thank goodness I've finally been rescued. I hope you don't mind but I've now decided to come and live with you, but please promise me that I won't have to be banished to your loft.'

*By the way, it's my birthday today as well - I'm 33, how old are you?
Lots of love, from Big Ted xxx'*



I turned the bear over and very faintly, it gave an appreciative little growl! Its mechanical growler still worked after all this time – magical indeed!

My dear mother Gwenda sadly died in 2012, after a battle with cancer. There are various things that remind me of her, lots of wonderful memories, every time I hear a Neil Diamond track (her favourite) and *Big Ted*, who happily sits in our bedroom. Aged 58, I don't care anymore whether it is cool or not to own a teddy bear, he is just a part of my life that means the world to me.

The Nickname

Saturday 30th July 1966 is a date etched on the minds of many English football fans. It is the date that England famously won the football World Cup at Wembley Stadium in London. Ever since that day, supporters across the nation have hoped, prayed, and sang about a potential repeat win – thirty, forty, fifty years of hurt; will it ever come home?

I was sixteen months old at the time and my parents were lucky enough to own a small black and white television. My father Fred is a huge sports fan and apparently, he had invited some family and friends to join them and watch the big game, as they didn't own a TV set at the time.

After the game, in which, as I'm sure you all know, England won 4-2 in extra time, the England team paraded the famous Jules Rimet trophy around the Wembley pitch. Captain Bobby Moore was held aloft by the players, who took turns raising the trophy to the appreciative fans. For a few moments, England player Norbert (Nobby) Stiles famously danced along the touchline while holding the trophy and my father recalls that I copied him, doing a little jig around the lounge.

My Dad called me '*Nobby*' and the name seemed to stick.



Every time he mentioned Nobby, I would do the little jig – something that brought a smile to my parents' faces.

I am now 58 and my father is 90, yet he regularly calls me *Nobby* – I no longer do the famous dance, but his term of endearment has stayed with me, all these years.

A few years ago, I met Nobby Stiles at his book-signing event in a Solihull bookshop. I told him about my nickname and how it came about. He thought it was fantastic!



Meeting Nobby Stiles in a Solihull bookstore



Tales from Madeleine's Patch

<https://www.facebook.com/madeleinespatch/>

by Steve Parnwell

Nature Notes Spring 2023 – Mother Nature's Orchestra- a Fenland Soundscape

On a warm spring morning at Madeleine's Patch HQ, nature's pearl, the snowdrop, and the nodding yellow aconite, complete with its green frilled cowl, reminiscent of a mediaeval serf's attire, subtly give way to the golden celandine under the woodland canopy. The air is

alive with the soundscape of birds singing, the soft sigh of the wind through the tall grasses and the coarser rustle of last autumn's dead leaves coquettishly playing 'catch me if you can' with that same breeze. These auditory stimuli chime in with the soft repetitive cooing of the wood pigeons and if you can resist such soporific, siren lullabies, which conspire to lure you to succumb to the arms of Morpheus, come with me on a virtual soundscape sensory journey.

Quietly sit awhile with me on one of the ubiquitous benches within the Madeleine's Patch landscape, eyes shut, and face turned to the gentle warmth of the vernal sunshine and listen with your mind's aural senses to Mother Nature's symphony.

Away in the hedgerow, the eponymous Chiff Chaff vigorously vies for auditory supremacy over the Great Tit's leaky bicycle pump routine; to the untrained listener these two calls are easily confused. A Robin sings nearby while a Wren's startled chittering scolds from the shrubs, giving this secretive bird's location away.

An oft repeated busy 'sispi si-hi-hihi' alerts us to a pair of Blue Tits feeding their young, frenetically flitting to and from a nest box on one of the Ash trees Madeleine and I planted 42 years ago, now suffering from Ash dieback fungus. While it is safe to do so, we will retain the tree as a dead and dying monolith, because standing dead wood offers a haven for many species, such as xylophagous (wood boring) beetle larvae, which in turn are greedily hunted by the probing beaks of woodpeckers, the tell-tale evidence of their feasting betrayed by the studded pock marks in the decaying trunk. The maniacal laughing 'yaffle' of the Green Woodpecker echoes loudly through the woodland glade, and then the indignant 'pic, pic, pic' of the Greater Spotted Woodpecker joins in, as if offended by the audacity of its larger, green cousin daring to usurp its territory.

Then the corvid section of this wild orchestra adds its own refrain, the cacophonous cawing of the Crows, the repetitive penetrating high pitched 'Jack, Jack' of the Jackdaws, as if, like the Chiff Chaff, they are scared that someone might forget their name. Then from the denser scrub, the harsh, strangled scream of the Jay joins the chorus, followed by the staccato machine gun call of the Magpie.

The Jackdaws are nesting in the barn owl box in the hay shelter,

which was briefly frequented by Kestrels before the more aggressive Jackdaws evicted them. Kestrels are one of our smaller birds of prey and their rapid 'kee kee kee' call suggesting they are contemplating breeding somewhere nearby, is a welcome sound. Their larger raptor cousins, Buzzards and Red Kites are frequent visitors, and their mewing calls draw the eye skywards, but both species seem to sense they are safe skimming low overhead at tree top level, offering perfect views of their plumage and majestic lazy flight as they soar on the thermals. Two pairs of red kites perform aerial acrobatics while emitting haunting piping calls like a bosun's pipe saluting the embarking admiral. Are they two breeding pairs competing for terrestrial dominance, or a family with last year's offspring still in tow?

On a sentinel post high on the pinnacle of a Leylandii conifer, a Song Thrush melliflously sings its heart out, a song arguably trumped only by that of the Blackbird, but I will let you be the judge of that, because listen, one is calling from the other side of the garden.

Let us now wander down the lane from HQ to Madeleine's Patch *per se*. *En route* a Pheasant calls from the hedge emitting a metallic sound like a motorcar's starter motor accidentally being engaged while the engine is already switched on. In the winter sown wheat crop, which is now well established, its lush green bladed stems already almost at knee height, another game bird, the Red Legged Partridge skulks, while making its repetitive 'kerchow, kerchow' sound like an old steam engine as its pistons turn over at a country bygone fair. These short-legged birds sense our presence, and change their tune to a wet, sloppy, throat clearing "chukka chukka" as if a gobbet of phlegm needs expectorating.

In the hedgerow, the Yellow Hammer sings its classic call of 'a little bit of bread and no cheeeese,' the last notes drawn out on a rising scale. The Chaffinch's "pink, pink" competes with this Oliver Twist like request for victuals, while the Goldfinches' tinkling fairy bells conjure up magical images of the Fae Folk. Look carefully with a non-sceptical eye, and maybe you too can see these preternatural beings. Deny them at no cost, for the tale of Peter Pan warns of the consequences of such cruel ignorance.

As we enter Madeleine's Patch, the Cowslips in the meadow dance

on a gentle breeze. Now so prolific, these first heralds of spring look from a distance as if a cantankerous child has randomly strewn a bag of lemon sherbet drops over the verdant grassland tapestry.



Cowslips at Madeleine's Patch

Skylarks flushed from the meadow ascend skywards with angelic trilling, until reaching their azure zenith they fall rapidly to earth and start their joyous exultation all over again, while Swallows hawking for insects on high, fill the air with excited twittering proclamations of their joyful return from an exhausting 6,000-mile migration back from South Africa.

As daylight closes, and the creeping shadows of eventide spread its mantle over the landscape, the echoing bark of the Muntjac deer in the thicket, and the blood curdling scream of the Vixen from the gloaming evoke eerie memories of ghost stories told long ago. The stealthy tread of the fox does not go unmarked by the wary blackbird, whose rapid warning 'chuck chuk chuck' and 'spink spink' calls alerts all the denizens of the night to the prowling predator's presence.

In the cover of the reeds which fringe the ubiquitous ponds within the reserve, Moorhens sound their surprised clucks before venturing onto the lawns to graze, while the Tawny Owls watch from the willows, serenading each other, the territorial male makes the traditional hooting 'twoo' and the female responds with her exited 'keewick' shrieks which together make up the classic 'to wit to woo.'

In the undergrowth, the noisy grunts and squeals of the hedgepigs' uninhibited courtships are enough to make a matelot blush. So, let's steal away back to the warmth of our homes and leave the nightlife soundscape to the statues, watched over by the bats and moths as Áine's moon shadow bathes their semi-naked bodies in ethereal light.

The Station Cat

Not too much from *The Cat* this edition but news is in that top seller, our young Mark, is in Bali sorting out his third book set in Soho amongst the grass skirts. That is, he is writing amongst the grass skirts of Bali, not about grass skirts in Soho. Bloody English...nightmare...

At the same time, Ann is waltzing away in the Alps of Germany, France, and just about everywhere else in Europe, from where Fizz has recently returned, David with fellow IPA member, Mark O'Donoghue, has returned safely from Ukraine, and Eleni has just about recovered from her awful car crash in Greece (not quite a Greek Tragedy thankfully but pretty darn close!), what travellers we all are. (That's supposed to be a caravan joke Ann and Fizz, but as *The Cat's* humour is notoriously feline, it might be best if we move rapidly on...)





We almost managed to get away without one mention of The 'C-word'. (The Coronation in case you were wondering?) but here's our intrepid Professor having fun... cheers Sir Tony, you really should have the sword upon your shoulders. The Cat will have a word...

If you have snippets, (what we used to call 'tit-bits' in the less pc-woke-prim world of duplicity in which we now exist) please send them in to The Station Cat : davidlewis@brynstowe.co.uk along with any 'Quirky Quicks'.

Quirky Quicks

Please send your 'Quirky Quicks' to: The Editor, 'Writes' Magazine:

davidlewis@brynstowe.co.uk

Here is one:

There was a very young Acting Sergeant keen to impress his superiors for promotion, who took great delight on occasion at Oxford in marching the constables to their beats through the city in a cohort. This to the incredulous and admiring astonishment of the locals and tourists alike. Wouldn't happen now we suspect? But a happy quirky memory, nonetheless. Now, I wonder who that was?

And just in case you thought it was all over, a reminder to us all that we are actually at war, proxy as it may be, but not far away, men, women and children are dying so that we might live. Here's a toast to all you heroes in Ukraine. May your suffering not be in vain, and may the war soon be over. Thank you to you all for your awesome sacrifice.



Slava Ukraini!

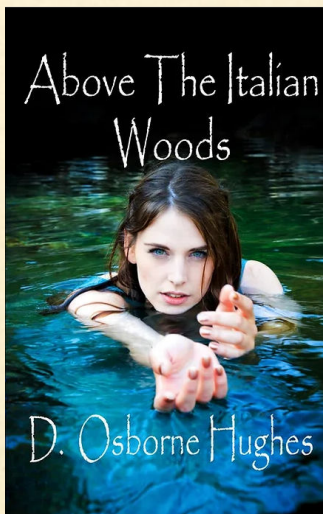
Some of the Forum Member's Recent Publications:



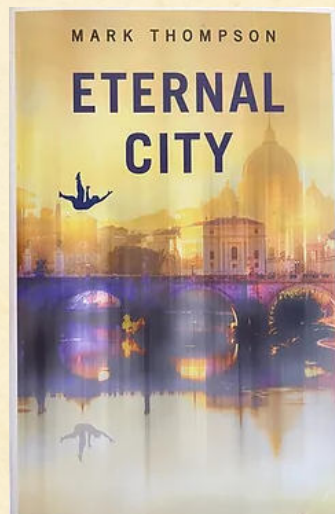
Art and poetry of
people's roots



A guide book *tour de
force*



A beautiful novel of
self discovery



A modern literary
'great'

All available at:

www.globalwritersforum.co.uk