

# Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 67

## Introduction

Now entering its sixth year the first rule of Flanagan's Running Club is everyone should be telling everyone they know about Flanagan's Running Club! After all, sharing is caring. Details of how to sign up is in the epilogue.

There is no need to panic, there is no actual running involved, it is not a running club in that sense. The title is made up from extending the title of my favourite book – Flanagan's Run by Tom McNab.

So, sit back, grab a cup of coffee (or beer or wine or whatever), and enjoy the read.

## On This Day – 17<sup>th</sup> January

1773 – Captain James Cook leads the first expedition to sail south of the Antarctic Circle.

1912 – British polar explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott reaches the South Pole, one month after Roald Amundsen.

1917 – The United States pays Denmark \$25 million for the Virgin Islands.

2013 – Former cyclist Lance Armstrong confesses to his doping in an airing of Oprah's Next Chapter.

National Day (Menorca, Spain)

The opening ceremony of Patras Carnival celebrated until Clean Monday.

Christian feast day of Blessed Gamelbert of Michaelsbuch

## Births

1706 – Benjamin Franklin

1820 – Anne Brontë

1863 – David Lloyd George

1899 – Al Capone

1922 – Betty White

1942 – Muhammad Ali

1971 – Kid Rock

1974 – My Brother, Larry

## Deaths

1893 – Rutherford B. Hayes

1997 – Clyde Tombaugh

2008 – Bobby Fischer

## Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1956 – Bill Haley & His Comets – Rock Around The Clock

Number 1 album in 2005 – The Killers – Hot Fuss

Number 1 compilation album in 1983 – Various Artists – Raiders Of The Pop Charts

## #vss365

A short story in 280 characters or less, based on a prompt word on Twitter

Sal was born on the riverbank. Her family had been #riparian stock for generations. Yet she hated the river. It rushed past carrying the flotsam and jetsam of others' misfortune.

The dark soul of the river was calling, wanting her to become a part of it.

She jumped in.

#vss365

## Joke

A man who was born, reared, and educated in New York took a job in Mississippi after college. He liked Mississippi so much that he stayed, married, and had a family. When his widowed father retired, he invited him to move to a nice retirement community near him. His father, tired of the cold New York winters, decided to give it a try. After a month of

living in the retirement community, he and his son were having dinner together and the son asked, "Dad, how do you like living in the South after all those years in New York?" "Well, son," he replied. "I like it a lot. The people are really friendly, and everyone seems to have a nickname. For instance, Tom is called "The Mechanic" by everyone in spite of the fact that it has been over 20 years since he has worked on a car. Bill has not practiced medicine for at least 15 years, but everyone still calls him "Doc." "So, Dad, do you have a nickname?" "Yes, I do. Even though I have not had sex in the 10 years since your mother died, everyone refers to me as that "Fucking Yankee."

## Drabble

A drabble is a complete story that is exactly one hundred words long.

### No Words

All the people had now were stories. There was no history available to them, apart from the passed-on memories. The clowns in charge had burnt every book. They destroyed every storage device. Written words in all forms were outlawed. It still wasn't enough for them. The executions started. Those who were able to tell the stories were hung if they were found, most of the others went into hiding so they could stay alive. The past would die with them, and then in another generation's time, no one would know why it had happened. Or why they were all slaves.

## Random Items

### Facts

A group of officers is called a mess.

Physicist Murray Gell-Mann named the sub-atomic particles known as quarks for a random line in James Joyce, "Three quarks for Muster Mark!"

"Three dog night" (attributed to Australian Aborigines) came about because on especially cold nights these nomadic people needed three dogs (dingo's, actually) to keep from freezing.

### Thoughts

If you bow at all, bow low.

May the fleas of a thousand camels infest the crotch of the person who screws up your day and may their arms be too short to scratch.

When forced to choose between two evils, try the new one.

### Random Top Ten

The ten NFL teams with the most seasons making it to the playoffs.

Pos	Team	Playoff seasons
1=	Green Bay Packers	35
1=	Dallas Cowboys	35
3=	Pittsburgh Steelers	33
3=	New York Giants	33
5=	Los Angeles Rams	31
5=	Minnesota Vikings	31
7=	Indianapolis Colts	29
7=	Philadelphia Eagles	29
7=	San Francisco 49ers	29
10	New England Patriots	28

## Flash Fiction

Something between the 100-word shortness of a Drabble, and the short story, these are works of fiction somewhere between five hundred and seven hundred words.

### Celia

A woman walks into the ocean in a red ballgown, but that isn't the start of the story, not is it the end, it is somewhere in the middle of the tale. I knew the woman. More than that, I loved the woman. She was the most beautiful creature I had ever laid eyes on. And in the time, I knew her she had always seemed fond of me.

Her name was Celia. I met her at the lido when I was swimming. I say swimming, but it was more like a poor attempt at it, splashing and dragging myself through the water without the slightest hint of elegance. Celia came to me and asked if I'd like some help in being able to swim properly. I had seen her when I had stopped to change direction at one end of the pool. Pausing to take some deep breaths and expunge some of the swallowed water from my lung. She had been gliding through the water effortlessly. No splash, no wake, as if she was one with the water.

When she spoke to me, I was stunned. Tongue tied as to what to say to this vision of loveliness before me, and so I didn't say a word then. I just nodded dumbly and let her take my hand and guide me through the water. Correcting my body position. Changing how I moved my arms, how I kicked my legs, and within minutes I was swimming better than I ever had before in my life.

And so, I asked her to have coffee with me as a thank you for her lesson and her help. And we chatted, and laughed, and time flew by. She was new to town, only having arrived there a couple of days before. Chancing my arm, I said I could show her around if she wanted. Which she did. And so, I did.

On that night, the one with the ocean, it had been nearly a year since that first encounter. I had invited her to the grand midsummer ball at the Metropole Hotel. When she arrived in that stunning red dress I was as speechless as I was on that very first occasion in the pool. She was stunning beyond my comprehension. And then she took my arm and I floated into the ball room. Knowing every pair of eyes were upon us. Knowing every male in the room would be envious of me with the beauty I had beside me.

I had prepared some grand words of what I wanted to say that night, but they all flew away like butterflies in the wind. And as I got down on one knee all I could manage to say was the very simple,

"Will you marry me?"

It wasn't the no that broke my heart, but the reason for it. She asked me to walk down to the ocean with her as the chimes of the ballroom clock struck midnight.

Once at the beach she didn't stop walking, she carried on into the water, still wearing that stunning red ballgown. And as she did, Celia told me what I thought was impossible.

She told me she had come to love me. It should never have happened, but she was drawn to me. A forbidden love. She should have withdrawn long ago. Not let it go on for so long. For it to get so serious. But it could not be helped. She had come to the town just before we had met, but she had never said where from, and I had never pressed her on the matter.

But if she had have told me I would never have believed here. She told me as she walked into the ocean that she came from the sea. Celia of the sea. She wasn't human, she was a mermaid, and as she went further into the ocean, I could see the change begin; the red ball gown changing into a shimmering, sparkling, tail of scales of all shades of red. She, as all her kind were, was given a single year to live amongst the humans walking on the land, before they returned to the sea forever.

I had waded out into the ocean behind her, and before she turned to swim away and re-join her kind, she kissed me. I closed my eyes and when the kiss was over when I opened them again, she was gone.

A year later, on the night of the midsummer ball I didn't go to the Metropole Hotel. Instead I walked out to the end of the pier and stared at the ocean with the moonlight reflecting off the surface of the swell of the waves. And there in those waves I saw her.

Celia swam up to the pier, waved and blow me a kiss, and disappeared again.

And so, every year I made my pilgrimage down to the end of the pier, and every year, at the stroke of midnight on midsummer's night, Celia would appear, blow me a kiss and disappear again.

It's my eightieth year now as I walk to the end of the pier. I know it is the last time I will make this journey. And as if by clockwork, at the stroke of midnight Celia appeared. And as she did, I jumped off the pier and joined her in the sea for the rest of my life.

## Leicestershire

### Dukes of Lancaster

#### **Henry of Grosmont (1310-1361)**

Son of Henry, he became the 4th Earl of Lancaster and Leicester (and Lord High Steward) on his father's death, and was became the first Duke of Lancaster in 1351. This was due to his service to King Edward III in the Hundred Years' War. He was a founding member and the second Knight of the Order of the Garter, when it was introduced in 1348.

He was one of the founders and early patrons of Corpus Christi College in Cambridge.

He married Isabella in 1330 and they had two daughters. He was created Earl of Derby in 1337 and Earl of Lincoln in 1349, titles he held until his death.

He died in 1361 at Leicester Castle, probably of the plague, and was buried in the Church of the Annunciation of Our Lady of the Newarke.

#### **John of Gaunt (1340-1399)**

Third son of King Edward III, he married the second daughter of Henry of Grosmont. He inherited parts of Henry's titles and lands upon Henry's death, but didn't pick up the Leicester titles and lands until his wife's older sister died in 1362, at which point he became the 2nd Duke of Lancaster, the 5th Earl of Lancaster and Leicester and the 2nd Earl of Derby and Lord High Steward.

When his father died his nephew, Richard II succeeded to the throne at ten years of age, and John influence on the crown came to the fore. He was suspected of wanting the crown for himself and he left to seek the throne of Castile instead, and he became the King of Galicia, Castille and Leon in 1372, and surrendered in 1388. He only came back to England in 1387 to help the King stabilise his rule after the Peasant's Revolt, for which he was rewarded by being made the Duke of Aquitaine in 1390. He was made the Earl of Richmond in 1342, which he surrendered to the crown in 1372. When his first wife, Blanche (with whom he had seven children) died in 1368, he went on to marry the daughter of the King of Castille, Constance in 1371, and had two children with her. He also had four children in an affair which bore four children. When Constance died in 1394, he went on to marry the mother of his children, Katherine Swynford in 1396. He also had a further daughter with another mistress – Marie.

He died in Leicester Castle of natural causes in 1399 and was buried beside his first wife in the choir of St. Paul's Cathedral. Their tomb was one of many completely destroyed in the Great Fire of London.

#### **Henry Bolingbroke (Henry IV) (1367-1413)**

Son of John of Gaunt, he became the 3rd Duke of Lancaster, the 6th Earl of Lancaster and Leicester, Duke of Aquitaine and Lord High Steward upon his father's death. He had become the Earl of Northampton and Earl of Hereford in 1384, and then the Duke of Hereford in 1397.

He asserted the claim of his grandfather Edward III to become the King of England, some six months after his father had died, and the title of the Earl of Lancaster and Leicester became extinct.

A lot could be written as he was a King of England and the subject of a Shakespeare play, but it doesn't relate to the Leicester title.

He died in the abbot's house at Westminster Abbey and was buried at Canterbury Cathedral.

### Laughton

Laughton is a small village and parish situated in Leicestershire, approximately 5 miles west of Market Harborough. Old buildings dominate Laughton with currently only two modern buildings situated in the village. There is a row of cottages opposite the church that has parts dating back to medieval times. The church itself dates back to the 13th century and had a major renovation in 1879.

The population is included in the civil parish of Gumley.

The church of ST. LUKE consists of chancel, aisleless nave, bell-cote, south porch, and vestry, and is built of cobble walling and ironstone. There are some features of the 13th century and later medieval date in spite of the extensive rebuilding which took place in the 18th and 19th centuries and which included the demolition of former north and south aisles. The nave in part is of the early 13th century. Its west wall, built of cobbles, has an external projection below the bell-cote and this is pierced by a narrow lancet window with a round headed rear arch. The north nave wall has, externally, a blocked pointed piscina, which presumably served an altar in the former north aisle. The nave arcades, now incorporated in the north and south walls, are each of three bays and have pointed chamfered arches with a low springing line. A well-preserved capital survives at the west respond of the north arcade. Differences in the treatment of the hood moulds at this end of the arcades suggest that their building may not be of exactly the same date. A clerestory, later removed, was added to the nave, probably in the 15th century.

Before the 19th-century restoration the chancel had cobble walling, a priests' door with a large four centred arch, and a two-light Perpendicular window. In spite of extensive rebuilding the chancel retains ancient triple-moulded jambs to the east window and a medieval piscina and sedilia.

The aisles were removed about 1780 and the arcades built up to form external walls. The windows inserted at this time had leaded casements in square frames. Large brick buttresses were built on either side of the southern door and these supported a pentise roof which formed a porch. The flat-pitched roof of the church was slated, as was the brick bell-cote.

A general restoration was undertaken in 1879-80 at a cost of £1,400 under the direction of Charles Kirk of Sleaford (Lincs.). A new chancel was built, incorporating some earlier features, and a north vestry was added. The nave was re-roofed, new paired lancet windows were inserted, and a south door was provided; the bell-cote was also rebuilt. It was presumably at this time that the clerestory was removed: it had still existed in 1798. The stained-glass window at the west end of the nave was presented by the contractor who carried out the restoration.

The communion table and altar rails are believed to date from 1761, but the remaining furniture was mostly installed during the restoration of 1880. In 1798 the church was described as 'newly pewed and seated with deal', and W. C. Humfrey, rector 1833-74, constructed a gallery across the west end of the nave in 1850 and refurnished the interior in 1859. In 1880, however, the gallery was removed and new pewing introduced; the pulpit and font were also removed, and although a new font was installed in the same year the pulpit has never been replaced. Part of the old pewing and the original font could still be seen, at Killock Farm, in 1958, the former in the barn and the latter in the garden. By 1961 the old font was in the church, though not in use; it is octagonal with roll mouldings at each angle and rests on an inverted capital of the late 13th century, serving as a base.

## **Life's What You Make It**

Excerpts from life writing.

### **Christmas Eve**

It's Christmas Eve, and I'm happily sat at home watching recorded repeats of Jonathan Creek. It makes me think, what a difference 30 years make.

Back then in the late eighties and early nineties, it would be a big night out, we would have been out round the pubs of Belgrave, or Rushey Mead, or Thurmaston. A lot of pubs, and a lot of drinks. A lot of laughs, and a lot of festive spirit (and spirits - such as creme de menthe, eh Tony?)

And for quite a few years, part of the Christmas Eve tradition was that I would drag everyone to Midnight Mass. There were a couple of us who were nominally Catholics, but not being so didn't stop lots of people traipsing up to Our Ladies church.

Someone would always ask what time it started, and yes there was a hint in the title, Midnight mass did start at midnight, but a carol service would start half an hour before, not that we ever made that.

We would meet my dad and brother in there, although sometimes there just wasn't room near him in the back corner so we mingled with some of the more serious churchgoers. I can remember Dave Lyons sat next to the Louis family with tinsel still wrapped around his head. And others making their way up for communion because they were doing what everyone else did, despite not being Catholic. Canon McCreavy not caring because he'd been in the Catholic club all evening downing Guinness and so was three sheets to the wind just like the rest of us. Although a small communion wafer wasn't really a decent replacement for the end of night chippy stop, or a burger or kebab.

They were great nights, and I'm glad we had them, but I'm not convinced that necking a dozen pints and shots and careering into a wholly unprepared church for midnight mass nowadays is for me.

Happy Christmas to all of you who were there then (and to some who are no longer with us - RIP).

All the best

Kev

## Poetry Corner

### Inside The Mirror

Touch the mirror  
Reach into that void  
Feel the ripple  
As your hand disappears

Take a deep breath  
And submerge your face  
Take the gamble  
That there's something else

Open up your eyes  
And with them your mind  
Open up your mouth  
And breathe it all in

A new world found  
You are an explorer  
A new beginning  
You are a pioneer

No one knows you  
On this side of it  
No one judging  
The mirror version of you

Take the first steps  
See what you can find  
Be the first man  
To be free from it all

Hear that first sound  
Wait, what is that noise  
See that first being  
Wait, what is that shape

No, it can't be  
You are not alone  
No, please not here  
You should be alone

More shapes arrive  
Every second another  
More noises are made  
An increasing cacophony

You were the first  
But obviously not unique  
You were so brave  
But everyone is now

They all arrive  
This world's crowded too  
They all survive  
Now this mirror's full too.

## Did I Really Blog That?

Regurgitating an old blog post

### A Beautiful View (12<sup>th</sup> July 2020)

After breakfast in a bag it's time to head out into the glorious sunshine of this Sunday. We have afternoon tickets to Belvoir Castle, so take a meandering route across Leicestershire to get there, stopping at other places of interest on the way. The geography of the county makes it look like someone has taken a massive bite out of the north of it and so heading east we quickly find ourselves crossing the River Soar and venturing into the twilight zone of bordering Nottinghamshire for a few miles along the A6006 before it comes back into Leicestershire just before we head through Wymeswold.

We follow the road to Asfordby where we turn off to head south, making for Kirby Bellars. Once there it is down Main Street until it stops at the end outside the church of St Peter's and the field that is all that is left from the former priory. The church is very striking with its distinctive ironstone coloured walls and tower, and the limestone tower. Again, it is fascinating to see the lines of family headstones in the graveyard, the use of slate for headstones in Leicestershire making them a lot less weather beaten than those we have seen elsewhere in the country. The church is sadly in need of restoration work and is on the Heritage at risk list. Having not been around the county churches for a long time, the ironstone colour seems really unusual to us, but as we find out over the next couple of days, it is the predominant choice for churches in the east of the county.



The next destination is Burrough Hill Iron Age Hill Fort. After parking in the car park and starting the walk up the footpath to the fort we are surprised to be passed by three trial bikes off to rampage through the countryside. The views from the top across the countryside are impressive, and the first of many hills we will stand atop over the next few days. The size of the fort is impressive as well and the building up of the bulwarks must have been a big task at the time. We walk the circle around the fort and get out just before the hollow is filled with migrating cows. One side of the bulwarks was being slowly eroded by children digging our rocks and throwing them down the side of the hill. On the way out someone's poorly controlled dog managed to jump up on me and get its muddy footprints on my nice clean jeans. I resisted the temptation to throw the owner off the top of the hill.



We stopped for lunch at the Royal Oak in Great Dalby, forgetting it was Sunday and that roasts would be available. After a lovely dinner it was time to head to the castle. We headed through Melton Mowbray, not having time to stop to get a decent pork pie, and took an unintended road out the other end, but one that wasn't too much of a detour.



The car park was rammed, but once through the estate gates it was quiet. The track up to the castle through the woods was steeper than I remember as a child, but atop another hill, the views are worth it, and the castle is impressive. What looked to be the queue for the entrance to the castle was actually the tea room queue and it was straight in for us. Although the self-guided tour doesn't cover the whole castle, there is still plenty to see and explore. It is quickly apparent that the family is well aware of image. Paintings line ever available space of all the previous Earls and Dukes of Rutland and their wives and children, and framed photos are congregated on every table.



The grounds are set out very well, and it is only when you are trying to get around to see everything that you realise how big they are. There were some parts we didn't get to, including the mausoleum before it was time to vacate to prevent getting locked in the car park. We crossed over to the Engine Yard, a good new addition to the area, and got a soft drink before carrying on.

One place I really wanted to see was St Mary the Virgin Church at Bottesford. I had got excited when they put on Facebook they were opening. However, it was only 10-12 Monday to Saturday, so I was going to miss it on all counts, and so having missed the mausoleum at the castle I wasn't going to see any of the impressive tombs of the Dukes and Earls. The church is an impressive beast, probably one of the finest parish churches in the country, with the second highest spire in the county, only behind Leicester Cathedral.





The village is lovely as well, with a road through the ford in the River Devon from which it took part of its name. It does say the road is not suitable for motor vehicles, but after seeing others drive through easily we had to have a go as well after we had walked a loop around the village.



We briefly drove north out of the village under the railway and into the most northerly village in the county in Normanton (not more than a mile away from the county border to the north, east and west) before turning around and heading back.



We drove skirting the border with Nottinghamshire, through Redmile where we stopped to take pictures of another ironstone church and spire; and on through Barketstone le Vale, Plungar, Harby, Hose, Long Clawson, Nether Broughton, Queensway Old Dalby, and Old Dalby to Six Hills.



I wanted to stop and get a picture of the Durham Ox at Six Hills, as there are many memories of nights out here in the late eighties and early nineties, especially on Sunday nights when it was the only place around open after 10:30. A stop at the Little Chef on the Fosse Way back into Leicester was compulsory as well. The building is now a Christian rehabilitation centre, somewhat ironically considering the lack of Christian behaviour when it was the Durham Ox.



Then it was onwards again through the Leicestershire Wolds, into and through Loughborough, up through Hathern and then a stop for dinner at The Otter. It had used to be The Navigation and sits on the bank of the River Soar looking across into Nottinghamshire. We had a nice second dinner of the day here, and at the end of the meal the manager gave us a business card offering 20% off next time if you download their app. That's fair enough, apart from the fact that nowhere on the card did it tell you the name of the app or the company the pub belonged to (Vintage Inns we found out). Even the manager had to laugh at the incompetence.

From there it was straight back to the hotel to chill and sort out some details for tomorrow's wanderings.

## Story Time

### The Second Coming

Inside the lid a plain white piece of card was stuck to the green felt lining and it had four handwritten words on it.

#### **“Property of Teper Naillian”**

It had started with a house move.

The house move had been a success. Well, as much of a success as a house move ever is. The solicitors did their part quickly and without fuss. The funds were transferred, and the contract exchanged, and we had the keys when we were supposed to. The packing up had gone better than expected. The volume of collected detritus had been less than for previous moves. We had spent time decluttering; selling items at car boot sales and on eBay, taking other things to charity shops, and throwing out pieces of junk we, not anyone else in their right minds, was going to use again.

And everything seemed to have made it to the other end in one piece. Even that hideous pink rhinoceros china ornament Jane's aunt had brought back from some African safari years before. It really needed to have an accident and shuffle off this mortal coil, and the fireplace it sat on. But Jane was strangely attracted to it, and it was the only ornament in the house which the kids had never knocked over. I could only hope.

The only strange part of the whole move was the funny looks I got from the Estate Agents every time my name came up. As if they knew it somehow. I doubted it though and thought I must be imagining it all. In fact, I doubted there was anyone else in the country with the same name as me. The surname was uncommon enough in the UK, being of Irish origin from County Clare, but with the unusual misspelt first name (apparently a mistake, one of the dangers of letting a drunken Irishman register the birth I suppose) I was unique. Or I was the last time I checked back in the noughties when websites to check your name's uniqueness against the 2001 census were all the rage. And I doubted anyone else had named their kid Teper instead of Peter since.

We had been disciplined about unpacking too. Three days and all the cardboard boxes had been emptied, broken down and thrown up into the loft. I remembered a previous move where some boxes had never been opened before we moved again some eighteen months later.

This time we weren't looking at moving again. Certainly not until retirement in twenty years or so. Or if there was a lottery win. The house had been a bargain, nearly £200k less than others like it. The detailed surveys had no sign of any structural issues or covenants. It wasn't under a flight path (or proposed one), and there weren't any new road or rail routes planned. It was bigger than we had been looking for and we felt lucky to find it.

It was a month, possibly a bit longer when Grace found the box. Out eldest had been building herself a cardboard city in the loft using all the broken-down packing boxes. She had found the wooden keepsake box against the gable wall of the loft. A small different coloured area of wood between the laminated chip board that covered the joists and insulation. Being inquisitive she had prised away at the different wood until it tilted, and she was able to pull it out of its hole.

It was a small intricately carved mahogany box; about eight inches long, six inches wide, and four inches deep. There were two brass hinges at the back, and the front had a little brass lock with a key hole. It was locked and had no key with it. I went up to the loft myself and had a look under the boards and amongst the insulation around where it had been found, but there was no sign of any key.

And so, the box sat unopened in an alcove in the kitchen. I would look at it each time I passed, and the kids would ask if I was going to open it. But I resisted. For all of about ten days before I got too curious about what might be in it. I got a fine chisel from the tool box and tapped it into place between the lid and box where the lock was. The box was sturdy, and it took longer than I thought it would, but I finally prised the box open without doing too much damage to it. Inside the lid a plain white piece of card was stuck to the green felt lining and it had four handwritten words on it.

### **“Property of Teper Naillian”**

I'm not sure how long I held my breath for, but I remember eventually exhaling and gasping in some air. How could this box possibly have my name in it? I shouted for Grace to come in. Berated her about where she had really gotten the box from. Had her mum put her up to this? I'm ashamed to say I made my daughter cry. And Jane's ire towards me was well deserved.

Although the ire did change to something more akin to confusion, and then a feeling of being spooked out, and then accusatory towards me, asking what I was playing at putting the box there like that, just as I had accused our daughter of doing.

I was just freaked out.

I started to take items out of the box. There was a yo-yo with flaking yellow paint on either side. Two old pennies, bigger than two-pound coins. A Matchbox car – a De Tomaso Pantera. A number of Derby County Topps football cards – Colin Boulton, David Nish, Colin Todd, Ray McFarland, Kevin Hector, Gerry Daly, Peter Daniel, Charlie George, David Langan, Don Masson, John Middleton, Steve Powell, and Bruce Rioch. A multi-coloured bouncy ball. A Rainbow badge with Zippy on it. A green and red kazoo. Two little pencils. A red sew on 10m Swimming patch. And half a dozen photos. A small boy was in them all. Small square photos, in colour but grainy in quality, with a white border around them. I recognised the garden of the house we were in. the shape was the same even if the windows had changed and the colours were different. Another had the boy sat on the knee of an adult. By the clothes and hands, I would say a man, but the boy was the focus of the photo and the man's head was cut off.

The boy himself has blonde hair, green eyes and a smile. In every photo a large beaming smile. I supposed he could have passed for being me at a similar age. There were definite similarities, but my hair was a bit darker, and you'd have been lucky to get a smile out of me, even as a child. After staring at the items for hours, I put them all back in the box and put the box back in the alcove and tried to forget about it.

Something easier said than done. It played on my mind. I would find myself sat at the kitchen table, looking at the photos from the box. Feeling there was something in them familiar to me, but I was unable to put my finger on just what it was. Jane had obviously had enough of me moping around more than I usually did, and the amount of time I returned to the box and looked at the photos. She came back from work one evening with an announcement.

“I've had a look at the Land Registry details for this house. You probably won't believe this, but there was a couple who owned this house back in the seventies. Their surname was Naillian. A Mr A. and Mrs E Naillian. Are they, or could they be any relation of yours?”

I couldn't speak. They were the initials of my parents. Not that most people would know that, and I wouldn't have expected Jane to. She'd only ever known them as Fred and Peggy. I doubt more than half a dozen people knew they were really Alfred and Elizabeth. I'm not even going to try to understand where the hell they got the name Peggy from for Elizabeth, but it was the case.

Surely, they couldn't have lived in this house. The dates were before I'd been born, but not long before. But they had never mentioned living in Derby at any point. Not even when we had told them about moving here. Not even when I had given them the address. If they had lived here, surely, they would have said something. Anything.

I got up and went to the box, and got the photo of the boy sat on the man's knee. I looked at it for what must have been the hundredth time. More closely now. Studying it. Had the clue been there all along? The signet ring on the man's finger. Hadn't I seen that same ring as a child? On my dad's finger?

I told Jane what I was thinking and what I was putting together.

She wanted to drive to my parents right then. Drop everything and go. I wanted to think it through. We compromised and I rang my parents and spoke to my mum. Told her we were thinking of visiting at the weekend, and she was delighted.

The week dragged. Three days felt like three months. A never-ending period of time. Until finally Saturday morning came, we got the kids settled into the car, and I took the box in a carrier bag into the passenger seat with me. Jane didn't trust me to drive by this point. I can't say I blamed her.

We arrived at my parent's house in Manchester. The house I had grown up in. It had taken two hours, not bad for a Saturday morning. The door opened and both my mum and dad came out. Jane hadn't even turned the engine off before the kids were out of the car and getting hugs from their grandparents.

Jane squeezed my hand as I took a big deep breath, and she said,

"No matter what, it will be alright."

We got out of the car, hugged our own greetings and went inside to a waiting pot of tea in the kitchen / diner. The kids got juices and headed off to the lounge and the lure of the television. And the conversation started.

I asked my parents about living in Derby, and there was a solid and quick no. Jane said about finding a Mr A and Mrs E Naillian as previous owners of the house we lived in. I said it was their initials, and if it wasn't them, did they know if it was some other relatives of ours? The denials weren't as fast, or as solid. My mum glanced nervously at my dad, who was keeping a fixed stare at some point over my left shoulder.

But producing the box changed things. My dad glanced at it and quickly looked away, but paled significantly. My mum refused to look at the box. I took out the photo of the boy on the man's knee, and pointing out the ring the man was wearing I asked my dad if it was his? He closed his eyes to avoid the photo, but my mum let out a sob. And after the sob came the story.

Teper Naillian was born on the 9th May 1970. He was named Teper by mistake, his father – Alfred, more commonly called Fred – was drunk when he registered the birth and had transposed the P and the T of the name Peter, and even when questioned by the registrar about whether the name was correct had apparently thundered "Of course it's correct, what kind of idiot do you take me for?"

He was a happy child and although his parents tried, a younger sibling didn't come.

His dad had got in the car to go to work, and didn't realise Teper was playing with his own cars, toy ones, in the gravel under the front bumper. There was no speed in the car, but the weight over Teper's chest was enough.

Heartbroken, his parents couldn't bear living at the house anymore. The car was sold, and they moved to Manchester and erased Derby from their lives.

I was born in Manchester on the 24th July 1979. I was told that my name was a mistake. But it wasn't. I was Teper Naillian. The second. I was an only child, or so I had believed all of my life. And to an extent I was, but I wasn't the first child. I wasn't even the first called Teper. I was going to be that younger sibling, after nine years my mum was pregnant again. But neither of us got that sibling, he had died five months before I was born. Neither of us knew about the other. Until today.

They had used the same name for me, knowing they were never likely to get it wrong. Never likely to call me by the wrong name. Never likely to let slip what they had left in the past.

My parents had done such a good job of erasing it they never brought it up when they knew I had moved to Derby. Or when they knew I had moved to the same house. Their house. Where the original Teper had lived. Perhaps that was why the Estate Agents had given me funny looks. A man moving to the house where his namesake had been killed in a tragic accident.

What my parents never knew was what that original Teper had done with his keepsake box. They had never known about its hidey hole in the loft and so had never sought it out when they left their old life behind. And no one else in the intervening forty-two years had found it either.

I suppose it was serendipity that Grace did, and I found out the truth.

## Chapter and Verse

A chapter from one of my completed books, works in progress, or novella length short stories.

### The Repsuli Deception – Chapter 3

No sooner had the new client left when Vipond decided to show his metallic face. He looked at the glass splinters on the floor.

“Have an accident, did you?”

I ignored the jibe.

“Where the nebulas have you been?”

“We both agree it works best if I am not here when potential clients arrive.”

“Did you let her in?”

“No, I had been out to try and get our remaining fees owing from the Tranter case. When I returned, I heard you talking and stayed outside until they left.”

“How much did you hear?”

“Not a great deal, the universal translator was interfering with my own. You really should look at getting it fixed or replaced.”

“I did fix it when it played up this morning, a quick bang with my fist worked wonders.”

“I’m surprised it works at all if that’s how you treat it.”

“Anyway, now that you are back, you can be of some use. Our new Repsuli client left this data chip here. It has all the details regarding her missing husband that we have been hired to find. Whilst that loads, can you work my data centre and put in a search for the name Tarrega Opsulate.”

Vipond rolled his eyes, it was one of his favourite tricks and it annoyed the hell out of me. They actually did roll around in the sockets, just like the reels on one of those old fruit machines I’ve read so much about. There were some clicks, which the translator ignored; they were a sign that my robot partner wasn’t happy in his work. He didn’t have to be happy, but he was good. The details on my new client flashed up all around me.

She was the eldest daughter of the Queen of Repsuli, and therefore next in line to the throne. If her husband was pregnant, and if the child was a female, then that unborn Repsuli child was the future ruler of a planet.

I wasn’t going to have any difficulties getting paid for this case, far from it, the Repsuli royal family were beyond rich. But I sure as nebulas would be encountering a whole host of other problems.

“I hope you charged her double your normal rate. Royalty can afford it you know.” Vipond remarked.

It hadn’t even crossed my mind. I didn’t know she was royalty when I had agreed to take the case. I didn’t even know for sure that she was until she had left the building. Beside the rates were in foot high letters on the back wall of the office. That and the fact I couldn’t have lied about that anyway.

“No, the usual price.”

“Let me guess, you couldn’t lie to her?”

“No, well, yes, but, well, I didn’t know she was royalty. I didn’t even suspect until she had made the initial payment.”

“Some detective you are.”

If I could have rolled my eyes I would have done. It came to something when your robot partner was more adept at lying than you were. I changed the subject.

“What’s on the chip then?”

“A lot and yet almost nothing at all.”

"I hate it when you talk in riddles."

"The chip has every detail about every trip her husband has been on, most of them with our client. There is some biographical information and numerous photographs. Some of a quite personal nature. But that is all there is. Nothing that describes personality, there is nothing that he has said. For all the photographs there isn't a single piece of video, or recording of his voice. His biographical information has his name and his birth date, and measurements, but there is no mention of his family at all. If anything, it seems like the kind of dummy biography that security services put together for their operatives for a mission."

"Does it say on the chip who put the file together?"

"That is another thing; there is no meta data in the file at all. Not in any of the documents, or on any of the photographs. It is all blank. That is something I have never seen, I didn't think it was possible, I don't think I could have done what the creator of this file has."

Great, that's all I need, a file that seemed like a ghost, put together by a ghost.

"Nothing at all?"

"No, nothing."

"So, what's his name then?"

"Franeth Opsulate."

"What was his name before he got married to our client?"

"Franeth."

"Very funny tin head, what was his surname before he was married?"

"Franeth."

"So, you're telling me his name was Franeth Franeth?"

"According to the file, yes."

"Aren't there laws against child cruelty on Repsuli?"

"I am not sure; I could look it up for you."

"Never mind, I was being facetious anyway. What can you find on him in the data centre?"

I could have typed in his name myself, but it might have taken me a while, my hangover was back with a vengeance. Vipond touched the data centre and more details flew up around me replacing the ones on my client. I tried to focus on the data floating in front of me.

"Is this right?"

"Why wouldn't it be?"

"It says that our missing Repsuli used to be the owner of Frantech. Surely that can't be right. Frantech is one of the largest corporations in the cosmos, even I've heard of them. How in the nebulae is it possible that I didn't know it was a Repsuli corporation?"

"There are a lot of things that come as no surprise to me when you say you don't know it. What you do know is a much smaller, much more manageable subset."

Vipond touched the data centre again and another set of data appeared. This time on the ceiling above me. I leaned back to look up and wished I hadn't, my head spun, and I struggled to focus more than before.

"Would you like me to read it to you Brodie? You seem more hungover than usual today."

I closed my eyes and nodded, and then just listened.

Frantech is over eight hundred standard years old. It was started on Repsuli by another Franeth Franeth, the only son of an aristocratic family on the planet. As soon as the corporation got to the point of being able to trade outside of Repsuli it set up a corporate front. It moved its headquarters to the nearby planet of Khakgle where it set up a board of local Khakgles to be the face of the corporation. A strategy used to get over some of the prejudices held towards the Repsuli. From there it grew across the known cosmos, and today is one of the five biggest corporations in the cosmos. The majority of its clients still don't know it is owned by the Repsulis. And since the marriage of Franeth Franeth to Tarrega Opsulate, it is now owned by the Repsuli royal family, after all property was transferred to the wife as per Repsuli law.

I didn't open my eyes. I lounged in my chair and wished that I had not opened my eyes at all yet this morning. I wished I had never set eyes on my new client.

"So, for clarity's sake, let me try and summarise. Our new client is the heir to the throne of Repsuli, something she failed to mention until it was too late. We have been hired to find her missing husband, who appears to have vanished into thin air whilst on Earth. A man, who before he was married was one of the richest men in the cosmos, and who now, is not, as all of his wealth has gone to his wife. And to top it off, she was pointed in my direction by the space corps. The same space corps who couldn't get rid of me fast enough because I told the truth, and of whom there would be any number of them who would quite happily see me interred in whichever penal mining colony they could get me on to. Is it too late to give the client their money back and find a new profession?"

I do believe Vipond was chuckling, or at least the robot equivalent of it.

"I didn't know she had been sent to you by the space corps. Does that mean they didn't like her, or that they are trying to get their own back on you?"

"Knowing them, probably both."

"I would normally be inclined to agree that this case may be more trouble than it is worth and to repay the client."

"Good Vipond, that's exactly what I want to hear."

"But.."

"NO, no no no no no! No buts, I don't want to hear any buts."

"If you want to create a diplomatic incident on a cosmic scale, and never work again on this or any planet, then by all means give the money back. I would suggest however, now that we are hired, we stay hired. We can do a half ass search; say we can't find the missing husband, and no one will know the difference."

I had to laugh; it would appear that my partner was a lazy unscrupulous pile of metal and wires.

"Did I mention our client insisted on coming with us?"

"No, that seems to have escaped a mention."

"Well she is, she is going to be back here this evening, expecting me to be ready to leave."

"Has she seen your space shit, sorry I mean ship?"

"Very droll Vipond and no I very much doubt it."

"It's probably not the kind of first-class facility that she is used to."

"That's not my problem. If she wants to come with us, then she needs to slum it in fourth class like us. Though hopefully it might put her off the idea."

"It would certainly put me off."

"You don't get a choice."

"So you keep telling me."

"Get the ship ready to ready to fly. We need supplies to get us to Earth. There is actually money in the business account, so we can get fuel through the proper route for a change. Don't tidy the ship up at all, apart from to move any junk from the seat behind me. The princess can sit there."

"You don't want to see her then."

“Not really, I can do without being able to see someone lick their eyeballs for two days if at all possible. And make sure we get all the data onto the ship’s computer.”

“But I have it all now; it would only be a duplicate.”

“But you could go missing.”

“Don’t be stupid Brodie, how could I go missing.”

“If a Repsuli can go missing on Earth, anything is possible. Just load the damn data, I’m going out.”

“Typical, leave me all the hard work as usual.”

“I need food, and non-alcoholic liquids. I need to sort myself out before flying us anywhere. Plus, I want to speak to Wynne. I need to bounce some ideas off someone I trust.”

“Am I not enough?”

“Sometimes Vipond, no, sometimes I need to get answers that aren’t logical.”

“And sometimes it would be nicer to be lied to.”

That’s all I need to top this day off, a sulky partner, a sulky robot partner. I got up and headed out.

## **Medium**

A lot of my blog posts were also get published on my Medium account, especially ones that are picture heavy, as there are no hosting costs to store all the photos there, the link is <https://medium.com/@onetruekev>. A lot has gone onto this site over the last year, and it would be good if you are on there looking at my work if you could register and become a standard member – it’s free for the basic member level, but it allows you to follow me on that site and allows for claps and comments to be made on pieces. Anything to help with profile raising is much appreciated.

As a user with over 100 followers, more recent posts are on what they call the metered site, so full members of Medium who read or like my posts generate me money, which is good. It also means I become part of their referral scheme. So, if you are not a member, and are considering [subscribing to Medium](#) if you do so through that link then you will be supporting my writing and you may also discover lots of other great writers, posts, and articles, including those I have already published [here](#).

## **Epilogue – Where To Find More Of My Writing**

To get people to sign up, point them in the direction of my website’s homepage of <http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/> scroll down past the menu and then enter their e-mail address and select whether they want Flanagan’s Running Club or blog post updates or both and then hit submit.

If you want to catch up on old issues, go to the website at <http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/frc.php> where all the issues are available.

For blog posts go to <https://onetruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/> which will have the most current post and the ability to scroll back in time.

There are various short story competition entries on my Reedsy prompts page at <https://blog.reedsy.com/creative-writing-prompts/author/kev-neylon/>

For all previous works including the old Surerandomality pieces go to <https://onetruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/else/> where pretty much everything I’ve written before is linked through to.

Then there are my books. Nothing published yet, but I have one full book available online, it’s called “Where The Lights Shine Brightest.” Can I ask you all a favour, please can you review my book on Inkitt, and the link is below? Even if you don’t take time to read it properly, please flick through a few chapters, give it ratings and a review and vote for it please. It may help me get it published.

<https://www.inkitt.com/stories/thriller/201530>

I have had a number (seventy-three) of Drabbles published on the BookHippo web site, and they can all be found at <https://bookhippo.uk/profiles/kevin.neylon/drabbles>



I've recently been submitting to Paragraph Planet and have had some pieces published there, they will be in the archive somewhere, one piece a month from me since June. <https://www.paragraphplanet.com/index.php>

You can also follow me on Twitter, where I will occasionally put up some micro fiction or micro poems, my Twitter handle is @Onetruekev – <https://twitter.com/onetruekev>

You can also follow all my writing on the Facebook page Onetruekev which is at <https://www.facebook.com/Onetruekev-102649357993650/>

And also, now on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/onetruekev/>

E-mail any ideas or suggestions to [kev@onetruekev.co.uk](mailto:kev@onetruekev.co.uk)

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