

KALEIDOSCOPE



A second collection of stories, poems and descriptive writings, produced by the Creative Writing Group of Countesthorpe U3A in 2011

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THE LAND OF “ONCE UPON A TIME”

In the land of ‘Once Upon a Time’
There’s ‘ever Never Land and dogs that fly.
Through the land of ‘spare-room’ and the wardrobe is Narnia.
There’s Puff the Magic Dragon and the Land of Honah Lee.
Once upon a time.

In the land of ‘Once Upon a Time’
There’s Noddy and Big Ears, and Bill and Ben.
There are mirrors that speak and animals that talk.
There are adventures and spells and fiends.
Once upon a time.

In the land of ‘Once Upon a Time’
There are places like Mr McGregor’s Garden and White Fang’s lair.
The Land of Lilleput and the Island of Robinson Crusoe
Once upon a time.

In the land of ‘Once Upon a Time’
There is the warm place of “Are you sitting comfortably?
Then I will begin”. It’s cuddly and Mum is there
And the crook of her arm is oh, so good.
You can drift off on a sailing ship of adventure to
The land of Eiderdown, and chocolate soldiers and cake
Once upon a time.

In the land of ‘Once Upon a Time’
There are places to imagine and travel with Sinbad.
Go to Sherwood with Robin,
Feel the magic of Merlin
And the thrill of Arthur and the Sword in the Stone
Once upon a time

In the land of ‘Once Upon a Time’
There is a never-ending story.
There are the Famous Five;
There are houses made of sweets.

Rumpelstiltskin and Rapunzel and her hair
And Alice in Wonderland.
Once upon a time

In the land of 'Once Upon a Time'
I can dream, I can live and be free.
I can be a child again and realise that
The land of 'Once Upon a Time' is for all,
Because we all like a story
And travel with it to the Land of
Once Upon a Time

By Richard King



CANADIAN ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Mountains high,
Pierce azure sky.
Fish eagles fly,
Breezes sigh

Reflection deep,
Turquoise keep
Mirror image steep,
Tree lines creep.

Ice floes pack,
Snow piles stack,
Gullies crack,
Melt waters track.

Waters tumble,
Shale crumble,
Rock falls rumble.
Humans humble.

By Margaret Woolley

LETTERS

*From: Topkapi Palace, Constantinople
To be delivered into the hands of the Lord High Physician*

Dear Hippocrates,

I am writing to ask for your help with a very personal and stressful problem.

I am now nineteen years old and have been a member of the Sultan's harem for three years. I am told that I am still attractive of face and with a shapely figure. Unfortunately, His Serene Highness no longer seems to find me desirable and it is some time since I was commanded to share his bed. Can you help me, please?

Please keep this letter confidential. I have asked my maidservant to await your reply.

Yours hopefully,
Mata (Number 8 wife)

* * * * *

From: The Lord High Physician

Dear Mata,

I understand your desires and feel sure I can help you. However, I must swear you to complete secrecy, never to divulge the following to any other person.

At dusk on Midsummer Eve next, gather seven flowers from the Mandrake plant. On no account get them from the Womandrake by mistake, as the consequences could be disastrous. Crush the petals and mix them with a large spoonful of runny honey and the same amount of ass's milk. Bind together with sufficient cornflour and ask your maidservant to bake them until golden brown.

Serve them yourself to His Serene Highness and I am sure you will not be disappointed.

Yours sincerely,
Hippocrates

By Sheila Knight

FOLLY

Alice brought her breakfast tray onto the patio to enjoy the June sunshine. She was later than usual, after nine, but had done the ironing and showered in the early coolness. She pushed up her green parasol, sat down and looked approvingly at the roses now bursting into flower. How lovely it all was, how blissful. Her bungalow was next door to a primary school; the playing field and assembly hall were screened from her garden by a thick hedge, but on this beautiful morning she heard the large outer doors of the hall rattle open to let in the air as the children made their way in. This was one of the things which she loved when she first saw the bungalow - its proximity to the little school, the vitality, the life. It was the very thing which had put others off. Faintly she heard the Head's voice and the children's answering chorus, "Good morning Mr Weeks!" Then they were off with their first hymn.

"Summer suns are glowing
Over land and sea
Happy light is flowing
Bountiful and free."

Oh yes, the loveliest of the summer hymns, the most evocative of freshness, joy, of youth. Alice hummed along with them. She was back in her own school days standing by her best friend, Ruth, the day rolled out before her like a magic carpet with rounders in the afternoon and down to the sea to swim after school.

An involuntary memory came to her. She sat for a moment with her cup suspended. Why, she hadn't thought of that for years and years. Why now?

She and Ruth were setting off for a walk to Folly. The tide was out in Cowes in the afternoon - no good for swimmers and here was an alternative. They trailed along towards Whippingham Church, chatting, stopping to look at the pigs half way along, trying to whistle with a piece of grass until they came to the stile near the church and crossed into the

fields. They were eleven years old and enjoyed a freedom which nowadays is denied to so many children and wandered the island happily for hours on end. On their right the estuary of the river Medina gleamed and somewhere distant they could hear dogs barking excitedly. They were making for that part of the estuary where the "Folly Inn" stood.

Now, when Alice thought of the "Folly Inn" it stretched before her, shabby and dark-walled with a tarry pitched roof; a forbidding place that with her adult's gaze she could imagine being in a film for a smugglers' den, but taken for granted by her child's self as a place to buy a glass of pop from the side window for threepence.



That afternoon they drank their pop on the bench outside and mooched along the bank of the estuary where the low tide exposed rotting hulks of boats and stretches of treacherous mud. No one was about. The place seemed utterly deserted.

Who was it that suggested that they should follow the board path across the mud and over marshy grassland to the long abandoned mill? Alice could certainly not remember. What she could remember, as she sat drinking tea on that heavenly morning, lost in her past, was that after they had gone twenty yards or more a dark cloud suddenly passed over the sun and a strong breeze sprang up. They looked across at the mill. Now

it stood derelict and dark like a menacing giant, no longer enticing. Some instinct, as deep and true as any they would ever have, made them turn and rush back across the boards and set off for home immediately, not even stopping to see if the white ducks were on the pond at the back of the inn.

The next afternoon Ruth came round to call. When they were well away from the house she said, "Mr Anderson came round this morning and I heard him talking to Dad." Alice looked at her enquiringly. "He said that they caught two escaped convicts last night. They were hiding in the Folly Mill." Any islander would know at once that they had escaped from Parkhurst Prison. The girls looked at each other in alarm; but very little more was said. They would no more have thought of telling their parents than admitting that they had been told off at school.

From the assembly hall came the sounds of children filing back to their classrooms and the clatter of gym apparatus being set out in the same space . . . space . . . such a little space separated her from those children, but such a vast space.

By Christine Claricoates



A SUMMER ACROSTIC

Sapphire skies and sunshine, strawberries for tea.
Umpires on the village green, umbrellas by the tree.
Myriads of marigolds, mazes made of maize.
Meadows in the moonlight, murmuring lovers gaze.
Elder, elm and English oak in gowns of emerald lace.
Ramblers roam romantically, refreshed by nature's grace.

By Shirley Wilding

TIME

My writing materials went into the case
As I packed for a late holiday.
Dorset I felt was an ideal place
To write about Time for today.

We stayed in a building that once was a school,
Pupils swam most days in the sea.
Happily there now is a warm indoor pool -
Much better, I think you'd agree!



We looked for fossils along the sea shore
And we spied a small oil well.
Products of geology from centuries before
And precious energy to sell.

Along the coast we found some good sand
A beach for the children to play.
We wanted to visit places inland,
But we peeped at the sea every day.

Brownsea Island gave us a highlight
When a cheeky red squirrel appeared.
Cameras flashed, we smiled at the sight,
And even some of us cheered.

A ruined castle perched high on a peak,
Stands guard o'er the valleys below.
It seemed to look over us during that week
As we tourists went to and fro.



In our modern way we kept watching the clocks,
Making the most of our time.
But our life spans are nothing, against Dorset's rocks,
Which have featured so much in this rhyme!

By Patsy Paterson

THE LIGHT OF DAY

My fronds unfurl lazily in the light of the summer day. I feel the warmth caressing my greenery as I stretch upwards and outwards to the sun, straining to reach its light with the tips of my being. Now fully grown, yet tiny still, I savour both the sunshine and the dappled shade of the trees under which I rise from the moist earth to display my delicate green tracery to the world.

Snap! I lie helpless now - just a broken frond, detached from my mother plant by a passing animal, though green and perfect still. What will be my fate?

Winds blow gently, covering me with particles so fine that they do not crush my delicate form. Water washes gently over me; warm, seductive – I can sleep for ever. The wind and water continue their work and I nestle softly into my bed of warm, dark silt. Peace descends. I can no longer move but I am content in the stillness.

Slowly, imperceptibly, the weight bears down and smothers me - though with sweet calm - as layer upon layer entombs me deeper in my resting place. Time ceases to exist – no light penetrates and I feel a change coming over me. An inevitable, creeping, awful change that I cannot comprehend or stall. I feel my very structures begin to stiffen; my lifeblood leaches into and colours the surrounding silt. Yet still I keep my shape and form over millennia, whilst hardening slowly, inevitably to rock.

In a trance-like state I lie metamorphosed, immovable, immured, immutable - waiting. Waiting for I know not what, to release me from this torpid state.

Vibrations, noise, clamour, awaken me at last. How long since last I saw the light of day? Three hundred and fifty million years since the

sun's warmth caressed my fronds. Splitting, shattering, fracturing, breaking; in all directions rock fragments fly, releasing me from my incalculable sleep as man's machines ravage the earth for coal.

But I am simply worthless siltstone now; no longer a delicate fern frond reaching out to the sun from my dappled bed, nor even good coal to service mankind's needs. What next for me, then?

A gnarled hand sweeps me from the mine waste. Blinking in the weak, yellow beam of his helmet lamp, a miner exclaims, "Why, this fossil fern will make a keepsake for my grand-daughter – I'll tell her how it formed."

Today, that is how my story stands, back once again in the light of day, lying on the desk of that old miner's grand-daughter as a fond reminder of a gentle, loving man. What next for me, then?



This piece was inspired by a fossil given to me by my grandfather, who worked as a mine deputy, and which I've used for many years as a paperweight.

By June Hawkins

A NARROW ESCAPE

The high-pitched whine of the powerful engine rose to screaming point as it reached the corner at a dangerously high speed. The driver with the skill of a racing ace, and getting every ounce of speed out of the car, accelerated round the corner; the tortured tyres screeched in agony as they tried to grip the road. In the back the man in prison grey clung to his seat for dear life as he was thrown from side to side as the car swerved and slid in the frantic effort to get away.

The police car, with its strident siren blaring its message to other road users to get out of the way, was only minutes behind. Fortunately the traffic was not too heavy and the road was relatively clear and its surface dry.

The driver of the first car cursed explicitly when he saw the flashing lights in front of him. He had forgotten the level crossing which divided the town and obviously a train had been signalled. A quick glance in the mirror showed that the police car was gaining on them. "Hold tight," he said through gritted teeth as, with the recklessness of desperation, he swung the big car round the first barrier, then fighting with the steering wheel he battled to turn the car to avoid the other one. The petrified man on the back seat could only watch with apprehension the lights of the train as it approached with seemingly merciless speed. "For God's sake, hurry", he cried.

The driver pushed the accelerator pedal down almost flat to the floor; the car gave a violent lurch forward, just clipping the second barrier - they were over!

The patrol car driver braked violently and the car slid sideways before coming to a screeching halt inches away from the barrier. At the same moment the goods train came chugging merrily along as if it had all the time in the world. It gave a friendly whistle and the rhythm of its wheels seemed to say, "They've got away, got away, got away", as if

to emphasize the sheer frustration of their position. The observer used all the colourful adjectives that he knew to describe what seemed to him the excessively long train.

He reached for his handset to pass on the news to control. They would appreciate as he did the futility of the chase now because the other side of the track was a labyrinth of side streets giving access to at least two main roads. It would need a certain degree of luck to pick up the trail.

“What a way to start a week”, he thought. He and his mate had been late coming on patrol after catching up on the pile of paperwork waiting to be dealt with. When the call came through about the prison break, they were heading in the general direction and were able to see the car pulling away and, from its speed, it was a possibility that it was the getaway car.

Apparently at an exercise session there had been a skirmish between some of the inmates and while the warder was dealing with this, a rope ladder had been thrown over the wall and a prisoner had made his escape - obviously a well-planned operation. It was just their bad luck that another warder had come and seen the man disappearing over the wall and had alerted the police quickly.

The getaway car was a well-tuned, powerful one and the two policemen had to admit to a grudging admiration for the skilful way the driver had handled it. They wondered if he had had some racing experience. The race through the streets had been hair-raising but if it had not been for that ill-timed train they would have had an excellent chance of catching them. One good thing - they were able to give a clear description of the car including the number. Of course, the likelihood was that this would be false or the car stolen. However, every police car in the county would be on the lookout for it.

At last the final truck! “I suppose we’d better have a look”, the observer said, “but I guess they’re well away now.” “That’s police work for you”, the driver replied. “Win some, lose some. But no doubt they will be picked up sometime; their sort usually are.”

Meanwhile, the car they were looking for was in a back street garage in a run-down part of the town, already in the spray shop, stripped down and false number plates removed. Help for the police was very unlikely in this area.

The two men had changed into jeans, sweaters, baseball caps and, with new identities, were getting into an unmarked innocuous-looking white van ready to carry on with their journey. Thanks to the train and Mac’s skilful driving, they had a good chance to get to the port, a boat trip, and eventually a new life in Brazil, where hopefully the money they had stolen was stashed away.

By Dorothy Elgar



CRUMBLE

Crumble, I think, is my favourite pudding.
Rhubarb in it is a sure sign of Spring.
Usually made when the fruit is just ripening,
Mine has semolina to give it some zing.
Be warned though, it might be a savoury filling!
Leeks, beans and meat, a dish fit for a king.
Each crumble is different - that’s part of its charm!

By Patsy Paterson

THE BOX

There was a time when I had to accept the box.

Not in a confining way, but the box was my security, my place of beginning, a place of growth.

I was part of someone else's box.

There came a day when I yearned for my own box and I broke free and went off to find my own way, my own life.

It was a box of personal choices.

I chose what went into my box and what I allowed out.

There was a special moment when alongside my box came another, very special box. Warm, intimate and close. The two boxes eventually became one. From that place of oneness came three very different boxes.

There came a time when our box looked at the three boxes and we saw them grow and develop and become their own box. Free and ready for all that being themselves means.

There is now a box where we in the box make choices together and separately. It's a good place and that box is open and warm where we add to other boxes and become the better for it.

There is a box now that has rich memories, a good future.

The box is now being filled with new ideas, new beginnings, new discoveries and new openings.

There in the box, the two are having adventures and opportunities they had never realised.

There is a looking back at when the two boxes became one. They now can celebrate and rejoice together - thankful for the box.

By Richard King

ORADOUR-SUR-GLANE❖

My bones ache, stiff in the morning chill
My rock and roll days passed, slowed to a slippered creep
I leave the haunted church and pass the silenced school.
No more skipping in the playground,
No more hopscotch in the street.

Their bones do not ache, still, beneath the glass
Their dance of life passed, changed to this charnel heap
Hate pierced their tender frames and fire consumed their youth
No more skipping in the playground,
No more hopscotch in the street.

My bones ache, but my heart aches more
For I have lived the life they were denied.

By Jacqueline Barker

❖ *The original village was destroyed on 10 June 1944, when 642 of its inhabitants, including women and children, were massacred by a German Waffen-SS company. A new village was built after the war on a nearby site and the original has been maintained as a memorial*



THE CAR STOPPED

The car stopped. It just refused to go any further. Looking back on this incident when I was younger, it is quite easy to see why.

However strong and robust a car it was, it was no match for the task inflicted on it by a strong-minded driver intent on conquering a one-in-five hill in the Yorkshire Dales while towing a fourteen-foot caravan. Added to this weighty burden were the occupants of the car, namely two adults, four young children and a large dog!

We were all looking forward to reaching some spectacular heights but were somewhat puzzled by the reactions of drivers coming the opposite way, downhill, who were waving frantically at us. Slowly we realised that they were trying to indicate that what we were attempting to achieve was not a wise thing to do!

Now our driver, not renowned for his willingness to take advice, of course, 'ploughed on'; the noise of the straining engine becoming more prominent as the usual chattering and complaining in the car was replaced by an anxious silence. Even the dog looked worried!

Outside, instead of the eagerly-awaited views there was an increasing abundance of thick cloud and rain which enclosed us in our own little world as we tried in vain to see where we were going. The only view, provided by the overworked window wipers, was of the narrow, ever-ascending road in front of us and the vague, ghostly images of passing cars, their drivers just visible as they drew near. No-one in the car said anything. It was the car that finally broke the silence. With a noise that sounded as if it was from a Stockhausen composition, it just stopped!

In spite of my efforts to allay fears 'because of the children', I felt my anxiety turning to alarm at this sudden change in the situation. A mixture of maternal instinct and self-preservation came into operation and logic pointed to the advantage of lightening the load in the car.

With the prospect of the whole outfit succumbing to the power of gravity and sliding back down the hill taking us all with it, a quick decision was made to evacuate the vehicle. Out we all scrambled; that is, all but the driver and there we stood, huddled together on the uneven grass verge in the mist - mother, four children and an Alsatian. We were cold and wet but safe and glad to be out of that car! I'm not sure what consideration we gave at that time to the safety of the driver!

This spectacle soon attracted the attention of the occupants of passing cars. Two cars stopped and the considerate drivers hurried across to our still stationary car and caravan. Earnest discussions took place

between drivers and our car engine started up. With much shouting of instructions the two considerate drivers took up their positions at the rear of the caravan and began to push it, still attached to the car, up the steep incline of the narrow road.

We stood in awe as the car and caravan began to move and as it was swallowed up in the gloom of the low cloud, we set off to follow on foot.

As we reached the summit, there were the car and the caravan, surrounded by a sea of cloud, parked in a lay-by created for the use of visitors. Emerging out of that cloud were the two considerate drivers, dusting themselves down after their valiant effort. After many thanks to them, we joined our driver in the car, not quite sure of what to say or how to react.

It was the appearance of the group of sheep that broke the rather awkward silence. The dog barked wildly and the children clambered out of the car. The visiting sheep were an immediate success as they were so friendly, albeit that their main interest was in food! We sacrificed our sandwiches and gave thanks for such a welcome diversion!

What's more, as we stood feeding those friendly sheep, the clouds began to move. There were just sufficient breaks to reveal a patchwork of fields of subdued colours contained by waving lines of stone walls and dotted with low, wind-swept trees. In the distance, there lay our destination, sheltering in the hollow of the hills, the compact stone-clad village of Hawes and looking back down the daunting hill we had just struggled up, the village of Kettlewell.

Surrounded by such beauty, it was hard to dwell on the recent hair-raising events and so our holiday continued. Such are the healing powers of beautiful countryside and when you are young – well . . . !

By Anne Tester

RIPENESS

The golden-red glow,
Reminiscent of autumn's virginia creeper,
Beckons with its
Promising ripeness.
Born of mediterranean warmth
It sits in the blue bowl.

Waiting to tempt;
Waiting to be tasted;
Waiting.

Selection takes time.
Testing, touching, anticipation
As crimson, flecked flesh yields to
Gentle pressure.
This is the one.

Eager in morning sunshine
I relish the pleasure to come.
Do I score it into quarters?
Do I lift it to my lips and bite?
The more abandoned approach, I decide.

Piercing the shiny skin, sweet-sharp juice trickles
Into my mouth,
Down my chin.
A slight, audible grating on inner hardness
As teeth meet stone.

Savouring aroma and flavour,
Succulent pulp melts in an intensity of delight.
Sticky fingers testament to the feast.
Such is my summer nectarine.

By Mikki Wilde

SHOPPING

There were only a few spaces in the supermarket car park. She found one near the exit and walked in the dusk, past one or two shops, towards the automatic doors. Julie usually did the weekend shop on Thursday evenings after work and was staying within the routine. The brightly lit fruit and veg. displays confronted her as she pushed in the trolley. It was now that her discomfort began.

Julie would be forty-nine next birthday; mother of a boy working sixty miles away and twin girls in their second year at different universities, and wife of Daniel. They, Dan and Julie, had been planning how to decorate their son's now spare bedroom, what to do with the garden - no longer needed for games - and where to go for holidays that they could enjoy together, just the two of them. And then Dan, dependable Dan, had come home two weeks ago and announced that he was leaving her to go and live with Samantha, their best friend's elder daughter. Sam, whom they had watched growing up from a gawky teenager, into a graceful young lady, then a successful, level-headed, business woman. Sam, more than fifteen years Dan's junior; how did that happen?

Julie looked at her big trolley. Why had she picked up a big trolley? A small one would have been better. She glanced at the plastic bags of potatoes and grapes, the big round cabbages and hands of six or seven bananas. Shopping had become difficult. The pork chops and salmon steaks were in trays of two and four and the chickens looked enormous. Everything seemed packaged for couples or families. Julie fought back the tears. Would the folk



around her notice her distress? Would they look at her few bits in the bottom of her trolley and wonder why so little, or worse still, know? Did she look different? She certainly felt different. She had never before noticed the people here. She was always in a hurry to get home and rustle up something for supper that Dan liked.

The cruelty of her situation was hitting hard in these familiar surroundings, where she was usually so confident. She was unprepared for the sadness and feelings of injustice that built up explosively within her, sapping her strength so that she had to work hard to keep walking and maintaining a grip on the trolley. Anger drove her on to finish the job. Shopping for one needed a new mindset. She would have to work on it, but her hands were trembling as she negotiated the checkout. Luckily the girl was preoccupied, clock watching.

Carrying the bag back to the car, she passed the hairdresser's. Would she have the courage to get her hair done? A new style, maybe, and she had never had a manicure. The time was hers now, she supposed, so one weekend soon she might go the whole hog and have a facial too.

By Ruth Westley



A LITTLE BLUE MINK

(Health & Safety warning: Only for use with grandchildren under the age of 3!)

I once had a little blue mink
She wanted so much to be pink
So she squirmed and wriggled
Shimmied and giggled
And tickled herself pink in a wink!

By Patricia Brown

LACE

Rockets of remembrance
Shoot through the mind, launched
And propelled into the past;
Catapulted by whirring wheels of nostalgia
Where mind maps of memory
Lie like lace webs in
Fitful forgetfulness.



Memory's apparel clothes our experience
In pleasure or pain.
Flashes of recall pierce consciousness,
To be swept away
As neural connections fail to ignite.
Filigree fibres unyielding to grasp,
Severed, jumbled.

The mind, like stripped, bare branches of winter,
The closed blankness of white gallery walls.
Soundless, vacant space -
No access at all.

Will time remember us
When we can't remember time?

By Mikki Wilde

A ONE-SIDED CONVERSATION

It was Friday afternoon and the bus station was particularly busy. The last day of the summer holidays meant mothers and children had been shopping for last minute items before school reopened on the following Monday. A group of noisy teenagers had been enjoying their last day of freedom while people from the town were pouring in after finishing work early for the weekend.

Laden down with her purchases in a variety of bags, packages and parcels, the harassed looking woman rushed into the bus station. A glance at the large central clock told her it was four fifty-five. She sank wearily into a vacant seat, realising her bus had gone at four fifty and there wouldn't be another one for thirty minutes. Should she go and get a cup of tea she wondered, but was discouraged by the idea of carrying the results of her day's shopping still further. This was going to make her late getting home and there would be a hungry family to feed later. "I've got some salad in the fridge", she thought to herself, "so we can have jacket potatoes and I can make some coronation chicken with yesterday's leftover chicken and . . ."

Her reverie was interrupted by a strident voice saying, "Why, Helen! It's been years; how are you?" A substantial frame was lowered into the nearest vacant seat and the weary shopper looked up saying, "I don't think I . . ." She didn't get as far as "know you" before the voice continued with, "Pat, from the computer class, you must remember, we had such a lot of laughs together, even though we didn't learn a great deal."

Well, she *had* gone to a computer class, what was it? Five, maybe six years ago, but she really couldn't recall Pat and she didn't seem to be the kind of person you would easily forget. "I can't remember . . ." The voice interrupted again, having gained the attention of all the waiting passengers within a wide radius. "No, I can't remember when

we last met; we always said we would drag our husbands out and have dinner together. How is Norman by the way?”

“My husband isn’t . . .” But no, she didn’t manage to finish that sentence either before Pat continued with, “A bit under the weather is he? Just what he needs then, a nice meal out! Look, my bus is due in a few minutes - I must dash”. Delving into her handbag she produced a grubby piece of paper. “Here’s my phone number, Helen. Give me a ring when you get home and we’ll fix something up.” With a cheerful wave she disappeared into the crowd, not hearing the exasperated shopper say in a resigned voice, “I’m not Helen, I’m Susan, and my husband isn’t Norman, he’s Steve.”

By Shirley Wilding



FIRE, ICE AND PEACE

(Following the eruption of the volcano Eyjafjallajokull in 2010)

Faraway Iceland.
Deep in the earth a rumble.
Fire spews out through ice.

Mountainous towers,
Billowing cauldrons of ash
Drift dreamily south.

The skies are quiet
As European aircraft
Sit pinned to the ground.

By June Hawkins

I CAN HEAR WHO I AM

It was quite unexpected. The impact left me a little unsteady as it caught me unawares; off balance as it were, as the images of the past flooded into my mind and in that moment I became again a small boy running carefree in fields of pale green and straw coloured grass, but let me explain.

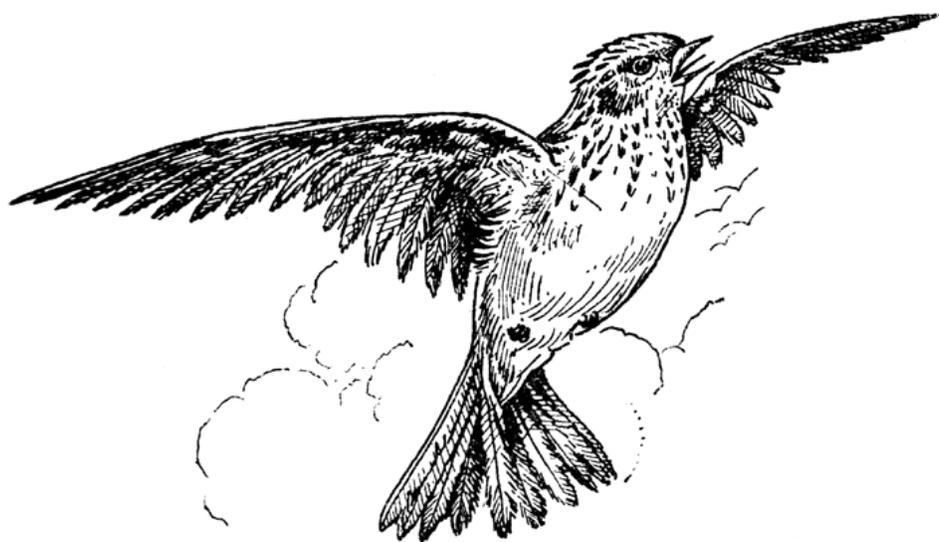
The context for this experience began the day before with a five-hour drive from home to Pembrokeshire and an apartment on the coast. It was unfortunate that we had to travel on a Saturday and the traffic was heavy, with more holiday traffic and agricultural paraphernalia than normal on the move. Even the motorways were busy. Not wanting to stop in a motorway service station, it wasn't until we were within 10 miles of our destination that we had a break, did some shopping and, to my relief, some walking around. By time we had arrived, got ourselves settled in and had a meal I was feeling tired and quite grouchy and was ready for a good sleep.

The morning began with welcoming sunshine streaming through the windows. The sea lapping at the shore of the bay looked calm and welcoming. Breakfast was taken slowly and with grace, not like at home where even in retired households like mine there seems a sort of urgency to do something or be somewhere. Next came the vexed question: what should we do today? After much humming and hawing, trying to sound out feelings and preferences, it was decided that a coastal walk to the nature reserve, a favourite route, would do as a low key start to holiday activities. So with a quick assembly of sandwiches, water bottles and chocolate bars we were on our way.

The Coastal Path in Pembrokeshire is a delight to behold. It is not crowded; you do meet fellow walkers, but not too frequently, there are wild flowers in abundance and the sea is virtually free of activity. Large

tankers are at anchor out in the bay, but nothing moves on the surface near shore except the sea. Eyes are kept on the move constantly, being stimulated by flowers, butterflies, beetles and insects and a constant stream of birds, which float into your eye line competing for attention. With a cool morning breeze massaging our weary figures we set out along the path, periods of silence punctured by the cries of 'What's that?' and 'Look at that view', with silent pauses in progress to fully appreciate the complexity of the beauty that pervades.

It was in this mind set, a cocoon of warm appreciation with added lifted spirits, that the event occurred. The path had just deviated from the cliff top into a meadow made necessary by coastal erosion. That's when it happened. Suddenly it was my ears not my eyes that were assailed. First one, then two, eventually there must have been five all



at once. Skylarks! I stood as if I were rooted to the spot. My ears transfixed me, filled and thrilling to multiple trills and song intended to distract me from the nest, while in my mind

there was a small boy running through flower meadows shouting with excitement at seeing and hearing his first skylark. The moment seemed eternal, but can only have lasted seconds. As if remembering that I also had eyes, I turned my body to rake the skies to get a fix on the trilling quintet. The symphony gradually softened as the birds descended, came into view from their lofty stations and disappeared into the long grass and silence reigned. It was if I had had a revelation, just standing there in a pool of wonderment, not able to move and barely able to breathe.

After that the walk resorted to normality. It became again a more cerebral experience, the extraordinary surroundings becoming the norm. Even stumbling on a family of seals playing in a remote cove, a much rarer sight to me than skylarks, though pleasant and enjoyable, did not have the same impact on me.

Reflecting on the walk in the satisfied glow of a meal taken in the light of a setting sun over the bay, I struggled to understand the moment. I couldn't then, and can't now, explain why those birds had such an impact on me. I can only speculate that, in contrast to the previous day's unnatural captivity trapped in a tin box, my mind was so wrapped up in absorbing the world then around me that I was vulnerable to memories long ago put aside. The whys and wherefores don't really matter. It has left me exhilarated and thrilled and reminded me that I am a simple country lover at heart and that listening can really lift your spirits.

By Graham Surman



AN AUTUMN ACROSTIC

Autumn hovers like a bird of prey
Until winter comes to end its stay
Telling golden leaves to dance and play
Under moistened skies of leaden grey
Mysteries of nature in fine array
Nostalgic thoughts of an autumn day

By Shirley Wilding

THE WAY HOME

A journey to delight at any time
The sky streaked in colour from end to end.
Eyes on the road steering a straight, fine line.
Cream, gold, red – a palette to comprehend.

Sudden isolation 'twixt intrusions
Of noise, flashing lights and stark, dark shadows.
A special moment of peace to create illusions
Of hope as light streams 'cross the meadows.

Some days, the journey grey and lowering
Presses on swishing tyres, whirring wipers.
No quiet time; workers rushing roaring
Past looming woods and the hidden vipers.

So each and every day the fields entice.
Then lights appear – warm, welcome will suffice.

By Betty Morley



A FEW KIND WORDS

It was after the autumn half-term holiday when the trouble started.

The reception class had, by now, begun to settle in nicely. Yes, there were the odd tears of parting with Mum in the morning, but it was soon sorted by Mrs Dixon, the teacher, or me, the nursery nurse. Most children knew all the others' names in the class.

Some children even spoke to each other, not just the 'teachers'.

Some even spoke too much.

The routine was getting familiar. Come in, sit on the carpet and read a book on Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday, and complete a jigsaw on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with or without Mum's/Dad's/Grandma's help. Then it was time for register, after the adults had filtered out. This particular morning all the mums, etc had gone and jigsaws were being put away when Leah was heard to say loudly and very indignantly, "Urrrr, that's a swear word". Grace, never too slow to report a misdemeanour, shouted, "Mrs Dixon! Mrs Dixon, Harry's swearing." Everyone looked at Harry interestedly.

Everyone was quiet – were they expecting him to spout forth a never-ending stream of expletives? Mrs Dixon swiftly cut off Grace's, "He said, he said . . .", with "I don't want to know what Harry said, thank you". She went on to simply tell the children that we don't use words that might upset other people, just 'kind words' like our school rules that tell us to use 'kind hands' and 'kind feet'.

This gentle lecture was obviously agreed with by Brandon, but unfortunately, he seemed to want to illustrate the point. "My Dad says 'f***' at home, but I'm not allowed to say it."

“My Mum says ‘bloody’!” piped up Lauren. Then everyone seemed to have something to say. The air was blue. “That’s enough”, said Mrs Dixon, clapping her hands. “Everyone be quiet. Jigsaws away now, sit in a circle, ready for register.”

Harry really had started something. He enjoyed the notoriety. Two days later he swore again, under his breath whilst looking at Mrs Dixon, much to the children’s amusement and Grace’s sharp intake of breath. Before she could speak, Mrs Dixon repeated her little lecture. Jonathan decided he’d like the same attention and stopped the whole class’s activity entirely by repeating Harry, word for word, but much louder; much, much louder.

That was it. Leaving Mrs Dixon with her class, I took Harry and Jonathan out for a bit of a talking to and five minutes’ time out. Meanwhile, Mrs Dixon was insisting that some words we hear or use at home were not to be used in school.

All was quiet for over a week. “I think we’ve seen the back of that”, said Mrs Dixon. “Weren’t they little monkeys?”

“Megan’s swearing”, said Grace importantly at milk time.

“No, I’m not”, said Megan, looking hurt.

“She was!” Daniella supported her best friend, Grace.

“I was not!” Megan was close to tears now.

We couldn’t believe it of quiet, shy, beautifully-behaved Megan. She was in floods now as everyone looked at her. I put her on my knee. “I only told Grace I’m having my ears pissed”, she said.

By Patricia Brown

THE WINDMILL

It was mid-June and the old man was lost in thought as he sat on the stump by the pond looking at the windmill, "How strange life is", he pondered, "how very strange". He was brought back to the present by the insistent pressure of his grandson's body pressing close to his leg. "Tell me the story, Gramps. Please, tell it to me now that we are here". He looks at Henk; the boy's eyes so like his own, pleading for him to begin.

"Well, my boy, it was this time of year. I was 17 years old, and I had lied to the Commander and told him that I was 18 and that I could fly. I had learned to fly when I was not much older than you; I had gone to the little airfield at the bottom of the track leading past our farm and made myself useful to the pilots. They had eventually taught me to fly, I think, to stop me mithering mostly. The RAF was desperate and so the Commander believed me and I joined the squadron.

I had had many successful missions behind me, but on this particular night lady luck deserted me. My squadron's job was to escort the bombers over Holland to Germany. It was mid-June and a clear night; we had not long passed the Dutch coast when about twenty enemy fighters appeared. It was a fierce dogfight and my wing got badly damaged. There was no option but to bail out; a very scary option, I can tell you. Down and down I floated and landed in a field of turnips. I gathered up my parachute and wondered which way to go and there, silhouetted on the sky line, was this windmill. It seemed as good a place as any to head for and I needed to be away and find shelter before the Germans came to hunt for me.

It took me a couple of hours to trek across fields and ditches, trying to leave as little evidence of my passing as possible. I even walked in a dike for some of the time to put any dogs off my scent.



When I got to the windmill there was no way I could know if the people living there would hide me. I weighted my parachute with stones and dropped it into the pond, just over there in that corner, and scouted around. Set by itself away from the house was a pigsty with two sows in it. I've always liked pigs and had grown up with them on the farm so I wasn't afraid. I considered that bedding

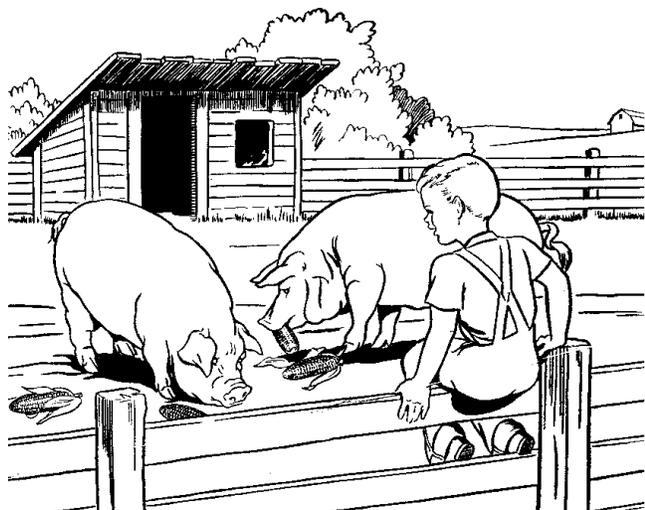
down inside the sty was my best option. It was warm and dry, the pigs' smell would disguise my smell should dogs come, and through a chink in the wall I had a good view of the house and windmill.

Curled up in the back corner I fell asleep. The pigs didn't mind me and one sow snuggled up so I was toasty warm. I was awakened by a lot of noise, people shouting, dogs barking, I looked out and my heart nearly stopped. There were German troops all round the windmill and farm. I covered myself with straw and kept watch. The soldiers were searching everywhere; the miller, his wife and daughter were just standing about helplessly. Two young soldiers wandered over to the pigsty but didn't like the smell and were too afraid to climb in for a better look; they didn't see me hidden under the straw cowering behind a fat pink sow. Eventually the platoon and their dogs moved off, convinced that there was no British airman here. As they disappeared, the miller spat after them and made rude gestures at their departing backs. Well, I thought, these people aren't collaborators then.

Later in the day when the miller came to feed the pigs and put fresh straw down I had to reveal myself. He was very surprised but he spoke a bit of English and invited me up to the house. After I had had a bath and some fresh clothes had been found for me, we all sat down together to decide what was to be done. I hoped to be able to make it to the coast and somehow get back across the sea but knew I would need the help of the underground movement. The daughter of the house, Everline, could speak more English than her father and she explained that her brother worked with the Resistance and when he came he would know what to do. Meanwhile they would say I was a cousin from Amsterdam come to help out on the farm.

Many months passed before your Great Uncle Henk could get me down to the coast and aboard a fishing boat. The scariest bit of the escape was transferring from the little boat to the British submarine that had come to take me and two other chaps home.

While I was overjoyed to be home, I had fallen in love with your Nana Everline and as soon as the war was over I returned here and we got married.”



“I love it here!” the young boy said, smiling at his Grandfather. “Uncle Jan says I can stay for the summer holidays if I want. I think Mummy will let me as you and Nana are staying for a bit. “I think it’s great that the windmill still works and that there are still pigs in the sty.”

By Dorothy Wells

A SUCCESSFUL DECISION

One rather cold February day in 1994, I made an impulsive decision to visit Pembrokeshire to look for a caravan. I knew that Saundersfoot Bay Leisure Park offered a special rate at the beginning of March, including bed linen and heating, so I contacted Anne and Maira, another friend interested in all things natural, to join me for a long weekend.

So, off we set and soon settled into a luxurious caravan, surrounded by landscaped gardens. I remember someone saying, "It's rather like a housing estate". We had a romantic vision of a field, outside facilities and collecting water every day.

It was late afternoon, so we decided to walk the cliff path towards Saundersfoot and we enjoyed the protection of the trees because, of course, it was pouring down with Welsh rain. Undeterred, we made the round walk back along the road to base and, oh boy, did we get wet! Later and much drier, we drove down to Saundersfoot to eat at the Royal Oak which soon became a favourite haunt.

Next day the sun shone and we pursued the purpose of our working holiday – 'Caravan Site Hunting'. It promised to be a marathon, as sites were mushrooming in and around Tenby. At once we discarded the town site which, though convenient, had serried ranks of vans enclosed with no outlook.

Our planned route took us along the coast to Wiseman's Bridge where, at the site, we waded through a 'pond' on the path (it had rained all night!) and peeped around the gate. Immediately I knew this was not for me and drove on to Amroth. Here a pleasant site behind the beach attracted us but was taken off the list, as care of the grass around the van was impossible, living 200 miles away. At this stage, we decided to go back, relax and start again the next day.

It was very pleasant, driving into our site which we now called home. An avenue of ancient oaks, daffodils, cherry blossom trees and well-kept borders suddenly seemed very welcoming and we could easily walk down to the beach through the woods to find bluebells and wood anemones on the cliff edge. Later, we strolled around the site and noted three empty spaces, which I remembered when we continued our search.

The next day we went inland, visiting sites in various stages of development. Managers welcomed us warmly, hastening to show us the 'club house' and caravans ready for sale. This was a new experience as we gazed open-mouthed at the gold fittings and lavish drapes - a long way from the simple caravan in a field!

So, the decision was made. I would choose a plot on Saundersfoot Bay Leisure Park, despite its manicured look. We all agreed on the pitch at the bottom of the park, near the wood and at the back of the cul-de-sac. Maira kept cautioning me about my decision, as it was an expensive undertaking, but next day we chose a new caravan. It was the simplest available within my price range and the deal was done, contracts drawn up and a date fixed for me to collect the key ready to spend Easter in my new holiday home.



So followed 16 years of golden drives, past thick drifts of wild daffodils in the Wye Valley, western gorse in full bloom, hedgerows covered with primroses, celandines and blackthorn blossom and, at the end of the long journey, ancient oaks to greet us.

By Betty Morley

AUTUMN



How can I write about autumn
In a way that is fresh and new?
How can I avoid the clichés
About leaves of every hue
Twisting and turning and tumbling
To lie on woodland floors,
Or toadstools and mushrooms springing
And spreading their dusty spores?

How *can* I write about autumn
From an angle that's not been done?
About mistiness over meadows,
The waning strength of the sun,
Dew on the grass and footpaths,
No daylight left after tea,
A nip in the air each morning
And hedgerow harvests for free?

How can *I* write about autumn,
Most beautiful season of all?
Nature's blazing finale,
Herald of chill winter's pall,
One final assault on the senses,
Voluptuous, fruitful and bold,
So that summer's warmth is hoarded
'Til spring's glory starts to unfold?

*How can I write about autumn
In a way that is fresh and new?*

By Jacqueline Barker

HOW THE U3A CHANGED MY LIFE

Imagine being able to write a story or a poem, and be brave enough to read it to a group of people, who were mostly feeling as apprehensive as you about that task. Well, this is what happened when I joined the U3A Writers' Group. Could I do it? Should I do it? Make a fool of myself, maybe. But, well, let's have a go and now, after two years, the difference is amazing, to say the least.

It is escapism, liberating, daring; the imagination that has been pent up for 75 years is at last able to escape my brain and flow free! Grammar was not my strong subject at school, as you will no doubt have guessed by now, but this, along with my long-suffering computer, does not hold me back. Thank heaven for spell check, and punctuation! Clever damn' thing, isn't it!

Well, I've been set free now by this U3A group. Its monthly challenges are wide-ranging. How far can I go? There no boundaries. Can I shock them? Can I swear? Can I include SEX? Wow! Who cares at my age – let it flow – it really doesn't matter. I just love this feeling of freedom; I feel young at heart and I don't care. The restraints of life have been lifted.

I just love my U3A activities; they have given me so much to enjoy in my senior years. Age is just a number. Be a child again! Do as you like! Be naughty! Let your brain run free! This is what the U3A has done for me.

They're taking me away next week!

By Margaret Woolley

We, in the Creative Writing Group, share Margaret's pleasure in our U3A activities, and we hope that some of our enjoyment is passed on to you as you read our pieces in Kaleidoscope.

If you have enjoyed our booklet,
perhaps you might like to join us?

We meet on
the third Monday of each month
from 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm
at Brook Court, Countesthorpe.



Visit our website for more details of our
group's activities:

www.countesthorpeu3a.co.uk
or leave a message on 07901 548576