

books *with friends*

Stratford Literary Festival

Sharing Stories Project

Books with Friends – Stratford Literary Festival 2017-05-25

No More Stories

by Sue Scarfe

There was a time, not so long ago, when sitting in a waiting room chatting to the person sitting next to me gave me enough stories to fill a book, and more besides. Tales of childbirth out in a potato field, the sickly calf brought into the cottage to be hand fed; walking five miles without benefit of a breakfast to be churched at Mass after the birth of a baby; stories of donkeys going home on their own when their owners were drunk; of getting married, only to see your new husband once a year from then on when he returned from his work on a building site in England. He'd leave, after the two weeks holidays were up, leaving you pregnant again with a farm to run. Tales of the pig killing time in early autumn, when the bladder was blown up and used as a football by the boys.

Whitewashing the cottage rooms and the sheds and barns in spring; lighting a candle to be placed on the windowsill to guide the Holy Family at Christmas; taking the pilgrimage to Crough Patrick; sending out the youngest child to find a new laid egg for the village Priest; the midwife arriving on her black tricycle while the children were sent out to play and the Father was in the 'pub'. Your husband meeting a lorry driver in the 'pub' toilets, paying out five shillings for packets of condoms the driver had bought 'up North' smuggled down into the Republic. He did a roaring trade. Then, confessing at Mass to a horrified priest who gave you penance of ten Hail Marys and hissed from behind the confessional curtain he'd be keeping an eye on your belly from now on.

Giving your eldest son to God knowing your reward would be in Heaven.

Paying the local Doctor, who reeked of whiskey, a shilling to come out to your remote cottage to tend a sick Mother. He prescribes expensive medicines that don't work and that you can barely afford. Buying a length of hand-made lace from a Gipsy girl standing at your door who read your palm and then stole the clean sheets you'd hung on the bushes to dry. Having baby siblings, who had died soon after birth, buried in the local cillin in the dead of night by the Father and the Uncle.

All these examples, and many more, are the stories people have told me while I've waited in waiting rooms. Waiting for x-rays or blood tests, to see Doctors, for the Social Welfare person.

One would lean across and ask how long we have been here, and I'd reply and say I've come home. Then another would join in and ask if we had asses, and I'd answer we do so. Then another would say 'Do you mind the time that Paddy's ass would come home and leave himself in the pub?'. The stories grew from simple beginnings, from tales heard from Great Grandfathers to stories of their own, schooldays with a baked potato in their pocket for their dinner, the tribulations of growing up with a Father away for the work, the pure joy of Fair days and fishing for trout.

I still need to sit in waiting rooms but now everyone has their noses firmly glued to a gadget of some sort or another. They're playing games, I suppose, or perhaps they're trawling the internet, or putting updates on Facebook. I no longer have conversations with complete strangers about intimate details of their lives. I no longer need to sigh when one of us is called in to see the main man, wishing I could have had just five minutes longer to listen to their tales of going to school in the Thirties.

They have to have their names called twice now because they have things in their ears and cannot hear, and they look up, vaguely surprised, away from killing mutants in some online game. Very few now lean towards me in a conspiratorial fashion and ask how many acres do we have and do we own any asses. Women no longer confide in hushed whispers about the sheer joy of finding out about condoms to prevent yet another baby. They are sending messages on their iPhone. Absorbed in another world.

Season Of Mists And Gossamer Spiders Webs

by Sue Scarfe

Poised and ready. Last night there was the most wonderful sunset. It was simply stunning and the camera battery needed charging.

So now it's charged and ready. What's the betting it'll be overcast and grim when the sun goes down? These mornings are simply wonderful, cold and crisp. Our cottage overlooks Tom's field, bit of a rough area actually, full of reeds. But on autumn mornings, early, before the sun rises, those reeds are draped in spiders' webs that glitter and sparkle. There's often a thick mist lying low over the field swathing the grasses and the bottoms of the trees.

It's cold. That sharp cold which heralds a warm day. He put his jacket and his cap on this morning before he ventured down our street with the dogs for their early morning walk. I snuggle back into my blankets and doze while the kittens, released from the confines of the bathroom, race hither and thither across the floors, skidding to a sudden halt to hurl themselves at the window when they see a sparrow in the honeysuckle.

Murphy lands on my shoulder and pounds away with his soft paws, purring away, until Molly leaps on him and away they go again. Jonny goes past on his tractor and the first of the workmen on the bridge drive by. It's getting light now and the beautiful gossamer spiders webs can be seen no longer. The mist rises and disappears, and Eilis is the first dog home, barking frantically at the back door as though the hounds of hell are right on her tail.

I emerge from my cocoon of warm blankets and ask Himself what's new in the street and he'll tell me Wendy's horses have gone down the bog road, and Jason's teeth are falling out, and Tom is away today taking cattle to the North. He makes a cup of tea and I prop myself up and try to look awake. The view from our window is plain and ordinary again, the mist is long gone and the magical sparkle of the complicated spiders' webs are but an illusion.

The secrets of the night hours will have to wait a while as the sun rises and late bees go from flower to flower, and apples drop with a thud from the old tree. The little pansies have long given up, assailed by snails and slugs their tiny faces are chewed almost to oblivion. Time for

them to be consigned to the compost heap. But their seeds will lie dormant to take root next year in unexpected places. And the wheel of life goes around once more.

About Sue

Sue was a member of the British Lung Foundation Patient Forum. Her daily posts brought life with Himself, her cats, dogs and donkey in an eccentric cottage down an isolated lane in Ireland into the lives of many whose condition often renders them completely isolated except for the visits to and from medical professionals and carers. The posts were eagerly awaited by everybody because her acute observation and ready wit helped to lighten the everyday grind of living with lung disease.

She wrote hundreds of such pieces, whilst herself living with severe COPD and the ubiquitous oxygen tank. Sadly, whilst preparing a new article to submit to Sharing Stories, her lungs gave up and she passed away three days later.

Her Books with Friends friends are heart sore at her loss and, with the approval of her family, have submitted these two short pieces, exactly as she wrote them; in fulfilment of her wishes and to bring the delight of her character to a wider audience.

A Few Thoughts

by Sheila Wolstenholme

Some happy and some sad memories from working as a nurse at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham (1943 – 1947). It was hard work but very rewarding to see in many cases a return to health.

Three months in the Preliminary Training School (PTS) and then onto the wards as a very junior probationer. Bedpans, bed making and cleaning wards. A few days on the wards and you'd hear a general cry of 'Oh my poor feet'!

Some anecdotes:

1. Report to the sister, left by the night staff. Mrs Smith 'ate some custard and vomited a trifle'.
2. The old gentleman, who sold newspapers all night shouting 'Night Mail, Night Mail'.
3. The wee boy of about three, a patient on the men's private ward (no children's ward as there is an excellent children's hospital in Birmingham). Barney had had an appendectomy and I was detailed to remove his sutures. He cried out 'It will hurt nurse. I promise you it will hurt.' I proceeded to tell him about a Little Red Train, which puffed along (I don't think Thomas The Tank Engine had been written then). The elderly gentlemen in the ward were very amused. Barney was pacified and not a tear in sight.
4. Singing on Casualty with the Night Porter one of the hits of the day. 'Give me land, lots of land in the country that I love, don't fence me in'.
5. One of my duties as Casualty Night Nurse was to go across to the Nurses Home, knock on all the doors saying 'Six o'clock nurse'. Sweet revenge for when I was on day duty.
6. On the Private Patients Ward, accompanying Sister Trumpin (no prize for guessing the reason for her nickname). We had to rub all the backsides with cod liver oil, in order to prevent bed sores. Quite a smelly procedure but very effective and good for one's hands, made sore by all the hand washing.
7. One of the first people to be treated with Penicillin was an airman who had been badly burned.

8. One of the patients was the RC Archbishop of Birmingham whose nephew was a colleague of my father. I remarked that my one claim to fame was rubbing the Archbishop's bottom.
9. A frightening moment, taking temperatures one morning. The custom was to insert the thermometers into the mouths of three patients and then return to patient 1 to take his pulse. I glanced across at patient 3 and realised that he had died. Quite a shock but very peaceful for him.
10. Soon after starting on the wards, one of the sisters enquired whether several of her new probationers had ever witnessed a dead person. Several negative replies and we were taken into a side ward to view a dear old lady. She looked so peaceful and reposed that all our fears were removed.
11. Today's nurses are very fortunate – no bad backache as all the beds have electric hoists etc. Hand washing facilities on the approach to the wards are an excellent idea. Although the hours were very long and the pay abysmal, we did have lots of fun.
12. Christmas on the ward was such a lovely time. Groups of nurses would come round carol singing, the turkey was always carved on the ward by a visiting surgeon or physician, and every ward had a lovely tree.

I regret the passing of the nurses being addressed as 'Nurse' and with their surname. It all seems far too familiar. (I must be very old fashioned).

Happy days. My oldest friend, who shared a bedroom with me in 1943, sadly passed away last year. She had lived in Cornwall for over 50 years and had married a doctor who trained at the QE. We regularly kept in touch, and I miss her, but I still hear from her children.

A Faulty Start

by Larry Pontefract

In 1961, at the age of fifteen, I really wanted to be a journalist. Even bought an old, beat up Remington typewriter and bashed out a few stories before going off to school. Alas, my Father thought different (not better!) and demanded that I 'get a trade' and find an apprenticeship. I must have been dragging my feet a bit, as he came home one day and announced that he had arranged an interview for me with a local machinery manufacturer in Blackburn, to be an apprentice electrician. Now I had never shown any remote interest in mechanical things, never mind electricity, but his decision was law and off we went one Saturday morning. Yes, we. He actually sat in on the interview with me, and I guess he made an excellent surrogate candidate, as I was offered the job immediately and started the very next Monday.

You should remember this was 1961, eons before health and safety, employee rights, and equal opportunity – none of which was recognized by my new employer. As arranged, I arrived on the Monday morning and was directed up to the electricians' 'den' which was on an upper factory floor away from the 'fitters' and other folk who seem to be making an awful lot of noise. The foreman took me down to the shop floor and I was introduced to Lionel, works manager who, in lieu of a welcome, stated that I had better watch my step and told the foreman to keep an eye on me. We had only just met.

Well, being the newest and youngest apprentice in a heavy machinery building works was at the lowest rank you could be. Everyone considered you their personal slave and could hurl abuse on demand. The 'fitters' were a tough lot. Just 16 years after WW2, these guys collectively had the emotional scars to show. They weren't mean, just guys who had been through a lot and I was the clean-shaven kid they had fought to save, so I guess expectations were high.

One good example of this was the constant fight to install some wire on the underside of a carpet tufting machine before it was turned over on its legs. Obviously, it was a sight easier to drill down to install the clips before the machine was upturned, than lying on your back drilling vertically - particularly when eye protection was never a consideration. So, the mechanical foreman, being aware of my concern, made it his life's work to get the machine

bed upturned as quickly as possible, to prevent it being 'too easy' for me. The net result of this was a weekly visit to the First Aid department to have my eyes scraped!

The First Aid Department was not a department at all. It was short, fat Taffy, the band saw operator, who had a first aid box in his drawer. I am not too sure why Taffy was given this job, but he was the only source of help. So I presented myself to him and he turned off the band saw, got out his box and, without bothering to wash his hands, proceeded to examine my eyes and confirm yes, they contained metal fragments, which he deftly removed with what felt like a wallpaper scraper, but must have been some clinical instrument as it worked. This weekly visit was reduced when they finally gave in and bought me a pair of safety glasses, much to the amusement of the Fitters who then christened me 'Dan Dare'.

The Managing Director was a most unlikeable soul, who used to swan around the assembling shops in his very expensive suits and, as the company was owned by Americans, he insisted that he be referred to by his initials EP. Well, you can imagine the many combinations of nouns that could be created from those two initials, something of course he completely missed. The same guy didn't like electricians, mainly due to the fact that the fitters were always hammering and drilling etc. thus demonstrating their work ethic, whereas electricians basically didn't make any noise. We just cut wires, twisted them together and connected them to terminals so, whenever he came across us in the factory, he would always come over to see why we were so quiet, and then went away totally frustrated.

As the youngest apprentice, it was my job to take the scrap wire from the electricians' shop and transport it, via a wheelbarrow, to the dumpsite and then burn it to remove the insulation. EP gradually cottoned on to the fact that I did this at the same time every week and, by some remarkable coincidence he was usually in his car at the same time. It amused him no end to run at me in his big white Mk10 Jag and make me dodge the car. However, on one occasion, his near miss caused the wheelbarrow to tip - all the wire spilled out into the parking lot which, as you can imagine, was extra work for me. This time, I got up courage, went over to him, and told him that one day I would have a job and a car just like him, to which he sneered and walked away.

In 1991, I owned a successful electrical business in Canada and yes, I bought a Jag, not a white one, but the satisfaction was very sweet.

The Adventures of Alida Ann

Ch. 1

Alida Ann noiselessly dropped her legs over the side of her bed. The bare floor was colder than she imagined it was going to be, but she dared not try to put on her slippers. Adjusting her jammies so they were not too long over her bare feet, which might make her fall, she drew in her breath and started for the door of her room. She opened it inch by inch, listening to see if there were any noises in the house, which might indicate someone knew she was up. Slowly, she crept along the corridor to the top of the stairs. Then she began descending the polished steps hoping that she would not slip and listening for a tell-tale squeak. She looked down at the telephone table where she had heard her mother's scream a few nights ago, and the velvet curtains pulled across the door to the living room. It was all so strange now, and people had kept patting her hair and telling her 'it would be all right'. But what would be all right?

She realized she had stopped on the stairs, and she must continue. Now, the last step and she pulled one of the velvet curtains gently to go into the room. The electric candle sconces around the wall were all lit, and the room smelled of flowers. But there in the middle of the room was a bed with Daddy in it - her beloved Daddy whom people had been telling her had died and gone to heaven was right here. She wanted to call out to him, but perhaps he was asleep, so she crossed the carpet and tried to pull herself up on this funny bed. Daddy didn't move. He had on his favourite silk pajamas and must be sleeping very deeply as he did not respond to her tugging at him. She tried repeatedly to climb up, but there was no reassuring hand to help her. She felt for one of his hands and found it was icy cold. She nearly called out, but the realization that she was not supposed to be here overcame her, and she just sat down by the bed and cried quietly.

She had no idea how long she sat there, but she began to feel very cold. Slowly, she made her way back up to her room, closed the door and got back in her bed. Something was very wrong, but she would ask more questions in the morning.

'Alida Ann, time to get up.' These words woke Alida from the heavy sleep she must have fallen back into. It was her nearest brother, Craig. 'Mother says your clothes are laid out for you, and don't forget to go potty before you come down for breakfast.'

'Okay, okay, I'll do everything,' Alida mumbled.

Getting out of bed, she shuffled over to the door and pushed the switch for the light to come on. Yes, there were her clothes and her Mary Jane shoes all laid out neatly for her to wear. It must be Sunday, that was the only day she wore her party shoes. As best she could, she shimmied into her undershirt and underpants, a dress, socks and her shoes. For good measure, she tried brushing her hair, but knew it was not right. Mummy would have to do her braids for her. She opened the door to the corridor and went along to the bathroom. No one in there so she went in and shut the door. She managed to wipe herself, wash her hands, and remember to take the hair brush and started downstairs. Her sister, Frances, was waiting at the bottom. 'Here, I'll do your braids for you, Alida.'

'Frances, Daddy is sleeping in the living room, he's not in heaven,' Alida shouted. 'Let me see if he is awake yet, please?'

Frances pressed Alida to herself and said, 'Oh, dear, how do you know that Daddy is sleeping in the living room?'

'Because I went in to see him last night.'

'Mother, Baby has been in the living room, and knows Dad is in there.' Frances called out.

'I am not baby, Frances. Just because you are so grown up, I am *not a baby*.'

'Sorry, Alida, you were such a surprise package that no one knew what to call you for ages - after all Mother and Dad thought that four of us was enough, and then you appeared after ten years of no babies!'

'Frances, what are you talking about?' The sounds of Mother's distressed voice was coming around the corner. 'When did Alida see Dad?'

'Apparently she came down in the night.'

'Oh dear, well can't be helped now. Alida, please let Frances braid your hair, then have some porridge before you and Craig go to Auntie Blanche's. She is taking you both to Sunday School and then you will have dinner with her, and she has a big treat for you in the afternoon.'

'I don't want to go to Auntie Blanche's, Mummy. Why can't I stay here and play with Daddy when he wakes up?'

'Shhhh now, Daddy is not going to wake up,' said Frances, trying to calm Alida down and finish her braids. 'We explained that Daddy died very suddenly in his car, and is going to heaven now.'

'Well, I'd rather go with him than to Sunday School and Auntie Blanche's.'

‘Little One, it does not work that way. God has called your Dad, but not you. You need to be here to be Mother’s big helper girl. She is very sad, and will need lots of help from you now like a big girl.’

Craig’s voice chimed in, ‘Yes, you must be a good big girl, and please put on your leggings and boots now. It is snowing a blizzard out there, and we need to get going.’

A disgruntled and unhappy Alida wrestled into her leggings and pulled on her boots and took Craig’s hand. ‘All right, I’ll go, but I’m telling Miss Potter and see what she says.’

Frances dropped a kiss on Alida’s head and gave Craig a playful shove. Craig and Alida left through the heavy front door out into the storm. There were men in blue uniforms trying to get the snow off the front lawn and shoveling out the driveway. ‘What are they doing, Craig?’

‘There will be lots of cars and people here this afternoon, and the police are trying to provide adequate parking for all of them. C’mon, don’t get in the way. Stay holding my hand, I don’t want you to fall.’

They trudged down the next road to a small bungalow where a middle-aged couple were awaiting them just inside the door which they opened as the two youngsters went up the freshly-shoveled front path.

‘Bless you, Craig, you kept her from getting too cold and snowy, come right on in.’ Auntie Blanche was trying to be extra jolly, Alida felt, but allowed herself to be wrapped in a warm hug and her coat carefully removed. Auntie Blanche smiled cheerfully at her husband, ‘Here, Arthur, you pop this near the radiator, but not too close, mind, we want it to dry, but not burn. We don’t need to leave for church for ten minutes, would you like some cocoa and a cookie before we leave?’

‘No, thank you,’ said Craig.

‘Yes, please,’ said Alida.

‘Alida, don’t make Auntie Blanche extra work. You will be coming back for lunch here after Sunday School so you can have cocoa and a cookie then, okay?’

‘No, it is not okay. Why did she offer it if she did not want us to have it?’

‘She was being polite. But I expect we have time for you to pat Terry if you sit on the floor very still so when he comes in, he can smell you and get used to you. Is that okay, Auntie Blanche?’

‘Good idea,’ Arthur said. ‘Will you get him, Blanche, or shall I?’

‘I’ll do it, dear,’ said Blanche. A moment later, a white ball of fur erupted from behind the kitchen door as Terry was allowed in. He went to Craig first and wanted to jump on him.

‘Just say “down Terry”, and don’t pat him until he waits by your feet, Craig’

‘Down, Terry. Good dog,’ said Craig, as he knelt to caress the dog.

‘My turn,’ said Alida, almost starting to jump up and down, but remembering at the last moment the instructions to stand still.

‘Put your hand out gently and he will go over to you, but mind, don’t encourage him to jump up,’ said Auntie Blanche.

After a few moments with both children now kneeling and patting Terry gently, Auntie Blanche said they must leave for church.

The drive had been slow and very slippery, but they arrived in plenty of time for the church service. Craig masterfully took Alida’s hand again, and they went downstairs to the Sunday School. Craig gave her a coin to put in the collection and watched her walk to her class area. Then ruefully strode over to his table. Suddenly, he could hear his sister’s voice: ‘I told you my Daddy is on his way to heaven right now. He was dead this week, and I want to go there with him. I saw him last night sleeping in the living room, but no one will let me cuddle him.’

‘Oh dear,’ Miss Potter said, ‘I think you better have a chat with the superintendent. She can explain it all better to you than I can with these other children here.’

Craig walked manfully over to Alida’s table, and asked Miss Potter what he should do as, by now, Alida had started to weep loudly. ‘Can you take her to Miss Staples by the platform and let her decide what to do, please, Craig.’ Craig reached out his hand for Alida, but she shrank back and cried all the louder.

‘Please come with me, Alida. You are disturbing the whole Sunday School, and it is time to get started.’

Suddenly, there was Miss Staples beside them with the brass bell in her hands.

‘Come with me, Alida, and you may ring the bell to start Sunday School.’

Alida stopped crying and put out her hand for the bell. ‘No, dear, wait until we are up on the platform, please,’ said Miss Staples. She led the way with the bell in one hand and her other hand holding Alida very firmly. They climbed the steps to the platform, and Miss Staples passed Alida the bell. ‘Now, please ring it gently, then pass it right back to me, all right?’ Alida longed to give the bell a good shaking, but she sensed this was not the way to behave, and rang it quite gently back and forth. She could see everyone staring at her and she

straightened up and looked at the hymn book she was suddenly sharing with Miss Staples. After the opening exercises, Miss Staples led her down to a small room which was kept for extra classes if needed. Miss Staples laboriously balanced her considerable bulk on to one of the small chairs, and indicated that Alida was to sit on another one opposite her.

‘Now, my dear child, what is this all about?’

‘My Mummy says my Daddy is dead and gone to heaven, but he was sleeping in our living room last night, but I couldn’t wake him up.’ Miss Staples visibly blanched at this statement, and stood up to enfold Alida in her arms.

‘This is a very difficult time for your mummy and you must be a very big, good girl-’

Here, Alida cut in with the tears starting to fall again. ‘But he was right there, and he just wouldn’t wake up, he has not gone to heaven wherever that is.’

Miss Staples sat down on a chair and pulled Alida on to her lap. ‘Please try to stop crying and listen to what I am saying to you, Alida Ann.’ Miss Staples passed Alida a lacy handkerchief and helped dry her face. ‘Death is a hard thing for anyone to understand, and especially, one as young as you are, my dear! What made your Daddy so special was his spirit, his soul, that is what has gone up to heaven. He doesn’t need his body anymore so that will be buried here - your mother must be having a home funeral for your Daddy this afternoon so that is why there were lots of flowers and your Daddy’s body was there, but he couldn’t wake up to hold you. People will come and say prayers and say nice words about your Dad, then there will be special people who will take your Daddy away to be buried. You must keep all your happy memories of your Daddy so you can think about him with love often. I am sure your Mummy will need lots of love from you and extra hugs and kisses.’

‘Will my Mummy die now too?’

‘I would not think so, dear child, but we all pass on when our time here is finished. We just don’t usually know when that will be.’

‘I heard Mummy scream when she answered the phone at night, and she kept saying “no, no, no, it can’t be Fred, not my Fred”. Since then, all my family has been at home and so many things have happened.’

‘Oh, Alida Ann, I must collect the money from the classes and bring our assembly to a close. Please go and sit quietly in your class now.’

Reluctantly, I returned to Miss Potter and the other children in my class. They all stared at me, but Miss Potter said ‘How nice to have you back again, Alida Ann. Can you find Hymn No. 23 in the hymnal?’

Anniversary Blues

by David Adams

It's not easy being blind.

They say they've levelled the playing field and there are all sorts of whizz-kid devices, technology and services that can help out. But there are still lots of things a blind person cannot do as well as a sighted person. For instance, although in theory airplanes can fly without pilots, I have never met a blind captain yet. Also there are not many blind shoplifters and even fewer blind murderers. It's difficult to achieve successful outcomes to complex situations when you can't see anything. You do need to rely on others for some things, however independent you might wish to be. That's why I am lucky that my partner is so caring.

People were surprised when I fell in with a partner who was black – how was I to know? I think they assumed, because I was blind, I didn't know what colour she was. I decided that was of absolutely no consequence; I can't afford to be discriminatory and would not want to be anyway. After all, she did not mind that I was white. We have been together for a long time now and she has been diligent, patient, and extremely supportive.

Next year will be her *big* anniversary after which she is sure to retire and sadly, the way things are, may only have a couple of years to live. Life is cruel but together we face the future, uncertain as it is, as bravely as possible.

At the moment, we are trying to be positive and focus on her anniversary year. We want to make the most of it and are considering ideas that will make it memorable for both of us. It might be a holiday abroad or a cruise or perhaps just some long walks around Lake Windemere. As you get older, there's something comforting about revisiting favourite places from a distant youth, even though many of them are now overrun by hordes of visitors. Although I bemoan the situation, she, despite everything, is still gregarious, friendly and makes new friends wherever we go. So in the end we think we will settle for something close to home. It takes a lot of maturity to face an uncertain future. She never seems to think about it and never seems to dwell on it, whereas I worry quite a lot about how I will manage when she is gone. If she lives five more years, she will be lucky, but we never talk about it.

Given this precarious situation, we are prepared to make the best of everything and try to stay as fit, active and positive as ever we can. I sometimes get a bit depressed thinking about the future without her, but she bravely pulls ahead, seemingly oblivious to impending tragedy, focusing on the here and now with bright, shining eyes and a great attitude.

Every morning when I come downstairs, she greets me with a lick and a woof and a very waggy tail. There really is no substitute for a faithful guide dog.

Buried Memories

by Trevor Hawkes

On the morning Saturday, 24th October 1936, Florence Elsie Hawkes (née Ongley) was serving behind the counter in the Newsagents and Tobacconist at 13a Newcomen Street, a narrow turning off the Borough High Street near London Bridge. That afternoon she was admitted to Victoria Ward¹ in Guy's Hospital round the corner and soon after gave birth to a first-born son and only child, Trevor Ongley Hawkes². I was almost called 'Guy', which might have made me an uncomfortable target for teasing on Bonfire Nights. I am grateful that my parents thought better of it and came up with Trevor instead.

Elsie's father, Edward Ongley, was a thrifty plumber and a member of the Order of Oddfellows, a fraternal society that probably evolved from tradesmen's guilds; however, its origins are obscure and its earliest written records only date from the early 1700s. Like the Masonic Order, the Oddfellows is divided into lodges and encourages mutual support among its members. With loans from the Oddfellows', Edward ('Ted') had acquired three houses in Forest Hill and the shop in Newcomen Street by the time he married in his thirties.

Elsie's husband, Fred (Frederick Thomas), was one of 11 children born to John Hawkes and his wife Isabella (née Coughtrey). Although Fred won a scholarship to St Olave's, he was not allowed to take it up because his mother insisted he should start work at the earliest opportunity to increase the family income. He left school at 13, and one story has it that he was actually only 12 because his mother altered the year on his birth certificate from 1906 to 1905. John's income as a dustman was not enough to feed so many mouths, but his wife Bella was very enterprising at supplementing it. For instance, she ran a small money-

¹ It turned out that one of Trevor's classmates at secondary school had been born three weeks earlier in the same

²
Friday's child is loving and giving,
Saturday's child works hard for a living,
But the child who is born on the Sabbath Day
Is bonny and blithe and good and gay.

But the child who is born on the Sabbath Day
Is bonny and blithe and good and gay.

lending operation in the neighbourhood at profitable rates of interest – usury was frowned on by the Church but was not illegal - and in the evenings had her children working at home, making envelopes and suchlike for meagre remuneration.

Fred first clapped eyes on Elsie behind the counter as a newspaper boy when he took over the round that included the wards in Guy's. One thing led to another and, when they got engaged, Elsie's father promised them the shop, with modest accommodation above it, as their wedding present. By the time they got married (in 1933) Fred was working for Nestlé's as a laboratory assistant in Cheapside across the river, having started there as a humble office boy when he left school. They had some connection with the Dean of Southwark, who married them in the Lady Chapel of Southwark Cathedral that sits in the shadow of London Bridge and is now dwarfed by the nearby Shard.

My very first memory, or what I believe to be a memory, concerns a tricycle. By 1939 there was much talk of war. Sometime that year, I was sent to Freshwater Bay in the Isle of Wight to stay with a childless middle-aged couple known to me only as Aunt Nan and Uncle Harold. My parents had been advised to send me away from London to avoid the expected bombing if war broke out. (In fact, I am not sure whether this was before war had been declared on 1st September 1939) or after, and I have no idea how my foster parents had been chosen: Friends of the family? Distant relatives? Volunteers? I recall indistinctly that they were kindly people. I am not sure how long I stayed in Freshwater - probably only a month or two - but word on the block was now that Germany were planning to invade and that the IoW would be among the first places to fall under Nazi occupation. So it was then decided that I should return to London. My parents and grandfather Edward came down to fetch me and, on arrival, presented me with a brand-new tricycle - it must have been awkward to carry it on the train and the ferry. I remember vividly my excitement at seeing the shining machine and wanting to ride it to London, or so I was told later.

From July till the end of October 1940, in what Churchill was the first to call The Battle of Britain, the Luftwaffe strove unsuccessfully to gain air superiority over southern England prior to a planned amphibian and airborne invasion (code name Operation Sea Lion, which Hitler had to postpone and later abandon). The sustained German bombing of London and other major British cities began towards the end of the Battle of Britain, after a British raid on Berlin in early September prompted Hitler to order the Luftwaffe to switch its attentions from RAF Fighter Command to cities of industrial and political significance. The

bombing of London, the Blitz, was relentless from August until the end of December 1940. The air-raid siren warning of an air attack would go off most nights and we would rush to a shelter in the basement of a nearby warehouse until the 'All Clear' sounded.

I do not know which particular raid destroyed our home but I suspect that the notorious attack on the City on December 29th is a likely candidate. On that night between 6pm and the early hours of the morning, more than 24,000 high explosive bombs and 100,000 incendiary bombs were dropped on London. The tide was low in the Thames and water to douse the flames was difficult to pump from the nearby Pool of London; also there was an unhelpful breeze fanning the fires. That night our warehouse shelter, which contained stores of cooking fat, caught fire, and we had to beat a hasty retreat along Newcome Street with the flames climbing up the buildings on both sides. I was carried by an uncle and my parents along Borough High Street until we reached London Bridge tube station and descended far underground into the protection of 'The Deep', where lots of Londoners regularly spent the nights of the Blitz. (Henry Moore made some famous drawings of them, some asleep, some watchful, in the tunnels of their safe havens).

The following morning we came up into the daylight and returned home to see the damage. Where our little shop with rooms above had been the day before was a smouldering pile of rubble, and I knew that somewhere beneath the debris were the molten remains of my shiny tricycle.

After the war, the space once occupied by our shop became a lock-up garage crudely constructed out of rusting corrugated iron. But when I visited it with my son last year, it had become a shiny green bike store for Guy's medical students. We wondered whether my tricycle was still down there.



Children

by Sybil Stacey

When this old world starts getting me down, I have a solution. I visit a nearby restaurant with my husband, where a children's party is often going on. On one visit a male customer told me – in a bored voice – that a children's party would be starting soon and we should finish our meal double quick. I thanked him for his concern and added: I had never found children a nuisance. Another time a waiter told us a noisy party was going on, and we should come back another time. To which I replied I didn't mind noise, wasn't that what children did? Since then customers and staff have changed their attitude. One manager now sadly left, always put on the theme tune from Dad's Army on the loop CD. It made me smile.

A member of the present staff always made a point of saying a few words to us when we visited, even if she was busy serving other customers. I liked that! I also liked to discreetly watch the children partying. The sibling rivalry, the dominant children and those with their chins in their hands who perhaps wished they were elsewhere.

On one particular visit, a party near us had what appeared to be a brother and sister from one family, the same from another family – perhaps cousins – together with several friends. I had to try hard not to laugh out loud at their behaviour and also not to make it obvious I was watching them! During the party the waiter went to collect the birthday cake and, as soon as he had left for the kitchen, three of the children, one girl and two boys, quickly came over to our table and did a very good spontaneous dance, arms and legs flailing like windmills. When they had finished dancing I smiled and clapped quietly, they bowed or curtsied theatrically and then quickly went back to their table as they noticed the waiter approaching with the birthday cake. Later, the parents arrived to collect their children whose attitude changed; they became by turns, naughty or clinging. The parents began organising coats, becoming more and more irritable as the children clowned around. Eventually the parents marshalled the children towards the exit like an army. As the female dancer passed my table she glanced at me, I lowered my glasses and winked. She smiled.

Life Down Under

Anonymous

Elsie was busy tidying the ladies cloakroom at the Grand Hotel. It was her first night on duty, she was very nervous. The ballroom was booked for the local Hunt Ball, and it was due to start. Pink shaded lights reflected in the mirrored walls, the marble basins were spotless but she rubbed them yet again! A pile of clean towels neatly placed by each, everything was ready, even the saucer for tips by the door. Hopefully it would be well filled at the end of the evening.

Elsie was a small woman, thin and harassed, cowed by life's hard knocks: resigned to the inevitable bad luck that had dogged her most of her life. Her bully of a husband had finally left her and the kids. She wasn't sorry for that, only for the debts he had left behind.

The sound of music drifted down from above, her heart started to beat faster, wiping her damp hands down the sides of her new pink uniform, she waited. Empty hangers ready for the coats gently swayed in the draught from the stairs making a tinkling sound.

The tapping of footsteps on the stairs heralded the first arrival. A tall girl, in a black dress with narrow straps, and slit to the thigh. Heavy black outlined her eyes, purple eye shadow, and brilliant pink on cheeks and lips. She ignored Elsie and flounced into the powder room. Elsie's 'Good evening Madame' echoed into empty air, she felt her face flush with embarrassment.

Donna was the young rebel daughter of the Master, present under protest. Her parents preferred having her under their eyes, after yet another incident with the local police at a wild party. She fumbled in her bag finding a blue capsule, and swallowed it down with water. That should help her to get through this ghastly dance! She stared at her reflection in the mirror, watching as her pupils got bigger; it was beginning to take effect. She sat touching up her make-up, adding yet more black mascara, and teasing the tousled black hair with a comb. She wondered if any of her crowd would come, it was unlikely, unless coerced by parents too. They thought it boring and stupid like her.

Frank Williams was sure to be here; no doubt she could wind him up a bit more! He had been chasing her for weeks, the lecherous old fool. But it was fun to lead him on. He gave smashing presents after all.

At the counter, an arrogant blond tapped long red nails impatiently on the shiny surface.

'Do hurry up, and be careful with that coat, it is mink you know. Give me the ticket I

have to be in the receiving line.'

This was Frances Williams, deputy Master, slim and elegant, in a fashionable silver lamé gown, Her face gave away her age: lined and leathery from the weather and too many cigarettes. Strolling into the powder room lighting a cigarette, she froze, glaring at Donna, still fiddling with her hair.

'You cheeky Madam, following Frank here, I know you are chasing him But this is outrageous. get out and find someone your own age'. Donna smiled in derision,

'I came because my parents made me, You wouldn't get me within a mile of this place otherwise. Anyway you needn't think I want your randy husband. He's the one doing the chasing. He's always after young girls.'

'How dare you!' Frances gasped, spitting with anger. Donna laughed, delighted to have scored a point and started to walk out. Elsie hearing raised voices peered nervously round the door, twisting her hands.

'Everything all right ladies?' she asked.

They both glared at her. 'No' they chorused 'Go away'. She hastily withdrew. That was all she needed, for the manager to hear them shouting and blame her. They were still at it hammer and tongs, their voices shrill and angry, then the blonde stalked out and up the stairs. 'I'll see about that' she flung over shoulder. Elsie heard sobs, and went in. Donna sat on the stool contemplating laddered tights and her dress hanging from one strap.

'Pa will kill me,' she wailed. 'I can't go home, but I can't go up there like this.'

'Don't cry, your mascara is running. Look I've got a needle and thread, I can mend your dress, but you will have to try the shop in the foyer for new tights, so take them off for now. Slip your dress off, and sit in one of the loos, in case anyone comes, whilst I stitch this strap.' Suddenly Elsie felt in control, smiling to herself at the idea of taking charge.

'Here you are, that should hold if you are careful,' Donna emerged, looking at her for the first time, the meek little woman she had ignored.

'You are a brick - what's your name?'

'Elsie Miss..'

'Right Elsie, thanks heaps. What an old battleaxe she was, no wonder Frank chases skirts!' They looked at each other and started to giggle, sharing the joke.

'Off you go now. If you can't get any tights, you will have to go bare-legged. There is a smudge of mascara on you cheek,' she gently touched the smooth young skin, with a work-worn hand. 'You certainly like to live dangerously.'

'Good heavens, do you think so? I think it's all too boring,' said Donna pulling the

dress straight. 'I must go, everyone must be arriving. I was early because I came with Ma and Pa, and he has to welcome everyone in. You have saved me from an awful mess, yet more trouble, as if I'm not in enough already! Thanks a million, I had better try and find some tights.' On an impulse she hugged Elsie, to their mutual surprise, and with a smile she rushed away. The rest of the evening passed by without further problems, and Elsie went home tired but content, feeling as if the job wouldn't be so bad after all.

The next time she went to work, the manager stopped her in the foyer. Elsie feared retribution but he was smiling.

'Miss Edgely-Smythe came in to thank you for your help last night. She was most complimentary, and left this note for you. Well done, you have made a good start.'

Elsie blushed, and thanked him. Opening it she was surprised to find a twenty pound note, Donna thanked her. 'Get yourself a bit of luxury for once! Don't let them grind you down!'

Elsie laughed out loud, and everyone in the foyer looked up, but she didn't bat an eyelid, head up proudly, she made her way down to her domain. Ready to face all comers.

How I Learned To Run

by B Beresford

It was Coronation Day and our road was holding its party. It was the women's race and I was encouraged to race to make up the numbers, although, weighing fifteen stones, no one was taking bets on me. The race started and I led from the off, much to the amazement of all the neighbours, but of course they were ignorant of who had taught me to run like that. When I got my breath back, I explained how the Luftwaffe had taught me all I knew about running way back at the height of the blitz in Birmingham. And now I will tell you.

At the height of the blitz my gran was looking after me, my younger brother and two boy cousins whilst my mother and Auntie Olive worked at the BSA and my father and Uncle George were in the army. Because I was a girl, I had the job of trawling round the shops during the two-hour dinner break searching for any bargains. Coming home one day, my gran met me at the top of the terrace with a bag and some money and said, 'Run up to Mills on the Coventry Road, I've heard they have oranges'. So off I charged, with the thought of a juicy orange spurring me on. When I got there, about half a mile from my home, I couldn't believe the queue, but of course I waited. You just did and hoped! I knew time was going on but I was getting nearer the head of the line. Of course we didn't know if we would be served because the oranges were under the counter and there was no telling when they would run out.

Then it happened, the manager walked down the queue and said 'That's it' and stopped in front of me. 'Oh no' I thought, 'I am staying put even if I only get a mouldy one.' All the rest of the people behind me moved away and some of the kids shouted, 'You'll be late for school if you don't come now', but I ignored the lot and stood there willing God to let me have at least one orange.

At last, I arrived and the assistant who knew me for the many times I had queued over the years said 'I'm sorry they have all gone'. I just stood there looking at her, my red nose and blue lips showing how cold I was. 'Wait a minute, give me your bag' and went off round the back of the open-air shop, she came back and said 'That's the best I can do. Don't open it, just give me the money and get off home'. I didn't need telling twice and virtually flew home. My gran grabbed the bag and pushed me up to the table. 'Hurry up or you will be late for school and will get into trouble. Eat your dinner as quick as you can.' That was not hard to do as I was always starving and there was never enough to fill me.

I finished dinner quickly and then ran out of my terrace to the road which seemed to stretch for miles. It was absolutely deserted, no people, no horse-carts, nothing! I lived down the road from the school and this was the first time I had ever seen the road so deserted, obviously I was late so I began to run. Suddenly I heard the whine of an aircraft stopped and looked up, expecting to see a Spitfire as the sirens had not sounded, when to my horror I saw the big black cross on the wing. For a moment I was transfixed with fear, thinking it was about to crash as it was so low when I heard the noise of bullets bouncing off threw walls. I realised then I was a target and ran like the wind towards school. As I went I could hear the bullets bouncing off the brick outside walls of the school shelter which lined the playground. At last. The school gate, which was still open. I flung myself inside and ran down the sloping playground towards my class. Sobbing I opened the door of the classroom and screamed, 'I've just been machine-gunned by a Nazi pilot'. My teacher looked at me and said, 'You are late. Sit down and get on with your work, if you had been on time it would not have happened.'

In later life when I became a teacher, I told this story and said, 'If your excuse is better than this, you can come late!'

How I Met The Emperor of Ethiopia

by B Beresford

In 1940 my father came on leave and had a taste of the Birmingham blitz. The next day he took us to the station and booked us on the first train leaving the city and this was to Malvern so, with my older sister, my younger brother and my mother, we set off with dad. I do not know how we arrived at Miss Ainsworth's but that is where we spent some time. During my time in Small Heath, I had played with my brother, two boy cousins and a gang of boys, so I was very much a tomboy and how this poor woman coped with us I shall never know. Apparently she had retired to Malvern on the death of her father, a colonel in the Indian Army, whom she had looked after since she was a young woman and she had never married.

The house was huge to my young eyes coming from a two up two down terrace house and the garden was a tomboy's dream. It went on forever. The house was so big we never saw Miss Ainsworth who obviously kept out of our way, but was aware of all my adventures as her maid was continually telling my mother of my misdeeds in the garden. I was forever being told that a young lady did not climb trees, do handstands against the kitchen wall or climb down drainpipes. I was always being sent to bed in disgrace and never allowed to meet any of Miss Ainsworth's circle of friends as were my older sister and young brother.

One day I was waiting outside on the pavement for my mother and brother to go to school. This way my mother knew I could not get into mischief while she got my brother ready, when out of the house next door stepped three – in my eyes – apparitions in long nightgowns and two were carrying huge swords. I screamed and ran back up the path shouting 'Help, come quick, the devil's after me'. Everybody came tumbling out of the house including Miss Ainsworth and there was a deathly silence except for me screaming 'the devil's after me' over and over at the top of my voice. My mother grabbed me by the arm and rushed me round the back of the house, flung me in the kitchen and shook me till my teeth rattled. When she calmed down she said Did I know what I had done? I had only insulted the Emperor of Ethiopia, a man who had the right of life and death over his people and was treated like a God by everyone!

When a very chastened little girl got home from school, I was taken in to see Miss Ainsworth by my mother and informed that I must go round and apologise to His Majesty Haile Selassie. To say I was terrified is an understatement but round I was dragged by my mother and older sister, one on each arm, and taken into the great man's presence. He was sitting on a chair which, to my eyes, looked like a throne with his two bodyguards standing

either side. They were so black they shone! I was amazed how small he was. I seemed to loom over him (I had always been a 'bonny girl'). I tried to speak but my throat was so dry and I was very frightened of the two big black men and their swords. I looked up and out of this brown face I saw a flash of white teeth and thought 'It's alright'. So, swallowing and taking a deep breath, I presented the bunch of flowers I had been given and said, 'I am so sorry for saying what I did'. One of the men took the flowers and he waved his arm about and I turned and fled out of the room. Of course the first thing my mother said to me was 'You did remember to curtsy didn't you?' and knew by my face I hadn't.

I never saw him again except on newsreels and later in life on the television but often wondered what he thought of that cheeky English girl in Malvern during the war. Needless to say within a very short time we were back home in Small Heath and strangely the subject was never mentioned again. When I grew older I realised that my mother hated being evacuated and in fact I had done her a favour giving her an excuse to come home. We went back to Malvern again when dad came home on leave and endured another air raid. But that, as they say, is another story, as is the time I was machine-gunned because I had been in the queue for oranges, and the time I was chased by a headless chicken and also when I was buzzed by the Luftwaffe.

Seven Year Hitch

by Susan Roughton

Yorkshire, in particular Doncaster, was where I was born and bred for seven years.

Outwardly, my husband says the only recognisably remnant is when I speak of my Anti (Aunty) Pauline. But the white rose lies deeper than that.

Railways, coal and horse racing dominate Doncaster, known fondly as ‘Donny’ to locals. Built over ‘black diamonds’ which my Uncle Tom mined and home to the Great Northern Railway Depot where my Dad worked. ‘We built the Flying Scotsman’ – I can hear the proud boast of my Uncle Ken, the gentlest of gentlemen.

Gritty, honest and friendly people live in the town. No coincidence that Open All Hours is filmed there, with its quirky warm northern humour. You can always tell a Yorkshireman, they say, but you can’t tell them much (or her). Maybe there is some truth in the saying ‘there’s nowt so queer as folk.’

In rationed post-war Britain Mum, with her wartime no-waste policy, made us sweep the plate clean or be punished by the site of a reheated ‘déjà vu’ the next day. My plate was always clean. We lived in a classic ‘back to back’ terrace with a rear yard and passageway, two and half up, two and a half down. We shivered through winters snuggled under candlewick eiderdowns, and blistered too close to the coal fire. Kaleidoscopes of frost patterns magically appeared on the windows. Bathing was ritualistic, the tin bath placed in front of the fire filled with hot water from the Ascot heater. Doused, soaped and hard dried were comforts, less so were outside winter visits to the lavatory.

Monday was ‘wash with Mum’ day. I was fascinated watching her motion the dolly and tub. This being Mum’s busiest day I knew that the evening meal was going to be chips and egg. To my infant eyes, the most dangerous task performed was cleaning the upstairs sash windows. I can still see mum sitting reverse on the sill, legs clamped to the wall.

Entertainment came easy in those days: hopscotch, marbles, skipping, jacks. Not an electronic button in site. My younger brother amused himself by dangling worms in front of me, but this may have helped my later athletic ability as I became very successful at sprint running. Community spirit was strong, the neighbourhood adults knew one another and kept an eye out, reporting transgressions. Some meted out admonishments or the occasional slap for serious offenders, with parents saying ‘well, you deserved it’. Policemen were feared, teachers revered, authority generally obeyed.

My Uncle Ken ran a fish and chip shop – Bells, the best in Doncaster. Lard fat frying, crunchy battered silky white haddock, mushy peas, pickle onions, scraps, fizzy pop and customer banter. As a young girl, this was heaven. Free servings were my reward for ‘rumbling the potatoes’. A winding mechanical contraption called a rumbler was located in the cellar. On visiting, my job, which I loved, was stirring the mushy peas in a big pot, and rotating the handle and watching the potatoes losing their skins ready for the chipper and hot fat.

And then, one day all this was to end. The East Coast Line called my Dad to move for promotion and we relocated downline south to Peterborough. I became a Yorkshire exile but the county gave me a happy seven year hitch to life. Exile I may be, but my favourite rose is white and the family still swoon over my crispy, soft Yorkshire puddings.

The Package Holiday, 1958 Style

by Margaret Barber

The offer of a package holiday in the sun, composed of a flight and two weeks full board in a hotel in Mallorca, flying from Blackbushe Airport, a small RAF aerodrome on the borders of Surrey and Berkshire rather than the original concept of the ‘package holiday’ – a ferry crossing and a tent on the beach. It was too good an opportunity to miss.

Fine rain was falling as we entered the wooden building where people were waiting for the flight. A lady came round to check our passports (passports valid for one year were purchased from local post offices), followed by two men collecting the suitcases, which had to measure no more than 30ft by 18ft by 9ft.

I happened to mention I was really scared of flying for the first time and the man sitting beside me quipped – comfortably – ‘Don’t worry love, if your numbers up, then your number’s up’. Another passenger piped up, ‘That’s all very well, but if it’s the pilot’s number that’s up, why should we all go with him?’ The tension broke, ripples of nervous laughter burst forth and soon everyone was chatting.

The rain was heavier as we walked to the plane, a Dakota with twin propellers. It looked huge but inside was deceptively small, with a row of two seats either side of a narrow central aisle. People sat where they wished but, being towards the back of the queue, I had a fixed upright seat in front of a stepped beam housing the wheels when the plane was in flight.

We took off around 9pm and could see through the curtained windows that the rain had reached torrential proportions with thunder and lightning illuminating the night sky. The flight was horrendous. The plane was incapable of flying above the storm which continued to rage unabated, and at one stage it dropped violently into a deep air pocket. About an hour before daylight, we touched down at Lyon in France to refuel and disembarked to wait in the lounge. I really didn’t want to get back on the plane. However the flight from Lyon to Palma was much more comfortable, the storm had passed and the sun was beginning to show its face as we took off.

From the air Palma airport looked unkempt and desolate with only a couple of wooden buildings and sorry looking palm trees around the perimeter. We landed in a dust storm and bumped our way along the stony surface of the runway.

Upon entering the nearest building, we stood in line with our backs against the wall. Two men in army uniform, hand guns in holsters strapped to their waists, paraded in front of us pointing rifles menacingly towards us, whilst speaking very loudly, in Spanish, to four colleagues, similarly attired, standing behind long tables. It was extremely frightening. We had made a long, arduous journey to Mallorca for a holiday and this was not the welcome we were expecting. They suddenly appeared to get themselves organised and one of the men indicated with his rifle that the first four people should step forward to the table. Passports and hand luggage were examined before allowing them to pass through a door at the far right of the building.

When our turn came it was awful. My hand luggage was of no consequence, but Colin's camera bag was a different kettle of fish. The camera was opened exposing the film rendering it useless. The light meter was examined in great detail only giving up on it after agreeing with a colleague that it didn't actually open. The spare boxes of film were shown mercy because they were sealed. The poor tripod had its legs extended, scrutinised and closed repeatedly. Eventually we could collect the suitcases and board the coach to Puerto Cristo.

Juan and Sebastian, the owners of Hotel Penello, greeted us warmly whilst the cases were hauled to the upper floors by rope and pulley. Champagne cocktails were the speciality of the house. The optic was apparently unheard of. The various alcoholic ingredients were poured into the shaker until it was full. Gin, whisky etc. received the same treatment, or at least until someone said 'Stop'. Everything was so cheap. I seem to remember there were 240 pesetas to the £1. The hairdresser charged 5 pesetas. I went every day. Manana, pronounced 'manyana' sums up so simply the life of the lovely people who live and work on Mallorca.

The Wall

Anonymous

Ian woke early impatient to get started. The sun was pale yellow in the autumn mist, but it looked set for a fine day. Liz grunted and turned over as he crept out as quietly as he could. She needed to rest, the baby was due in two weeks. Pulling on old jeans and a T-shirt, Ian hurried down the stairs. Whilst waiting for the kettle to boil, he faced his adversary through the kitchen window. There it was! Challenging him each time he glanced into the yard. But today was its last day.

Ian and Liz had bought the pair of cottages in this Cotswold village about three years ago. Ian, an architect, had renovated them and made one delightful honeyed stone house. It stood right on the roadside, so to get room to park the car he had opened up a side entrance and set out to make a courtyard at the back. The problem was *The Wall*.

There it stood, right in the middle of the space he had cleared, the only remaining bit of an old barn, just in the wrong place every time you tried to turn the car. Liz had scraped the side of the shooting brake three times. It was driving him mad, but today it was coming down. He couldn't wait! The whistle of the kettle broke into his thoughts, and he made a cup of tea. Barry promised to be here at eight so he'd better get on.

By the time the old truck drew into the yard, Ian had started, already sweating,

'It's a lot harder to shift than I thought' he said out of breath. Barry came over for a look, and they stood contemplating the bulk of it.

'It's well built,' he smiled, 'to have lasted that long. How old do you think it is?'

'Very old I should think. The cottages go back to the 1500s' Ian replied.

Barry, a builder friend of Ian's, was a big man, used to hard work. He soon began to make progress. Each stone seemed welded to its neighbour, and had to be shifted individually. The sun burnt off the mist and the temperature was rising, so both men were glad to see Liz coming with glasses of lemonade,

'How's it going' she asked as they leant panting on their picks.

'Slowly, but we're getting there,' they chorused, so she left them to it and they started again. These stones would make a good rockery, Ian thought to himself as he heaved his pick. His hands were sore as well as his back and he stood up to stretch. Just as he did so, Barry gave a cry as part of the wall tumbled down with a loud rumble and clouds of dust. Ian rushed round to find Barry partly covered with broken stones. He was white and shocked. 'It's my leg, a bloody great stone fell straight on it.'

Ian feverously shovelled the stones away then, dropping his spade, tore at the rest with his hands. As he finally uncovered his friend's body, Barry winced, 'Careful mate!'

'Sorry,' he muttered and gently cleared a space round the large boulder which lay across Barry's thigh, blood seeping round the edge. Ian drew in a sharp breath. 'This is serious Barry, we must get an ambulance.' He headed to the house, shouting to Liz, as he rushed to the phone

'Barry is trapped by a large lump of stone. It looks as though his leg is broken.' She gasped, running to the cupboard for the first aid box.

'They will be here as so as they can, so we better see what we can do'

They hurried towards the dusty figure lying in the ruins of the wall, and Ian slowly heaved the rock away from Barry's leg. They exchanged worried looks and crouched down. Barry tried not to scream with the pain as Liz gently cleared the debris away. The leg was torn and bleeding, the shattered bone showing white through the skin.

'I don't know how to deal with this, but it must be covered' she said getting clumsily to her feet. 'I will get some clean towels.' Ian took her place, and tried to console Barry.

'The ambulance will soon be here, Hang in there mate.'

Barry groaned and closed his eyes. Ian looked anxiously towards the house. Liz seemed to be taking ages. She appeared at the back door carrying a handful of towels, leaning heavily on the door frame. He came across and grabbed the towels.

'What took you so long?'

'Ian, the baby's coming! The waters broke as I reached up in the airing cupboard.'

'Oh heavens, you should lie down.' He put his arm round her.

'I'll be fine, you look after Barry'

He glanced across at his friend's pale face, back to Liz, confused and uncertain. 'Go on, quick, get that leg covered,' she urged, going back inside. He was still in a daze as he carefully laid clean towels over the open wound. Fortunately it seemed to have stopped bleeding, but Barry was semi-conscious and white with shock. He rushed to the house to find Liz packing her case, calm and unfazed, pausing now and then to hold on to a chair and take deep breaths.

'Don't worry, the ambulance can take me too,' she laughed. Ian fetched a blanket and returned to his pal, covering him to keep him warm. He was icy cold to the touch. With profound relief, he heard the ambulance siren getting closer. It drew into the yard, and nearly hit the pile of rubble. The men came over to them and spoke to Barry. 'You'll be OK now old chap, we will soon have you fixed up and off to hospital.' Barry mumbled and moaned as

they splinted his leg and got him on to a stretcher. Ian, trying to get their attention, pulled at the ambulance man's sleeve.

'Hang on a minute sir, if you don't mind, let us get him loaded then you can give me the details we need.'

'But it's my wife, she's gone into labour whilst all this was going on.' The ambulance man stood up, and gave a hoot of laughter. 'We've got two for the price of one here Stan! Can you manage him? I'll see to the little lady,' he said, walking to the back door.

'You ought to get that wall moved, we nearly hit it when we drove in.' Ian stood speechless, as Liz came out, 'Lost for words?' she chuckled.

Ian saw them all into the ambulance, and returned to lock up before following in the car. Just then, another car drove into the yard and again nearly came to grief on the pile of rubble.

'Sorry about that, it's just in the process of being moved, can I help you?' A thin bespectacled man climbed out clutching a clip board.

'Mr. Hamilton?'

'Yes, but I can't stop now.'

'Just a minute Sir. I understand you have a 15th century wall here. I have come to serve a preservation order on you. It's a listed item of historical interest.'

Ian glared at him, 'There's your blasted wall, in ruins, so is my friends' leg. He's just gone to hospital, and my wife is about to give birth, so I haven't got time for your preservation order.' The man looked startled.

'But Sir, you will have to rebuild it'

'You rebuild it then, I'm off.' He strode over to his car and drove off, leaving the council official standing open-mouthed in the middle of the heap of stones.

Tulips of The Third Age

by Jane Borutan

I used to hate tulips,
sneer at them actually.

Ramrod straight – a bit Corporation
for people with no imagination.

No room in *my* house or in my garden mess.

Over my dead body etc.

I've changed my mind since then.

It's taken post-middle age to suss them out.

Clever little life lessons meant for women like me.

In the slate vase, they stand deep in water,
bright green stems strong and sturdy.

Tightly controlled buds, perfect and proud.

No other word for it – 'Their time in the sun'

or not as the case may be. Been there and done that.

Pillar box red fades over the days to a more beautiful antique scarlet, apricot and bronze,

petals splayed and stippled lemon yellow,

black striations exposed for all the world to see,

stamens proud grey-black,

leaves life-burned, fold into each other and twist at the edges

at ease with themselves.

Stems curve wildly, still strong, bending and free.

A bit battered, buffeted and bruised now but very beautiful still.

I'm going to miss my constant reminder now spring is over.

Carnations just aren't the same.