

The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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Hamilton (1957-67)
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Vacant

Diary

Closing Date Bill Barnes
Competition
30th September 2003

Closing Date the Short Story
Book Prize Competition
30th September 2003

Closing Date W F & F G Froud
Memorial Competition
31st October 2003

DATA PROTECTION ACT

Members' names and addresses are held on a computer database which is used for mailing copies of the Civil Service Author.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in the SCPSW Author are those of the contributors and are not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Society.

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The SCPSW Author

Number 163

Autumn 2003

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Editorial

Eureka! Beryl Jones has agreed to take on the Treasurer's role, for which all members must be grateful, as a Treasurer is critical to our survival. Although members are also invited to take over my role as Editor, this is not an immediate issue. As demands on my time become greater I hope only that someone suitable can be found in the next year or two.

Like most people, my time is consumed by a variety of voluntary activities, all rewarding, but often time conflicting. For instance, yesterday evening I was due to attend a meeting of School Governors, play in a club bowls competition and act as Umpire for the County. Sadly my ego won the day, wearing the only red blazer amongst hundreds of blue blazers, as I opted for the latter. Perhaps members would like to write to me on how they spend their time in voluntary activities, whether for ego or more laudable motivation.

Gordon Gompers has questioned our failure to mention the outstanding success of J K Rowling. "Here" he says, "is an inspiration for all members, especially those who are single mums". Now I know Gordon always gives good advice, though I'm not even very good at keeping mum. Well I have to start somewhere, so I've sent away for information about having a sex change.

For those members who are single mums and even those who are not, perhaps the beginning of your road to riches will be your entry for our short story book prize. Max 2500 words and quote a pen name. Send to Editor under a pen name enclosing £3 payable to SCPSW. Any subject, but the first words must be, "If only I had known..."

The closing date is 30th September, so sharpen your quills and prepare to fill your bookshelves or pay for your Bermudan holiday by selling them. I recently saw a similar set of books sold at the Greenwich Auction for £120. The Auctioneer said most sets of blue, green, or red-bound books do well and the winner of our prize can choose red (Russian – as if they could be any other colour), or blue (complete works of Conrad).

Perhaps the promised critical letter from Mr R Withey will inspire you to express agreement, or alternative comments on the content and style of Author. We should not question the desirability of meeting Mr Withey's expectations, but we clearly lack the funds to do so, which is in part

restrained by the membership requirement to be in the service of the Crown. Even with greater resources, would we wish to compete with the likes of the excellent Writers' Forum? All comments are welcome, though invective will not be published in this instance!

I include an interesting piece by Daphne Darking and remind you that Joyce Thornton remains in need of your work for possible inclusion in future "Authors".

Although I am moving house on 13th August, I currently have no new address. However, all mail will be forwarded by the Post Office until a new address is available and duly advised to you.

All submissions for next issue by 19th October please.

Chairman's Awayday

By the time you read this Alan and Marjorie Watts will have moved house and those intending to call on him for his annual Awayday should note the following instructions on how to get there.

Go to Beckenham Junction station as usual, cross the footbridge and take the 162 bus to Overbury Avenue. It may be as well to ask the driver to let you know when you are there, but it is a fairly short journey. On leaving the bus, cross the road to Andrew Court at 68 Overbury Avenue, where Alan will be waiting. If he is not, make your way to his Flat, which is number 5.

Member's Successes

Arthur Bromley become world famous by having his work published in Author and has now been interviewed by a reporter from The Liverpool Echo. With no reflection on Author, this related to his time in the Army and subsequent life as an expert in acupuncture, resulting in an illustrated 2 page spread in Essence, the local magazine of the Wirral.

P.S. Although Ron Jefferies sent me details of prize winners for poetry etc., in good time, the move of half my house into storage and the other half to my son's flat whilst we continue to search for a new home, has meant that this information has gone into storage.

I apologise to all concerned and promise to retrieve it in time for the Winter issue of Author, assuming I survive this unending house moving drama.

Letters

Dear Editor,

I owe the AUTHOR — and that means, of course, yourself and all the other unpaid volunteers — many thanks for providing nervous writers like me the opportunity to try their literary wings within the relative security of a largely supportive environment.

Without the AUTHOR, it's doubtful whether I'd have gained enough confidence to get off the ground, let alone achieve a place in the Herbert Spencer competition. I'm extremely grateful to you all. Joan Lewis's letter welcoming me back set the tone, and this has been sustained by Barbara Dickinson's friendly Poetry Folios, where speculative work can be tried out on other minds without fear of embarrassment. Critiques are invariably set out in sympathetic terms; one never feels inadequate or foolish.

My poem, Person Required, was one of three I entered that had all "done the rounds" in Folios, and received encouraging feedback. The other two were returned with such positive comments from the judge that I took what was for me an enormous risk — I submitted them to the literary magazine ORBIS. I have heard, today, that one has been accepted for publication — albeit in about a year's time, but I'm not complaining!

A bit of own-trumpet-blowing, of course; but I wanted to share my excitement, and to express my gratitude.

My best wishes to you all,

Ann Froggatt

I note in your editorial and 'A few words from our Treasurer' that you are inviting comments as to how you can boost sales of the magazine. As a first timer I think I can understand why some members join for just a year and do not renew subscription. Without wishing to be rude I have to say that my first impressions do not exude much in the way of enthusiasm. Twenty sheets of A4 paper folded over to make forty and clasped together with a couple of staples is a pretty uninspirational format if you ask me.

To create more interest, surely you should be aiming for something along the lines of 'Writers Forum' or 'Writers News'. I know this costs money, but the magazine in its present layout is pale, anaemic and really pretty uninteresting. How about a bit of colour and a few illustrations or sketches. As to its contents, is anyone really interested in a million dollars worth of flies? What about a collection of decent short stories by first time authors?

A lot of these comments are born of disappointment. I really had expected more.

Mr R Withey

Dear Editor,

I congratulate Adrian Danson and his contributors for providing an excellent mix of articles and pieces in the Summer 2003 edition of the 'Author'. This was a sheer delight to read from beginning to end; and it made me think that in the SCPSW, we have many writers of originality and style. Plus a writer's group that is unique, friendly and worthwhile, bringing together members from all over Britain, and beyond. Thus, it is up to us, the members, to keep the society going by regular contributions, and input of all kinds.

Writing, doesn't seem such a solitary activity, somehow, when one is a member of the SCPSW.

Our 'sister' group, Poetry Workshop, seems to be flourishing. That is good, but let's give our full support to current editor of SCPSW Adrian Danson. We are lucky to have a man of his calibre.

Good editors are pretty thin on the ground. Let's all make an effort, then, (myself included), to literally bombard Adrian with material of all kinds; the more controversial, perhaps, the better. And I'm sure that Adrian would especially welcome contributions from the newer members, and those who haven't yet been published in the 'Author'.

Yours sincerely,

Terry James

[I would endorse the wish for more material and will try to merit the praise
– Ed]

To Whom It May Concern:

This morning I reluctantly renewed my membership for the SCPSW after only a year of membership. I can understand why the membership for this group has been dwindling. I have been a civil servant for the last three years and have recently celebrated my 23rd birthday. I only discovered the SCPSW in a small article in the Revenews. Publicity amongst the civil service for this group is hardly widespread.

From reading your publication "Author", I have got the distinct impression that many of the contributors feel that people under the age of 40 should not consider writing as they lack "life experience." Although I realise that the views expressed in SCPSW Author are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Society, printing opinions such as these will only discourage younger, new members from joining the society, or retaining their membership. [See Guidance for Members – Winter 2002 – Ed]

I was looking forward to entering some of my poems into your competitions and reading the work of other people from my profession.

I have not entered any competitions, as the details for the competitions have not been entirely clear. I hope that it would not be rude of me to suggest that you print a booklet detailing all of the year's competitions, where to send the entries, when to send them by, the entrance fees and exactly what can be entered. This would make it much simpler for new members like me.

Yours faithfully,

Miss Sally Smith

[I don't believe the final paragraph is justified, but we are well aware of our lack of publicity due to lack of Publicity Officer. Perhaps Sally will volunteer – Ed]



Short Report of Annual General Meeting of Society of Civil and Public Service Writers

Held on 17th May at 1.30 PM at the Civil Service Club, London. Attended by 14 members. Minutes of last Annual General Meeting were read and agreed.

Membership Secretary's report. Members up to date are 152 compared to 159 since last year. Joan has enrolled 19 new members thanks to Ethel's efforts. Advertising on internet and in staff tea-rooms have been a good source for new members. Article folio now has 8 members which is a good number.

Meeting Secretary's report. To continue with New Year party as very successful. No meetings arranged for St. Vincent's centre due to poor response. To advertise the annual lunch outside the society in order to attract new members. (Roy said Annual lunch social event of the year!)

Treasurer's report. Louise Lloyd has had to resign due to her child's illness. Joan has kindly taken over until a new treasurer comes forward. She has stepped in twice before, would only be too pleased to hand it over. Balance in account is £144.44, last year it was £29.50. The Society has enough money for 2-3 issues. Joan has not got full breakdown of figures due to only recently taking over.

Publicity Officer's report. Internet essential. Did new sheet about the society and sending it out with information about Froud War competition. Writers News good contact, Joan had 10 enquiries from them. Steady response but needs to be on going. Assured Gordon and Roy that Publicity is going on all the time. Gordon said we had been neglectful with publicity. Told him both previous publicity officers had to give up suddenly for illness and personal reasons and nobody has volunteered to do it until Ethel took it on. Now following Val's useful information and using e-mail a lot especially to save costs. Roy's competition is advertised in many places and magazines.

Editor's report. Received a letter from a member criticising the format of the society, is publishing it. If we had a more professional journal we would have to have more members. The Editor has suitable books to offer as prizes for a competition, a set of 32 Russian classics and a complete set 21 books of Joseph Conrad. Adrian also suggested an article writing competition with book token prizes.

Roy feels we need to emphasise the feedback from the folios more, Joan and Roy are going to write in about this. Gordon said anybody can get published, he wants to help people get published. Told that his column is appreciated. Alan said there are exorbitant room hire and costs now.

Competition Secretary's report. Slightly better news £305 paid out. £185 in fees. 27 entries for the Lewis Wright with a critique given by Val on every one. Have invited people to apply to be a judge. Ron read out the winners of the Lewis Wright competition.

Poetry Workshop. Another successful year. There are several poetry workshop folios run by Barbara Dickinson and Bill Douglas. Local mini workshop in Harrow in December was successful. Bill Douglas gained a wider audience through "Focus" the MOD magazine.

Annual Lunch 18th October 2003. To be advertised outside the society.

Writer of the Year. Paul Williams, his book 'As Handsome Does' is excellent.

Election of President and Vice presidents. All re-elected

Election of committee. All re-elected, Karen Lewis has kindly agreed to join the committee.

Market Information

Gordon E Gompers

County Magazines

I have always championed the priority of dosh. A sizeable cheque is proof that one can write. If that seems vulgar the alternative is even more so, i.e. one's opinion of oneself.

Nevertheless dosh is not the main priority. That must be getting published at all. There is one particular wide market for travel writers but it is rarely

high paying. Every county has some publications devoted to its area. These publications are notorious for being poor payers but they are easy targets.

When one goes on holiday one may find a place of interest but hardly of national interest. It could be a theatre or perhaps a unique museum. Of interest to tourists to that area but of little interest to anyone who has not the least intention of going there.

Thus a piece on a museum in Bournemouth, The Russell-Cotes Museum, was accepted by Dorset: The County Magazine. Articles on the theatres of Croydon and Wimbledon was accepted by Monocle.

Apart from their meanness I have always found the editors very affable and approachable.

Well, dosh is not everything. Getting in is!

Kent County Magazine

M/s. County Magazines Publications Ltd.,
6 Bexley Cottages,
The Street,
Horton Kirby,
Dartford
DA4 9BU

Essex Journal

Intercity Print Plc,
The Laurels,
The Street,
Waltham,
Chelmsford
CM3 1DE

Monocle Magazine

M/s. Merlin House Publishers Ltd.,
79-81 High Street,
Godalming, GU7 1AW

Surrey Life

Archant Life,
Prospect House,
Rouen Road,
Norwich, NR1 1RE

Kent Life

As above

Somerset Life Magazine

As above

Poetry Pages

Edited by Joyce Thornton

Earthwalking, Part Two

Mike Boland

Forget the posturing of princes,
Or the right-on calls
Of the band-wagon jumpers,
Or the Eighties drop-outs,
Casting their power suits
For the cuddly, caring culture
Of a new century.

Who cares for the Earth?
Who will nurture it,
Like a sick and ageing parent,
Nurse it back to health,
Heal its wounds?
Not for selfish ends,
Because the ozone layer's balding
Means skin-cancer from Spanish sun,
Not because the greenhouse gas
Will make us gasp for breath,
Not because the melting ice
Will overwhelm our homes,
But for its own sake?

Who cares for the Earth;
You, sir? Madam?
Stand up, crank!

Don't Give Me Flowers

Sylvia Neumann

For my fiftieth I want wire cutters.

I'll leave blank-faced London crowds,
cut through constraining fences,
paddle in forbidden streams
I want a heavy hammer
to flatten my vacuum cleaner.
I'll leave cast off clothes, outdated papers
to copulate in haphazard heaps.

I want scissors
to rip strips from my sensible skirts,
hoist them as rebellious flags
proclaim myself a free woman.

You Are My Bicycle

Sylvia Neumann

If other men are cars
you are my bicycle:
old fashioned, eccentric
tweed jacket and tie.
Some women might mock
yesterday's Englishman.
I am enchanted.

Cars aren't always fast:
traffic snarled, fume cloaked
while bicycles slip past
in nonchalant freedom.
Your independent mind
leaves lesser men baffled.
I am impressed.

But like a bicycle
our relationship's hard work.
As I struggle up further hills
I wonder how long before

I leave you rusting shed-bound
while I look for a car.
I am exhausted.

Poetry Workshop

Mike Boland

Chairman: Liz Rowlands, 19 Arkley Court, Maidenhead, SL6 2YR
Treasurer: Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, TW15 3QA
Secretary: Mike Boland, 11 Boxtree Lane, Harrow Weald, HA3 6JU

PW 2003

By the time this article appears, the Poetry Workshop will have held its annual Weekend at the University of Birmingham. As well as several workshop and impromptu writing sessions, the programme was scheduled to include talks on T.S. Eliot, Chaucer and Anglo-Saxon poetry. A report of the Weekend will appear in the Poetry Workshop's Autumn Newsletter. Texts of the talks will appear in that and subsequent Newsletters, as space allows.

AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Poetry Workshop was due to be held during the Birmingham Weekend. The Minutes of the AGM and Statement of Accounts will be included with the Autumn Newsletter.

Bill Barnes Competition 2003

Don't forget that the closing date for the 2003 Bill Barnes Poetry Competition, open exclusively to members of the Poetry Workshop, is 30 September 2003. Rules of the competition appeared in the Spring Newsletter. If anyone has lost their copy, or is a new member of the Poetry Workshop and would like to see the rules, please contact me, **Mike Boland**, at the address given at the top of this page and I will send one to you.

Subscriptions

Any PW member who hasn't yet renewed their subscription to the Poetry Workshop will receive no further Newsletters this year - if you haven't

renewed but wish to do so, or you would like to join us, contact **Terry Rickson** at the above address. Membership of the Poetry Workshop is open to all members of the Society of Civil and Public Service Writers at the annual subscription rate of £3.

Membership of the Poetry Workshop provides:

- Three lively Newsletters a year, plus a fourth Competition Special edition.
- The chance to submit poems for publication in Waves
- Access to the popular postal folio scheme
- Eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition
- Eligibility for the annual PW Weekend at the University of Birmingham

Cheques for membership should be made payable to: **Society of Civil & Public Service Writers Poetry Workshop Account.**

Dates to Remember

30 August 2003

Autumn Newsletter

30 September 2003

Closing Date, Bill Barnes Competition

30 November 2003

Winter Newsletter

* * * * *



“I don’t know how you managed it madam, but you have got through to someone in authority.”

The W F & F G Froud Memorial Competition winning entry:

Life in the Intergalactic Services

Louise Lloyd

Emma had been feeling rather pleased with herself recently. She’d been promoted to Deputy Flight Navigator on the Star Ship Explorer, she had a gorgeous – if slightly irritating - husband back on earth, and she was blessed with good looks and good health. Really life couldn’t get any better for Emma, so it didn’t; it got worse.

Firstly she’d discovered that her new boss was a dolphin called A124X. Not that she had anything against dolphins, after all that would be illegal under the Species Act 2314, but somehow, taking orders from something swimming about in a tank just didn’t seem right. Also, why couldn’t they choose names that humans could remember easily? The main thing that really annoyed Emma about dolphins was that they got all the top jobs since they’d learnt to speak human languages 200 years ago. And they didn’t even appreciate the power that their jobs gave them! You never saw a dolphin make their staff make them cups of tea/do all their dirty work/take the blame for their mistakes. Not that dolphins made many mistakes. That was another thing that irritated Emma.

Secondly she’d had a call from her husband Luke this morning and he’d been moaning again about her lack of commitment to him. This mystified Emma – didn’t she speak to him twice a day? Luke thought it was unacceptable that she’d not used any of her leave to go back to earth since they’d married over a year ago, and nor had she sorted out getting them married quarters on the ship so he could join her. Luke was also nagging her to have a baby, which was a sure fire way to ensure she never visited him. Space was no place for babies. The gravity simulators frequently failed, and unspeakable things happened to those who happened to be changing nappies at the time.

Feeling a bit fed up Emma set off for her shift. As she walked through the corridors she thought about Luke and wondered if she should actually apply for married quarters, rather than just telling Luke she had done so. For the first time she felt a small twinge of guilt that she was leaving him back on the

highly polluted earth while she gallivanted about the solar system. It had to be said she'd been fortunate to be posted to a ship whose mission was to draw maps, rather than being on a military ship where you would frequently be fighting for your life, or worse, a diplomatic ship where you had to meet all kinds of strange beings, and eat even stranger ones.

As she reached the door for the flight deck she was surprised to find her access was denied. She stood back and let the security scanner read her iris again, but the doors still didn't open. Emma was perplexed, as many things on the ship didn't work very well, but the security system was top notch. As she stood there wondering what to do next the doors suddenly opened, and out strolled Nelson Dupont the Chief Security Officer.

"Emma, just the person I was waiting for," he said calmly.

"What's going on?" asked Emma, "why is my access denied?"

"Come in and I'll explain," said Nelson.

They sat down.

"Your access has been denied because I am investigating an important matter, and until I can eliminate you from my enquiries you will not have access to any restricted area," explained Nelson.

"What's going on?" asked Emma, racking her brains for an answer. Surely she couldn't have offended Nelson so much that he was trumping up some charges against her? Surely she hadn't inadvertently made a pass at him while under the influence of Zargonian ale? * It was common knowledge that Nelson was an android, so surely she couldn't have been *that* drunk?

*All alcohol had been banned from earth for over 200 years, causing an 80% drop in street fighting, domestic violence and the number of people who thought they were good enough to sing karaoke. Taking your leave on the planet Zargon, where you could legally drink until steam came out of your ears, was particularly popular.

"A124X has gone missing," explained Nelson, "and according to our CCTV records you were the last person to be seen with her, so we wondered if you could shed any light on it?"

Emma burst out laughing.

"I don't find this amusing," said Nelson sternly.

"But how can a dolphin go missing?" asked Emma, trying not to smile, "she lives in a tank full of water, so she can't exactly go anywhere!"

Nelson quickly realised Emma was not going to provide any answers, though he was not sure whether this was because she knew nothing about it, or because she was a good liar. Reluctantly he allowed her to return to her quarters.

On her way back she passed H458Y swimming along the water tunnel that ran parallel to the corridor, but the dolphin was in a hurry and didn't stop to talk.

As Emma entered her room the phone screen was flashing, indicating there was a call waiting for her. She sat down in front of it and said,

“Hello. Emma here.”

“Emma darling, it's me,” said a familiar voice, “I wanted to apologise for moaning earlier. I hope you don't mind, but to cheer myself up I bought myself a new computer. It was a complete bargain, only 10,000 soms!”

Emma gulped. 10,000 soms was the best part of a years pay. She really found being married rather difficult, especially when her husband had the mood swings of an adolescent and the spending habits of a spouse of someone about ten times richer than she was. Sometimes she wondered why she'd ever got married, but then vague memories of an ale-fuelled night on Zargon seeped through. It was often said in the 24th century that unless you'd been drunk enough to marry a complete stranger on the first night you'd met them, then you'd not really lived.

Emma knew from experience that expressing disapproval would achieve nothing other than weeks of quiet sulking interspersed with childish rages, so she suppressed her annoyance.

“That sounds great,” she said sarcastically. Not that Luke noticed.

“Oh thank goodness!” he exclaimed, “I was worried you'd be cross with me for being so extravagant. Must dash, talk to you later.”

The screen went blank.

Emma decided to walk down to the leisure complex. A session in the gym usually cheered her up, especially if her crowd of friends were in there at the same time. Unfortunately the only other occupant was a dolphin, C291K, who was circuit training in the huge aquarium that surrounded the gym.

An hour later, after a strenuous workout, Emma was feeling much better, a mood soon shattered when she returned to her quarters and found Nelson inside with a team of investigators searching through her belongings.

“What are you doing?” she asked incredulously.

“H458Y and C291K have also gone missing,” said Nelson, “and we know you were the last person seen with both of them, so we are treating you as the prime suspect in the matter of their disappearance.”

“But I didn’t even know they were missing until you just told me!” shouted Emma.

“You would say that,” said Nelson brusquely.

Suddenly one of the investigators came forward,

“Look what I’ve found!”

He handed a particle dispersing handset to Nelson. He looked sharply at Emma.

“How exactly do you explain having this?”

Emma realised she was in deep trouble. Individual ownership of particle dispersers was illegal, and you could expect a sentence of several years hard labour on a mining planet if you were convicted of being in possession of one. The only place they were permitted was in transporter rooms, and even there the use of them was stringently controlled due to the potential danger of using them. Used by an amateur, instead of transporting people safely to destinations light years away in a matter of seconds, people tended to end up in several pieces in several different locations.

“It’s not mine! I’ve never seen it before!” shouted Emma.

Nelson snorted in disbelief.

“So, to summarise the situation, we’ve got three missing dolphins, all of whom you were the last known person to see them, and we find the means of making them disappear in your room. Don’t you think that is slightly incriminating?”

“I’ve been set up!”

Nelson snorted again.

“Take her down to the cells until she decides to tell us where they’ve been taken to,” he barked.

Several hours of quiet contemplation later, and Emma still couldn’t work it out. Why would someone want to kidnap dolphins, and why would they want to frame her?

Suddenly the door slid open and Nelson appeared.

“Follow me,” he ordered, “it looks like you’re off the hook.”

Perplexed, Emma followed Nelson until he stopped and turned into an interviewing room. As she entered the room she was startled to see a very familiar figure sitting at the table.

“Luke! What are you doing here? Why aren’t you at home?”

“Probably because he’s never been on earth,” said Nelson.

Luke explained that he’d been hiding on the ship since they met on Zargon. He’d hacked into a phone screen and had reprogrammed it to show his location as earth, and he’d deliberately nagged/moaned/mentioned babies to ensure she never wanted to visit him. Luke had further shocks for her. He explained that he wasn’t even human; he was a Zargon – a species capable of morphing into any shape or form. Emma had been an easy target, as they needed someone inside the ship to give them information about the dolphins, and she happily chatted to her “husband” about them. He’d merely seemed interested in her work, as any good husband would be.

“Why would you want to go to all that trouble?” asked Emma incredulously.

“Because I needed to kidnap some dolphins, as our planet is slowly becoming one vast ocean. To ensure our survival we need to breed with a species that can live underwater. So that we didn’t come under suspicion we needed to set someone up for it, and you were a bit of a pushover to be frank,” he explained.

“No offence intended,” he added sheepishly.

“And he would have got away with it, had I not caught him trying to steal back the particle disperser so he could transport himself back to Zargon,” added Nelson. “He’d used it out of range of the CCTV cameras the other times, so that you always appeared to have been the last person to be with the dolphins.”

Luke was led off to the cells. Emma sat in silence for a few minutes while she digested all that she’d just heard. Suddenly it occurred to her that no one had said what had happened to the dolphins. Though she’d never been their greatest fan, she wouldn’t have wished any harm to come to them.

“What’s happened to the dolphins?” she asked Nelson.

Nelson looked a bit uncomfortable.

“Well, it’s all a bit embarrassing really. After we caught Luke we beamed 5,000 of our security staff down to Zargon to rescue the dolphins. Unfortunately they told us that they didn’t want to be rescued as they’d got a

bit of a taste for Zargonian ale while they were down there and they refused to come back.”

Getting the Needle

Arthur E Bromley

"Sticking needles into people to make them better, what a load of rubbish."

The disbelief in my colleague's voice was only too obvious, and I was sorry I had told him that I had enrolled as one of the first students at the very first Acupuncture College in the U.K.

The college was in Warwickshire, and was only open at weekends (Saturday and Sunday) and only admitting qualified Medical Practitioners, such as Doctors, Dentists, Vets, Chiropodists, Senior Nurses etc. plus, of course, my own profession of Osteopathy.

The year was 1966 and hardly anyone in the U.K. had ever heard of the ancient Chinese art of Acupuncture.

At 6 a.m. on that first Saturday morning I headed toward the Midlands, as I was to do every weekend for the next three years, to take my place in class not knowing what on earth to expect.

I noted twelve men and six women, whose ages ranged from 25 to 50 years. At once, I endeavoured to weigh-up my fellow students whom I would be spending the next three years with, at weekends.

As would be expected of a gathering such as this, the extreme extrovert stood out like the proverbial sore thumb, a man in his early forties, who, I soon learned, was a chiropodist, and who was to keep us all chuckling for the full three years, as he deliberately misconstrued everything our tutors told us.

With pens and writing pads at the ready we took our seats.

The Dean of the college entered. "My name is Dr Wilson, I shall be taking some of the classes in conjunction with my other tutors," he said. "You will be meeting the rest of them as we go on."

The Dean then gave us a rundown on the curriculum. "You will find it hard going, and for the first year or so, you will be very confused, until it all starts to fit together," he paused. "The G.P.s particularly will find it hard to digest." I saw the three G.P.s look at one another, then one of them stood up. "Why should we, in particular, find it especially hard?" The Dean laughed, "Well you

see, you have been trained in a western style of medicine and completely orthodox, while the training in acupuncture is completely the opposite, you will have to unlearn a lot you have learnt in order to understand fully the Oriental concept and philosophy of this method of healing. The alternate practitioner such as the Osteopath or Naturopath will probably make out a little easier." I could see the G.P.s were unimpressed over this, and believed he was talking through the back of his neck.

The Dean continued — "You will learn all about YIN and YANG, or positive and negative, and how all things on earth MUST have these two polarities completely balanced if harmony, in all aspects of life, is to be attained." The Dean had more to say. "You will learn how to locate every one of the one thousand three hundred acu-points in the body even when blindfolded, and what depth each point is below the surface of the skin, and what result one would expect on needling any one of these points." The first day passed quickly.

On the following day, Sunday 9.30 a.m. we were all assembled in our seats to 'let battle commence'. The tutor for today was Mr Benall, a tall angular gentleman with a quiet air about him, and a voice to match. "Today we are going to locate all the acu-points connected to the COLON, there are, in all, forty of these and are on the arms, shoulders, neck and face, half the points on the left side and the other half on the opposite side." Each of you must get a partner, and then expose your arms, shoulders and neck." We paired off, I worked with a young man who had been sitting next to me.

The gentle voice spoke: "I hope each one of you brought the black felt pen you were told to acquire, so that you can mark the skin. The first point I want you to mark on your partner is near the nail of the first finger, here," he pointed to it on his hand.

"Excuse me Mr Benall," the voice came from the back of the class, "how can my partner mark my skin?" We all, in a body, turned round to see who had asked this question, then shrieks of laughter filled the small room. The young man who owned the voice was TOTALLY black. When the merriment died down, we all looked at our tutor. "M'm, it does pose a bit of a problem," he said, "and you can't buy WHITE felt pens." "We could whitewash him first", the chiropodist was at it again. More laughter. "I've got an idea," one of the ladies said. "If we had a packet of confetti we could stick small pieces of the paper on his skin." "Where would we buy confetti on a Sunday?" someone said, "all the weddings were yesterday." Titters all round. Someone produced a

sheet of white paper and scissors and proceeded to cut small round pieces about a quarter inch in diameter.

For the next two hours, each of us had a great time placing a black spot exactly on each acu-point on both arms, shoulders and face. When each student had completed marking all the forty points on his partner, we were told to link each spot with a black line, starting with the spot at the side of the nose, down the face, over the shoulders and down the arms to the hand. There were huge grins and much merriment when we looked at each other, the Red Indians could not have painted themselves any better, in the event of a raid on the Palefaces. The dark skinned young man, with his line of white paper spots, stuck on with his partner's saliva, looked more like a Christmas tree than anything else.

The weekend finished at 5 p.m. whereupon we all converged on the washroom to get rid of the black lines and spots we had so laboriously painted on each other. The water was cold, and the ink just refused to come off, no matter how hard we scrubbed. We gave it up, our skins red and sore with the effort. "See you all at the next weekend," I waved as I made my way out towards the car park.

It had been a great weekend, although I hadn't understood very much of it, but no doubt I was not the only student with this line of thought, we all knew it would be months before any of it started to make sense. Just before I came to the motorway, I saw ahead a female figure watching me approach, her hand movement indicating she wanted a lift. Usually I ignore hitch hikers, but today I felt happy and unusually generous. I pulled up alongside.

"Where are you going?"

"To Birmingham," she replied.

"O.K. hop in."

She was about eighteen years old, well dressed, pretty, not the type one would expect to be hitching a lift.

As I started to move off, she settled into the passenger seat then turned to look at me, a strange thing happened, her eyes widened and a look of horror came over her face as she shrank back into the far side corner of the seat. 'What's up with her?' I wondered, then I suddenly realised what was wrong, she must have thought she was travelling with a nut-case, I still looked like a Red Indian Brave with the black lines running vertically down my face, neck and hands. Trying to laugh it off, I said, "Sorry about these black lines on my face, they wouldn't wash off." I realised how unconvincing this must have sounded.

"You see I am a student at the Acupuncture College, and we paint our bodies to learn things about ourselves." How corny this must have sounded to this young girl, who had never even heard of Acupuncture.

As I wasn't making things any better I lapsed into silence, the girl just stared ahead, and I was relieved when we arrived at the Birmingham turn-off. She jumped out with a quick "Thank you", and was gone.

As the months passed, we started slowly to make sense of this complex therapy of Acupuncture.

We were starting to answer the questions put to us by the tutors, in a more intelligent manner and were even asking sensible questions. A pattern appeared to be taking shape in the classroom, it was becoming obvious who the brainy types were, these fortunate people who always knew the answers to everything.

One young man stood out as brilliant, Brian White, aged about twenty five, well dressed, well spoken, was never stumped to answer any question, and when it came to asking the tutors a question, he would come up with one which I never would have thought of in a thousand years. One could see the eyes of the tutors light up with pleasure, whenever they spoke to him, I'll bet they wished they had a class full of types like him. I very quickly, and enviously, nicknamed him "Brainy Brian".

At the end of the first twelve months of our training, we sat our Entrance Exam, a title I never did understand, except to understand how bitterly disappointed any student must have been when failing this exam after already having attended the college for one year. Fortunately all my class passed!

The second year of our training began, and as weekend succeeded weekend, we felt we were getting somewhere at last.

We learned the location of all the one thousand three hundred acu-points, what the value of each point was, and how each was linked to its own internal organ, and how, by putting a needle into the correct point, we could influence organs such as the heart, the liver, lungs, spleen, etc., etc.

'Brainy Brian' maintained his high standard of work.

At the end of the second year we all sat our second year exam, I was very pleased with my result this time. We now had just about 12 months to go, before the final theoretical and practical examination.

The next few months was to be of a more practical nature, the adrenalin was really beginning to flow, we would now really look forward to the day when, hopefully, we would receive the Licence to stick needles into our patients to make them well. But in the two years we had been training, not one of us had

stuck one needle into anyone, so it was with great anticipation that we all looked forward to inserting our very first needle.

Having each purchased one dozen needles, we were shown how to insert one into each other. Because students are expendable and not the same as real, live patients, it was with a great deal of excitement that we were informed, that on the last few weeks of our practical sessions we were to treat patients who had been booked in for treatment.

At 10 a.m. our patients started to arrive, and eight of us were allocated one patient each. My patient, a lady from Birmingham in her early forties, turned out to be a sufferer of migraine. I showed her to a cubicle. Time was not of the essence, so I spent the next one and a half hours giving Mrs Burgess a full scale Oriental diagnosis exactly as I had been taught. First I had to ask many questions, I then palpated the lady, front and back. I looked into her eyes, and at the colour of her skin. Felt for a pulse in her umbilical, did her B/P, checked body temperature. Asked about her waterworks, her bowels, the colour of the stools, felt the texture of the hair. Everything being recorded on my Case History Sheet. Finally the apex of Oriental diagnosis, to check the patient's pulses. On each wrist one must palpate six pulses, which will indicate the state of the internal organs, and whether any organ is lacking in energy or too full of energy.

The Dean visited each one of us in turn at intervals and under his watchful eye, I inserted my **FIRST NEEDLE**. He seemed pleased and told me to carry on, then he left. At this point an unearthly scream rent the building, vibrating around the walls.

We all froze.

The sound had come from one of the cubicles, we all knew what had happened, one of our members had committed the vilest of crimes known to Acupuncture, that of giving pain on the insertion of a needle. But **WHO** had perpetrated the crime? The Dean was seen rushing toward the cubicle in question.

Yes! We did find out who had been responsible, who had 'let the side down', and in all the years since then, I **NEVER** did see among the list of Licensed Practitioners the name of 'Brainy Brian'.



Humbert Wolfe

By Michael Wilde

So, Humbert Wolfe was the first president of the SCSA (1935-40). That's a piece of interesting information from 'Author'. I have two books of his poems somewhere in the mess of books bought from charity shops and second-hand book shops: I am a really cheapskate bibliophile! They are 'Requiem' and 'News of the Devil'. 'Requiem' clearly shows the popularity of his poetry in mid 1920's: it's from the fifth impression. 'News of the Devil' begins as a satirical description of a scheme by an owner of a newspaper conglomerate to unify all religions into an efficient business-like organisation ("Religion by Results"), but ends as an ambivalent exploration of sin.

I recall, from the Dictionary of National Biography, that Humbert Wolfe was born in Italy, was of Jewish extraction and had been prominent in the setting up of the national network of Labour Exchanges. Time to revisit Mr Wolfe and to take a more detailed look of his life.

The skeletal list of his life events runs as follows. He was originally named Umberto Wolff and was born in Milan on the 5th of January 1886; the younger son and third child of Martin Wolff of Mecklenburg-Scherwin and his wife Consola Terracici from Genoa. His family migrated to Bradford, where his father owned a 'wool business'. He was educated at Bradford Grammar School and Wadham College, Oxford. He entered the Civil Service, by examination, in 1908 and was assigned to the Board of Trade. In 1910 he married Jessie Chalmers, with whom he had one daughter, Ann, a current member of our Society. In 1918 his name was anglicised — as Humbert Wolfe. This was also the year in which he was awarded a C.B.E. In 1925 he became a C.B. He died on his birthday in 1940 and a memorial service was held for him at St. Martin in the Fields on the 11th of January 1940. As an author he produced more than

forty books in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as writing reviews and making some translations.

Humbert Wolfe's Civil Service career was one of continuous advancement and of unstinting service. His distinctive personality, his capacity for work and outstanding intellect were recognised early in his career in the Board of Trade. Here he had the good fortune to become one of the trusted subordinates of William (later Lord) Beveridge during the organisation of the fledgling network of Labour Exchanges and the institution of Unemployment Insurance (1912 to 1915). For most of the First World War Humbert Wolfe was assigned to the Ministry of Munitions. Here he undertook essential administrative work as a controller of labour regulations.

With the armistice, Humbert Wolfe reverted to the administration of the network of Labour Exchanges, now under the control of the Ministry of Labour. During the inter-war years he represented Britain at conferences on international labour relations in Geneva. At these his linguistic skills, his urbanity and his humour made him widely respected as a representative of the United Kingdom government. His Civil Service Career continued to advance during these years and he became the head of the 'department of employment and training' within the Ministry of Labour in 1934. When this department was divided in 1937 he chose to be part of the employment division. Then, in March 1938, he became the deputy secretary to the Ministry of Labour.

With impending war, Humbert Wolfe's earlier experience with the organisation of labour during wartime was utilised. He was given the task of organising a recruitment campaign for Civil Defence, the Territorial Army and the Auxiliary Fire Service. Despite fears for his health (he suffered from high blood pressure and advanced arteriosclerosis), Humbert Wolfe responded to the challenge of his task with efforts ensured that many more were recruited to these services than had been requested. Sadly the fears about his health were realised and he died in his sleep on his fifty-fourth birthday: an untimely end to a successful Civil Service career that would have certainly reached greater heights.

The Times printed a large account on Humbert Wolfe after his death. Not only was there an obituary, but there were also appreciative letters and a long list of the notables who attended his memorial service. Sir William

Beveridge made the following tribute to a practical aspect of Humbert Wolfe's intellectual powers and of the personal qualities that endeared him to his colleagues.

"Humbert Wolfe was one the few men that I have met who were literally capable of dictating to two or three shorthand-typists at once on different subjects. I have a particularly vivid recollection of his exercise of this gift in preparing for the Minister notes on proposed amendments on the Munitions of War Act ... To his intellectual gifts he added an exceptional personality. He combined an artist's love of the picturesque and of dramatic emphasis in speech with a fundamental sincerity that made him both one of the most entertaining and one of the best of all possible colleagues."

The twenties and thirties saw Humbert Wolfe developing his literary career. Most of his published output was poetry: though he also wrote critical commentaries on poetry and poets, contributed reviews to newspapers and magazines and made some translations. Of his translations, one, 'Cyrano de Bergerac' by Rostand, was produced as a radio play (1937): while a translation of a Hungarian play, 'The Silent Knight', appeared on the London stage in 1938. An original work of Wolfe's that also was given a London production was a 'poetic ballet' called 'Reverie of a Policeman'. This piece was produced at the Mercury Theatre in 1936.

Despite his abundant output of published poetry in the twenties and thirties, Humbert Wolfe's reputation as a poet has not survived. Undoubtedly he was a man whose complex character was allied to a high intellectual ability. Though his insistence on using formal verse forms did, according to a contemporary's view, lead to sense tending to become lost in the resonance of his phrasing and in his pursuit of technical excellence. Perhaps such an approach to poetry was not best suited to the treatment of religious and social matters that can be found in 'Requiem' and 'News of the Devil'. Yet there are trenchant insights and some passages have potent images.

News of the Devil

..... 'The Press needs trouble.'
'Don't fret at bubbles pricked; blow a new bubble;
'Never tell truth unmixed or unmixed lies.'
'Always forget, never apologise.'
'For headlines every man is half a hero,
and equally for headlines half a Nero.'

Remember, therefore, in your warmest praise
to note the hero's weakness — in case.
'Nothing's too high to spoil, too low to use.'
'The sole criterion is and must be news.'
'There is only one law, one only virtue,
desert your friends before your friends desert you.
'And finally there is one damnation,
a failure to maintain your circulation.'

Requiem

The Harlot

I

STRIPED with fierce wales of sunlight the brown idol
gapes nonchalantly through disfeatured eyes,
while round his trunk bursts in green foam the tidal
wave of hot creeping plant-obscenities.

He is as blank as those who worship, dumb
as their dark minds, and does not care, nor know,
when the black chuckle, rubbed across the drum,
of rifts down as palpable as evil snow.

He is the image of their emptiness,
the carved metaphor of minds untaught,
guessing, as we as pitifully guess
at God, and bringing Him, like us, to naught.

And while the victim flounders at his knees,
the nameless god, to whom is sacrificed
the tortured blindness of the savage, sees
beyond this tumult the slow tears of Christ.

II

ALL THE world over in every town and city
there is a furtive shuffle of tired feet,
and the invisible hounds that know no pity
pad after them in alley-way and street.
All men are whippers-in of that foul pack,

and follow them to life's supreme disaster
as certainly as if you heard them crack
the huntsman's whip, or halloa like the Master.
Their sin is all our sin, ours is their shame,
and while a single woman earns her bread
by blasphemy committed in love's name
not only she, but all our world, is dead.
Then God call off the hounds, and bid the whore,
and all who made her, go and sin no more!

Day Trip

Daphne Darking

We went to the Mother of Parliaments, my sister and I,
Last Wednesday it was,
A couple of trippers, in town for the day.
A very special occasion, we had tickets for
Prime Minister's Question Time.
It seemed incongruous, to step out of London rain
Into history, and walk the salons and the halls
And come to the place where government is made.
We were told how privileged we were
In the Queen's Robing Room no less
By an attendant who loved his job
And told us endearingly
How the carpet is blue because of the Monarch's blue blood.
He was great, and enjoyed telling us
The reasons and origins of the beauty around us;
I looked in his face for signs of Spoof
But there were none,
And we proceeded on the tour.
We were there, in the House ...
Of Commons, where acts of blood and sweat and tears
Had taken place.
Churchill had coined the phrase, and we touched his honourable toe
As we passed by:
And one for luck for Attlee, the opposite bronze,
After all, we are British and must have fair play!
But not in Question Time
We sat enthralled, and listened to history being made,
As figures stood, and asked, and sat, and stood, and tried again
To catch the Speaker's eye.

Not to miss a trick
We went afterwards, to the Lords
Heard the quiet voices of debate
Sat quieter than quiet in the sumptuous surrounds
And understood why even the attendants loved their job.

Apart from size and scale of building and magnificence of art
There is the sense of age old confidence
And time to do all things well;
We felt it, and brought some of this away
And kept it in our hearts.

Why Every Poet Needs – A Pussy Cat!

Terry James

You think I'm joking? — well, I'm not. Furthermore, if you're a dog-owning poet, you may well be 'barking mad' at me, by the time you've read this piece. On the other hand, you could end up purring with pleasure at my words, if you already are a pussy-loving poet. Now what was it Champfleury wrote in 1885?: 'Refined and delicate natures understand the cat. Women, poets, and artists hold it in great esteem, for they recognise the exquisite delicacy of its nervous system; indeed, only coarse natures fail to discern the natural distinction of the cat.' Quite. Cats, you see, have a poetic vision denied to dogs. For two decades there were dogs around the house, but I was indifferent to cats. I didn't know they had the potential to be perfect poetic partners.

However, when our most recent dogs passed away, both my wife and I agreed — 'No more pets'. And so it was, until a few months later when a tortoiseshell cat appeared in the garden, and began visiting daily. Thinking she was a stray, I began to feed her. Then I discovered that 'Lucy' actually lived in the next avenue. All was well, I thought; Lucy has a home. But Lucy's visits continued daily. Soon, she was coming at seven in the morning, and staying until the evening meal; after which I would take her home. This went on for six months. Then came a knock on the door one evening. Lucy's owners stood there. "Look," they began, "Lucy likes a quiet life; she doesn't get on with our other cats and dogs. So, we're offering her to you." Right away, Lucy moved in, and life — especially my writing life — changed for the better.

Now my little study has always been out of bounds to both man and beast. You see, I believed that poetry was best written in solitude and

silence. Yet the day after the cat moved in, she insisted on following me into the study to 'sit in' on my daily late-afternoon writing session. And what a wonderful poetical partner Lucy turned out to be. This magnificent moggie became my sounding board, and didn't mind me murmuring and muttering as I wrote, in the least. She did seem, though, to warm to quiet, reflective, nostalgic verse.

Thus, if I became too raucous or dissonant in my utterances, she would give me a reproachful look — or even clear off in disgust. Happily the latter rarely happened. So, Lucy's presence had — at a stroke, so to speak — banished the solitude of the study. And more days than not, whenever I would 'down (garden) tools' and head for the study around four or so, Lucy would be at my heels.

She came to love the study with its book-lined shelves, and would sometimes smell a book, and pull it out with her claw for closer examination. The silence of the study, too, was eventually banished, no — not by caterwauling or meowing; but by Lucy indicating her preference for romantic piano music. My wife had bought me a CD player and installed it in the study ("No room anywhere else, dear"). Soon, every writing interlude would begin with the sweet sounds of Lucy's favourite tune — 'Clair de Lune' and other piano favourites. No wonder my poetical 'needs' have expanded from the basic 'Pen, paper, and person' to 'Pen, paper, person, pussy cat, pot of tea, piano music, and plenty of time'. With these seven 'components' in place, I too, tend to purr as loudly as Lucy.

But folks I have to advise that having dogs in your study is no use at all. They tend to thrash about noisily, slobbering, barking, jumping up and licking your face, and banging against you; as though saying 'I'm here! I'm here!' No, thank you. I'm convinced that pooches are for prose writers, pussy cats for poets. A cat is a free spirit — as is the poet. And cats have perfected the art of daydreaming — the poet's stock-in-trade. Watch a cat, and you'll soon get the hang of it. Someone described cats as — 'sensitive little individualists'. Yes, and not a bad description of the poet, either! There's also the amazing contrasts of cat behaviour, that delights and disarms.

A cat on one's lap in the living room is akin to a babe-in-arms. A cat in the garden becomes an urban tiger; and best of all, a cat in the study becomes a potential poetical partner — marvellous! And a cat that chooses

to sojourn on one's lap, induces a delicious feeling that there is no past, and no future, just the joy of the moment.

Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, Edward Lear, D H Lawrence, Rudyard Kipling, W H Auden, T S Eliot, A L Rowse and Kingsley Amis — to name but a few — were all published poets, and pussy cat lovers. The relationship between poet and pussy cat can be a very strong and close one. It's like a secret Masonic world that dog-owning prose writers don't understand, because they haven't experienced it. Nonetheless, I conclude by declaring with complete confidence that the only pet for any poet — is a pussy cat!

Aspects of Childhood

Elvira Bridges

As she shifted in the modern pine chair the young woman's glance settled on slivers of sunlight darting through the patterned curtains in a filigree dance. The kaleidoscope of colour brought back memories of the multi coloured toy she had looked through, when, as a child she settled on her grandmother's lap.

Leaning forward she longed for the cosiness of her Grandma's, well worn, rocking chair at the old house.

She turned over the black and white photograph and read the faded slanted hand writing. 'Grandmother Cameron with wee Kirsty on the swing.'

Recalling the old stone cottage a feeling of comfort overwhelmed her as she remembered her childhood visits. She must show Matthew the old picture. Closing her eyes, sleep overtook her. Memories filled her half conscious reverie of Gran pushing her on the apple tree swing.

Then the visits had stopped, no more train rides to the white washed warm kitchen in the country to see her Gran.

"Can we go to see Grandma Cameron, today," eagerly she would ask her mother.

"No, not today."

"I want her to push me on the swing. It's fun, What about tomorrow?"

Her questions were met by a solemn faced mother, "Don't you worry about that. Grandma is with the angels."

Kirsty remembered asking, "Where do the angels live, can we go and see her?" She was reminded also her mother's expression which meant 'Don't ask'. Kirsty knew better than to persist. Mum had a dread of any subject where she had no control, like the facts of life, illness or death.

Kirsty was aroused by a deep voice saying, "Sleeping on the job, eh?" Opening her eyes she saw her husband grinning. "Well. What do you have to say for yourself?"

Kirsty stretched, "It's your fault, I don't get enough sleep at night!"

"Come on, Mrs, stir yourself, where's my supper?" Matt gently held her arms and pulled her from the chair. He kissed her cheek and asked, "Are you OK? Feeling tired?"

She took both his hands and with one of her own she smoothed them across her slightly bulging stomach. "Yes. A bit disturbed last night. Think 'Delilah' thought she wasn't getting enough attention." Smiling she patted the bump, "Matt, you are happy, aren't you, sweetie?"

"Course. Though I'm not really happy with er ... DELILAH?" The corner of his mouth twitched, "Thought perhaps, Nefertiti, or Boadicea."

"What, over my dead body. No. I want her to be beautiful, really knock the socks off all the fellas."

"Like you, you mean?"

"Flatterer! How about Helen of Troy?" She chuckled then smiled into his eyes. "Matt, seriously, what about Helen? What do you think?" She inclined her head, "Helen, I like it, do you?"

"Mmm, yes I do. What about a second name?"

"I'd like to give her my Grandma's name, Elizabeth. What do you think?"

"Mmm, Helen Elizabeth Gray. Yes, nice." He bowed his head solemnly, "I name our daughter, Helen Elizabeth Gray."

Kirsty smiled then her eyes clouded momentarily, "You weren't too disappointed when you knew it wasn't a boy?"

Matt shook his head. "No. To tell you the truth I had secretly hoped for a girl. As long as it's all right. I'm just happy we'll be a family."

"I've been looking through some old photos today. I found this one with my Grandma, you know, the one I mentioned, Elizabeth." Kirsty held it out, "That's her," and she added shyly, "and me when I was very little."

Matt took the picture and said, "Aww, aren't you cute? Couldn't mistake you with that mop of hair. Where was this taken?"

"On the edge of a village called Beechwood. About 60 or 70 miles away. We, Mum and me, would go by train. I loved the times with the old lady. She made the most delicious jam from her masses of soft fruit and honey from her own bees. She taught me to make cakes and pastry ..."

Matthew grinned and said, "Oh, it's her I have to blame is it?" He side stepped to avoid a playful push.

"Cheek!" Kirsty smiled distractedly, "We would walk through the woods and collect bluebells, and she'd fill every vase and jam jar. Such a lovely picture ... still in my mind."

"Tell me more about her."

"Well, as you can see, she's little and fat and lovely and she was always hugging me. She had lots of lavender in the garden, picked sprigs of it, had it under the pillows, everywhere. Grandma's hair was thick and springy, and she would struggle to keep it flat by rubbing lavender oil on it. I ask you? Lavender oil! I can never smell that scent without thinking of her." Kirsty paused and held the photo again.

"We'd work in her garden and when I was tired she'd push me on the swing." Kirsty held out the photograph, "Like that, see?"

"You look very happy there."

"Yes, I loved her old cottage ... guess what it was called?"

They both said in unison, "Lavender cottage."

"How often did you see her?"

"A lot until she went to live with the angels." Kirsty blushed and laughed with embarrassment, "Sorry. That's what Mum used to say and, and, I don't know, I, I never stopped thinking it. How stupid."

"You didn't really think it was true did you?" Matthew shook his head. "When you were older your mother told you the truth, didn't she?"

"No. Not really. I mean I knew Gran must be dead, but you didn't argue with Mum. Can't explain properly ... She was uncomfortable if I asked questions about anything. I knew better than to ask." Kirsty paused, "Never mind about that now ... how was your ..."

"You've never talked about your father at all. Has he gone to live with the angels?"

"Matt! No, I don't remember him, must have gone to live with the ... " She reddened, "Must have died before I was born."

"Sorry, love, didn't mean to upset you. It's just ..."

"It's OK. Come on, I'm starving. Don't forget I'm eating for two!" She took his hand.

Matthew insisted that Kirsty rested while he washed up after the meal. She lay on the bed reliving her time with Grandma. The girl breathed deeply as she remembered the soft, plump cushioned breasts, of her beloved Gran, where as a little girl she had delighted in burying her head.

A sudden longing overcame Kirsty. She called, "Matthew, Matthew."

Her husband took the stairs one at a time, "What's wrong, are you all right?"

"Yes, I want to go to Grandma's house."

"What? When? Why?"

Kirsty, wide eyed with excitement looked at Matt, seeing his concerned expression. "Sorry sweetheart. It's, can't explain it. I want to see the cottage. I have this feeling, this ... NEED to go back. Indulge me, please ... I'm pregnant."

Matthew sat down and held her hand, "You don't know if the old place is still standing."

"We could see." She kissed him, "Please!"

Slivers of sunlight slipped through the curtains making a filligree pattern on the bedroom wall of the cottage. Kirsty took from her pocket a dog-eared snapshot of her Grandma Cameron pushing a little girl on a swing.

Smiling, Kirsty watched through the window as her daughter, Helen, pushed her own small girl on the same tree seat. Elizabeth, fondly known as Liz, laughed, her round face full of merriment.

Kirsty called from the window, "Tea in 10 minutes. Come in and wash your hands, Liz." Her family waved assent.

Kirsty and Matt had never regretted moving permanently to Lavender Cottage on his retirement. Despite the giant task, they tackled rebuilding and renovating their new home. The stone structure stood up well to the years and with love and a satisfactory weariness they had completed their 'new' cottage.

Time, since then, made for busy fulfilling lives when their families visited in the holidays. Kirsty didn't keep bees but busied herself growing soft fruits and making jam. She enjoyed showing Liz how to make cakes and pastry. Smiling wryly to herself to remembered Matt's cheeky comments all those years ago. Well, I have improved!

Kirsty's gaze moved to Helen, same mop of red hair as herself. It wouldn't be long before the young couple would be having their second child.

Helen held out the old photograph to her husband. "Look Daniel. Mum showed me this earlier. It's her, look, on the swing, when she was tiny, just like our Liz. Helen brushed away a tear. The little old lady is my great grandmother. When I asked Mum about her she said, 'She went to live with the angels.' I started to laugh but I saw she was upset so I hugged her."

Kirsty and Matt put the finishing touches to tea when Liz ran in, Kirsty held out her arms and enclosed her granddaughter to her plump breasts. She remembered her own grandmother in this same kitchen.

Helen held out the old photograph to Liz, "Do you know who this little girl is?"

Liz peered at the faded images. "It's me, it's me," she said excitedly.

Kirsty laughed, "No, it's me!"

Liz looked down at her own tiny form, looked again at the photo then at Kirsty. "That can't be you," she said seriously, "YOU are fat!"

Sitting on the Fence

Scoop Gutterpretz

They say nothing changes and I'll vouch for that. I've been scribbling for the same local rag for over thirty years. It's only a free paper now, but it was a proper paper when I joined it and I still remember one particular day back in 1960.

It was Monday and the politicians had let us down. Nothing new from Westminster and the local talk shop had done no better, no strikes, major accidents or hospital cases involving the famous or infamous. Worse than that, the Christmas supplement was due out and we still hadn't found the traditional London story.

"Tell you what," said Shorty Barker, who was Editor then. "Why not try outside the manor. Don't have to be local. Long as it's London I'm sure our readers'll be interested."

That's how I came to be across the Thames. I tried to talk to people in the street and got nowhere. Everyone was in a rush, like shoppers on opening day of Harrod's sale. My feet ached from tramping granite cobbles, past St Pauls, Tower Hill and into the docks. I tried a Pub on the Isle of Dogs. A pint of bitter to match my mood. Solace for a throat dried by futile questions. The bar was empty except for the Landlord who kept going on about somebody I had never heard of. I listened anyway, since I couldn't do any worse than I'd done so far that day.

"Sid Devereaux always sailed close to the wind. Bloody miracle he didn't spend his whole life in gaol. Six years in the Scrubbs for blowing a Bank were enough to keep him clean the rest of his natural, or so he kept telling everybody here at the Crown and there's some as might have swallowed it.

Thing about the Crown is it's close by the foot tunnel from the Island to Greenwich. Handy for getting away from them geezers what likes cars with noisy bells, but them wireless's was getting a sight better and the tunnel weren't what it used to be. If Sid had twigged that he might have stayed clean like he boasted, long as you understand clean means he weren't nabbed Don't mean he weren't doin' nothing. Perish the thought!"

Another customer came in to the riverside Pub and interrupted the Landlord's tale, but only to buy a packet of Craven "A" cigarettes, then we were alone again.

"Now where was we?"

"You were telling me all about the man who ran this Pub before you," I said.

"Well not all. I mean nobody knows all, do they? Well they might think they do," he continued without waiting for my answer. "I mean you take Sid. People thought they knowed him, then when he were banged up they found out the truth. Course they still didn't know the whole truth, not even them as went to Court every day.

I were working for Sid then. Had been for about a year and with him being in Court like, I had to stay here. I mean somebody's got to keep things going ain't they? Anyhow the Brewers said they was grateful, then they give me the job permanent and I been here ever since. Nigh on ten year. Gordon Bennett! I just thought. If Sid gets full remission for good behaviour he could be out any day now. I tell you what though, if he thinks he's taking over the Crown again, then he's got another think coming."

"Do you think the Brewers would offer it to him? Given that he's done two stretches now, I doubt that he could get a license. In fact I'm a bit surprised that the Magistrate gave him a license the last time."

"Oh they're quite reasonable, so long as the 'Old Bill' don't raise no objections. Anyway, most of our customers have done time. No offence Guv!"

"Oh none taken I assure you. There but for the grace of God and all that jazz. Quite a few of my mates, weren't so lucky."

I wished I hadn't said that. It was a clear opening for him to question me. Anytime now he's going to ask what I do for a living, I thought. If I admit that I write for a south London rag, he's bound to dry up.

No need to lie. He didn't ask. He was too keen to tell his story. Probably bored his regulars to death telling them the yarn over and over. Anyway he was back where he left off, like a needle dropping into the groove of a Jukebox record.

"Course they knowed 'e done it, but they never found the loot and 'e never told 'em nothing. While he was out on bail CID was buzzin' round him like bluebottles round a jam pot.

Bluebottles, you get it?" He laughed so much that I joined in. I didn't see the joke but he was like Gilbert and Sullivan's laughing Policeman, his laughter was contagious.

"Can I get you another?" He asked, when we eventually stopped, as if expecting me to pay for my entertainment.

"Not just at the moment, but let me get you something."

He accepted the price of a pint, topped up his glass by about a third and returned to the story.

"Best part of a year they followed him around. Anybody what talked to him got the third degree. They kept hanging round the bar standing him drinks, like they was trying to get him drunk so as he might let something might slip. No bleedin' chance.

I got to admire him when I thinks about it. I mean, got to admire him getting away with it all them years and nobody knowing. Well some must of done that's obvious, but I didn't, his Missis didn't, his brother-in-law Jack Bishop didn't and I could name a lot more as might of knowed but didn't."

"Sorry, I don't follow you. What didn't you know?"

"About him launderin' Ginger's money. Ginger, the biggest fence in the East-end. Ginger didn't want to, mind. He hated Sid's guts in fact, but Sid got something on him and Ginger got to toe the line or else, and "or else" won every round bar the last.

I told you about the foot tunnel and in a minute I'll tell you how Sid got caught in it. Ginger would of done a stretch as well, if he hadn't grassed Sid up. There's some still can't believe Ginger done such a thing, seeing as how he was East Ferry born, but they never seen him suffering all them years like what I did, doing whatever Sid told him and burning up inside all the while. Wonder he didn't do for Sid long before, but I suppose Sid was just too sharp for him and he got to like it or lump it."

"Did you ever find out what Sid had on Ginger and what Ginger was doing for Sid?" I asked in frustration at this lack of detail. I couldn't see what the Sid had done to make him so admired, still less why the allegedly important trader in stolen goods should have been under his control.

"Well, I told you they never recovered the money from Sid's bank job, right?"

"Yes," I said, in a voice more patient than I felt.

"Well it was used notes, all except some bundles of new fivers what Sid posted to the CID bloke's homes. Nigh on laughed his self to death, readin' them newspaper stories about their wives getting arrested trying to spend the robbery money. At least half a dozen got done before they twigged.

Anyhow Sid gives Ginger the rest, all the used notes, so as he could use it to buy hot money, you know stuff what they can trace. Sid and Ginger done alright too, givin' only two bob in the pound. Laundered it all round town. Bookies, down the market, old cars for cash then floggin' 'em cheap for clean money. You name it they was into it, 'til all the hot stuff was gone and they got a nice little bundle. Bought a couple of second-hand car sites and a row of Stepney lock-ups.

Ginger put sixty per cent in his name and forty in Sid's. That were the first and last time Ginger were ever in partnership, but he didn't know then that writing down all them details in his own fair hand was so bleedin' dangerous. Course if Sid hadn't somehow got hands on them bits of paper, and if Sid hadn't got a microphone under the table taping every word of their plan and where they got their money, maybe things wouldn't have turned out like they did. See that's how he made Ginger his accomplice. What briefs call after the fact of the bank job and before the fact of his spending the money what he stole. He was settin' Ginger up right from the start. Sharp as a razor is our Sid."

"But Sid couldn't harm Ginger without harming himself, so what did Ginger have to be worried about?" I asked.

"You don't know Sid. He would have done time if that's what it took. Ginger had to do what he was told, or him and Sid would be going down together and Ginger knew Sid would do it too. Now Ginger fancied 'is self as a toff and got a nice little gaff up Hampstead way and two little girls what he said was gonna be Deb's when they growed up. He got a lot to lose and Sid got nobody and nothing but this Pub. Thing is Sid didn't seem to want nothing else so we couldn't twig why he got mixed up with Ginger in the first place. Then somebody who was at school with both of 'em says Ginger used to beat Sid up in them days.

So Sid's got the goods on Ginger and don't give a toss if they both goes down. Course we didn't know that then, we just seen Ginger down here every bleedin' night and givin' Sid this envelope what was supposed to be Sid's cut. Sid told us later it were only bits of folded paper 'cos he didn't need no money, then Sid'd get Ginger to serve him a drink or two 'fore he sent him home. It were the same every night."

"So Sid was only trying to humiliate him, not take his money though, from the way you tell it, I imagine Ginger would rather it was money. So how did it come to an end?"

"The usual George?"

I jumped as a voice behind me said, "No, make it mild and bitter. I'm proper parched but I don't want to get sloshed or I'll get roasted when I get home. Bet Stan been rabittin' on about old Sid again ain't he?" He asked me. I turned and saw a second door from the street. It was behind me and I hadn't noticed it before. "It's the rubber soles," he said, having seen the way he'd made me jump. "Quiet as a mouse and rubber soles is what Sid should of got his self, right Stan?"

"That's what I was just going to tell this gent 'ere."

"Gilbert. Call me Bert," I said.

"He told you how Sid used to sit on Ginger then. We was all scared of Ginger, yet there was Sid who we thought weren't no more than a three rounder, treatin' Ginger like a slave. Slapped him down if he said a word, made him clean up the mess if a drink got spilt. Sat on him right enough, sat on him proper. I'm only surprised it lasted so long without no blood being spilt. Go on Stan, it's your yarn, you tell him."

"Can I get you something, Bert?"

I got the message and bought a round to pay the story teller's fee for the next episode. Once more Stan filled his glass with an inch or two, gave George his cheap mild and bitter and charged me for three pints of bitter.

"It ended when Ginger come crashing in sweating like a pig and runs over to Sid in a right tizz. "You got to help me," he says. "Or I'm done for. I'll take you with me, see if I don't," he screamed at Sid. We didn't have a clue what he was on about, but Sid must have 'cos he didn't slap him down like we was used to.

"Old Bill on your tail?" He asked Ginger, who just nods. All his breath gone see, just pants with his mouth open and stares at Sid. Bloody good bit of acting weren't it George?"

"Yeah, but we didn't know that then. Go on Stan tell him what happened next."

"Well Sid was staring at this suitcase Ginger brought in and he says, "The stuff in there, is it?"

"Ginger don't answer, he just opens up the suitcase and starts covering the table with solid gold watches and red and green and blue jewels, whoppers like I never seen in my life before."

"Me neither," said George.

"Put that stuff away you stupid bastard," says Sid and he starts putting it back into the case. Now what Sid and none of us noticed was, Ginger was wearing gloves. What we was to find out later was, the only prints on that swag was Sid's. They was on the gems, the case, everything.

"They got East India Dock Road blocked off and they're coming down the Island like fleas lookin' for a fresh dog," says Ginger and he started rolling his eyes around, like them Jamaican matelots. What a performance, eh George?"

"Should of got an Oscar," grinned George.

"Through the tunnel, it's the only way," said Sid, as he pushed Ginger outside. Then we heard whistles and the sound of running, but we still put our money on Sid. This weren't the first time he only got a few yards start and got away in the past few years. All that stuff about going clean. What he meant was thanks to that tunnel he never got caught, but this time was different, this time they got wireless's what worked and they got a dozen rozzers waiting to nab 'em at the Greenwich end."

"So what happened to Ginger? I asked.

"He told them he was only running 'cos his mate was running and he didn't know nothing about nothing, least of all this talk about Hatton Garden. When was that supposed to have been? He asks and surprise, surprise, he just happened to have mates who'd swear he was playing poker with them about that time. Course they didn't believe it, but when he starts telling them about the money Sid give him to invest they went easy on him. Joke is, Sid's brief got him off on that, so he kept the money, or the property as it was by then, but they got him for receiving all them jewels and things."

"So Ginger went back to being the East End's number one fencer of stolen property did he?"

"For a bit he did, but not for long. Sid weren't going to let him get away with that. No! Sid sold his forty per cent and used the cash to have Ginger laid to rest.

"You mean murdered?"

Never said that, did we George? Let's just say he weren't never seen around here after that and nobody seen him nowhere else neither." "Ask no questions and hear no lies," George added, with an exaggerated wink.

I don't mind admitting now, I believed every word. I might have made a fool of myself and the paper if I hadn't looked once again at the boxing photograph displayed behind the bar. This time my eyes focused on the boxer's names and the penny dropped.

National Boys Club Champions 1948. George "Ginger" Devereaux - Middleweight. Stanley Ignatious "Sid" Devereaux - Welterweight. Stan, alias Sid, saw the direction of my eyes and began to laugh.

"Let me introduce you to my brother George, or Ginger as we used to call him before he lost his hair." We all had a good laugh then and I paid for another round of well earned drinks before heading home - still without a story!