

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 90

Introduction

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, wine, rum, port, Pepsi, or whatever), and enjoy the read.

Announcement

This is the last monthly issue (for at least the next year), as for 2025 Flanagan's Running Club will change to being issued on a quarterly basis instead of the current monthly timetable. This is to allow me to put more time into other projects which I am working on.

On This Day – 29th December

1607 – According to John Smith, Pocahontas, daughter of Powhatan leader Wahunsenacawh, successfully pleads for his life after tribal leaders attempt to execute him.

1845 – The United States annexes the Republic of Texas and admits it as the 28th state.

1911 – Mongolia gains independence from the Qing dynasty, enthroning 8th Jebtsundamba Khutughtu as Khagan of Mongolia.

1989 – Czech writer, philosopher and dissident Václav Havel is elected the first post-communist President of Czechoslovakia.

2006 – The UK settles its Anglo-American loan, post-WWII loan debt.

Constitution Day (Ireland)

Independence Day (Mongolia)

The fourth day of Kwanzaa

Births

1766 – Charles Macintosh

1800 – Charles Goodyear

1908 – Magnus Pyke

1928 – Bernard Cribbins

1936 – Mary Tyler Moore

1946 – Marianne Faithfull

Deaths

1170 – Thomas Becket

1894 – Christina Rossetti

1986 – Harold Macmillan

2003 – Bob Monkhouse

2020 – Pierre Cardin

2022 – Pelé

2022 – Vivienne Westwood

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1987 – Pet Shop Boys – Always On My Mind

Number 1 album in 1971 – T. Rex – Electric Warrior

Number 1 compilation album in 2001 – Various – Now 50

#vss365

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

Lee was always told that he should #aspire to be the best at whatever he did.

And he was the greatest ever; although no one would know, and he wouldn't be recognised for his achievements.

With over four thousand killings, he was the most prolific serial killer of all time.

#vss365

Joke

Far away in the tropical waters of the Caribbean, two prawns were swimming around in the sea - one called Justin and the other called Christian. The prawns were constantly being harassed and threatened by sharks that patrolled the area. Finally one day Justin said to Christian, "I'm bored and frustrated at being a prawn, I wish I was a shark, then I wouldn't have any worries about being eaten..." As Justin had his mind firmly on becoming a predator, a mysterious cod appears and says, "Your wish is granted", and lo and behold, Justin turned into a shark. Horrified, Christian immediately swam away, afraid of being eaten by his old mate. Time went on (as it invariably does...) and Justin found himself becoming bored and lonely as a shark. All his old mates simply swam away whenever he came close to them. Justin didn't realise that his new menacing appearance was the cause of his sad plight. While out swimming alone one day he sees the mysterious cod again and can't believe his luck. Justin figured that the fish could change him back into a prawn. He begs the cod to change him back so, lo and behold, he is turned back into a prawn. With tears of joy in his tiny little eyes, Justin swam back to his friends and bought them all a cocktail. Looking around the gathering at the reef, he searched for his old pal. "Where's Christian?" he asked. "He's at home, distraught that his best friend changed sides to the enemy and became a shark", came the reply. Eager to put things right again and end the mutual pain and torture, He set off to Christian's house. As he opened the coral gate the memories came flooding back. He banged on the door and shouted, "It's me, Justin, your old friend, come out and see me again." Christian replied, "No way man, you'll eat me. You're a shark, the enemy and I'll not be tricked." Justin cried back "No, I'm not. That was the old me. I've changed." "I've found Cod. I'm a prawn again Christian"

Drabble

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

Incoming

The biggest dish at Jodrell Bank had been there longer than most people knew or even thought was possible, it had been there for centuries, if not millennia. This one wasn't used for monitoring like the rest of the dishes were. It was sending information out instead, taking everything the rest of the dishes collected and beaming it all to the Fyllorgs.

All this time the security services had been worried about the information they were gathering falling into the wrong hands, that of a foreign power. They never thought about it going off-planet and that the invasion was imminent.

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.

The Turkey Of Doom

It was the night before the night before Christmas as they lay smugly in their beds. No more shopping to do, no more cards to send. The fridge is full, the bird has arrived. A bowl with chocolates in it in every room in the house. The cat plays contentedly with the furry catnip filled mouse. And as the waning moon peeked through the clouds as it travelled over their roof there came a scream. A cry so piercing, so full of terror, that it could not have been from this world. One so loud it roused, not only the house, but the whole street too.

His ears were ringing as he fumbled for the light to illuminate the room and find what it was that had caused her to scream so. But there was nothing out of the ordinary to be seen, and she slept on as if nothing had happened, and as if she had not heard a sound, let alone have produced one of such blood curdling intensity.

The tremors from it washed away. The lights went back out, the people settled down as if it had never happened and Christmas Eve came in as the moon departed.

She awoke and the fragments of the strange dream crept around in the corners of her mind. But she never said anything to him, and he didn't say anything about the scream to her, and the day went on as it usually would.

And so, came the night before Christmas, as the moon passed over unseen above the rain laden clouds, he had the dream. It didn't elicit the scream, just a weird moaning noise and a bit of thrashing. She woke and stroked his head as if soothing a troubled cat before drifting off back to sleep.

And he awoke on Christmas morning with pieces of the broken dream running and hiding in the nooks and crannies of his mind, but he didn't mention any of it to her, and she didn't mention his moaning during the night. Perhaps if they had spoken it might have helped. Perhaps it could have prevented it, but that, like so much now, can never be known.

So, it came to pass that when they did what they always did and each started to carve an opposite breast of the bird at the same time, neither of them noticed the little arcane speech fragment that came from their mouths as they did so.

And as the words died away as their knives plunged into the bird the world changed. The veil they didn't know was there was torn asunder, and the beasts and the demons of the underworld streamed forth from the bird, and they had their own Christmas feast.

The screams were not of this world, and those who heard them were already too late to make an escape. The hordes which flowed out were more than any mind could imagine, or any computer could calculate, and within minutes the Earth was theirs and the humans were no more.

Leicestershire

River Mease

The River Mease is a lowland clay river in the Midlands area of England. It flows through the counties of Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire and forms the administrative border between these counties for parts of its length.

The river and the lower part of one of its tributaries, the Gilwiskaw Brook (pronounced jill-a-whiskey) are both protected as "one of the best examples of an unspoilt meandering lowland river". The river receives protection under European Union law as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC); and protection under UK law as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The Mease is formed by a confluence of smaller streams near to the village of Norton Juxta Twycross in North West Leicestershire. It flows westwards for approximately sixteen miles (25 km) across a largely rural and agricultural landscape to its confluence with the River Trent at Croxall in Staffordshire, with its waters eventually reaching the North Sea via the Trent and the Humber Estuary.

The river flows through areas underlain with bands of Triassic Period sandstone and Mercia Mudstone. After flowing through a wide valley between the villages of Measham and Appleby Magna, the land opens up into flat countryside: the river's path is not of steep topography, meaning the river flows gently and meanders "passively".

The path of the river has changed little over time. Historical alterations were made near to the villages of Clifton Campville, Harlaston and Croxall, with the addition of weirs and leats to serve mills (now demolished or non-operational). In the 1980s work was undertaken to deepen the Mease between the village of Measham and its confluence with the River Trent: this was part of a "comprehensive arterial drainage scheme" which was designed to allow land drains to drain into the river.

The village of Measham takes its name from the River: Measham means: the homestead on the River Mease.

The river is a designated site of special scientific interest due to the fish that it supports. Of particular interest are the resident populations of spined loach (*Cobitis taenia*) and European bullhead (*Cottus gobio*) (two internationally notable species of native freshwater fish with a restricted distribution in England), white-clawed crayfish (*Austroptamobius pallipes*) and European otters (*Lutra lutra*).

The most numerous fish in the river are chub and roach; with dace, pike, perch, and gudgeon also recorded.

The river's wildlife is highly sensitive to pollution and fish numbers have fallen since 2007.

Natural England's report in February 2010 reported that the river's two special fish (spined loach and European bullhead) were both being adversely affected by pollution: both in terms of having lower than expected population sizes, and the river failing to provide favourable conditions for them to live.

Other wildlife, such as the white-clawed crayfish, have been pushed along the river to its confluence with the River Trent. White-clawed crayfish numbers have also been negatively affected by infiltrating foreign American signal crayfish, which have entered the river from a pool at Catton Hall.

The river receives the outflow of 9 Sewerage Treatment plants (located at Smisby, Donisthorpe, Packington, Measham, Netherseal, Edingale, Snarestone, Clifton Campville, Overseal, Norton juxta Twycross, Annwell Place and Chilcote), as well as the outflow from ten private sewerage operations. In addition the river receives the outflow from several opencast coal mines. The river has suffered reduced fish numbers since 2007 when the Environment Agency stopped artificially restocking the river. The Environment Agency are instead trying to encourage a natural recovery following several "pollution incidents".

The main pollutant is thought to be phosphates and the main cause of the pollution is thought to be the Sewage Treatment Plant at Packington, which is operating at full capacity, leading to "overflow" being released into the river via the Gilwiskaw Brook. The water quality of the majority of the river is recorded as "moderate"; the section between Harlaston Bridge and the confluence of the River Trent is recorded as "poor".

Following pressure from the Environment Agency, North West Leicestershire District Council refused to grant planning permission for any construction work which would add to the sewage outflow: this included housing developments, hotels and business parks.

In November 2012, following fears that the situation was damaging the local economy, North West Leicestershire District Council announced a new plan. The council's plan would not stop the pollution of the river, nor prevent the additional outflow and pollution from new developments; instead, developers would have to make a one off "significant contribution" of between £225 and £250 per new house built. South Derbyshire District Council and Lichfield Borough Council have both made similar proposals, with South Derbyshire planning a one-off charge between £86 and £354 per new house. The money from these schemes would then be used on projects designed to improve the river's water quality.

These schemes have been heavily criticised as they do not prevent or reduce sewage outflow into the river, and, with resumed building, outflow and pollution will increase. A proposed development of houses on Leicester Road, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, is predicted to increase sewage outflow by 110 cubic metres a day; with an added thirty-seven cubic metres a day of surface water runoff also added to the river. This has added to fears about worsening flooding as large areas of the Gilwiskaw Brook and the River Mease regularly flood after heavy rain.

Slawston

Slawston is a village and civil parish in the Harborough district of Leicestershire, England, north-east of Market Harborough. According to the 2001 census the parish had a population of 143, including Welham and increasing to 191 at the 2011 census. The parish includes the deserted village of Othorpe. Slawston is located roughly 1 km away from Medbourne.

In 1870-72, John Marius Wilson's Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales described Slawston like this:

SLAWSTON, a parish, with a village, in the district of Uppingham and county of Leicester; 2½ miles NW of Medbourne-Bridge r. station, and 5½ NE of Market-Harborough. Post town, Market-Harborough. Acres, 1,510. Real property, £3,241. Pop., 246. Houses, 59. The manor belongs to the Earl of Cardigan. The living is a vicarage in the diocese of Peterborough. Value, £174. * Patron, the Earl of Cardigan. The church is of the 13th century, and has a tower and spire. There is an Independent chapel.

"Slawston, a parish, with a village, in the district of Uppingham and county of Leicester." In Slawston the Anglican parish church is dedicated to All Saints, the church was restored in 1864 and currently seats 168 people. From the Church records the Anglican register dates from 1559, the congregational chapel was built there in 1776 and rebuilt in 1850. Slawston is eighteen miles southeast of Leicester on the southern edge of the hills which overlooks the valley of Welland and adjoining the county boundary with Northamptonshire. This parish includes the deserted hamlet of Orthorpe. The village lies at over 300 ft. and Slawston hills (also known as Mill, Barrow or Burrough Hill) exceeds 400 ft. The south of the parish is below 250 ft.; the low-lying ground adjoining the Welland is liable to flooding. The soil is a stiff clay overlying limestone which in the 18th century was quarried; on Slawston Hill the soil was then described as "fine and red".

According to the 2011 census, Slawston had a population of 191 people.

John Holyoake ran a large boarding school in Slawston in the early 18th Century which had as many as twenty young gentlemen from London and elsewhere. As Holyoake was a land agent (real estate agent) he erected a pew for his students at the west end of the north aisle in the church. In the 19th Century it appears that a school was held in the church, there were notes in the register of baptism records that a school was instituted in 1817 with forty-five pupils. Subscriptions were still recorded in 1821 but in 1832 desks which were said to have been used by schoolchildren were ordered to be removed from the communion rails. In 1833 there was only one private day school where four boys and

four girls attended and educated at their parents' expense. Also in 1833 an Independent Sunday school opened and was attended by twenty-six boys and thirty-four girls. After this Slawston had no schools.

An Anglican Parish Church which dates back to 1559 and is dedicated to All Saints in the church's register. The church which seats 168 was restored in 1864. A congregational chapel was built there in 1779 and rebuilt in 1850.

Slawston bridge, is about sixteen miles (26 km) south-east of Leicester and about one and a half miles down Slawston Road. The bridge is the abutments of a former railway bridge from which the span has been demolished. The bridge has become popular for rock climbing. As a climbing area it has of three types of rock: ironstone, gritstone, and smooth blue engineer's bricks, offering the best local climbing with some vertical seven metres (23 ft.) heights. The nearby Wheel & Compass pub accommodates climbers.

The village is characterised by Slawston Hill, 131 metres (430 ft.) in height. Slawston Hill is also known as Burrough Hill.

Life's What You Make It

Excerpts from life writing.

A Bottled Memory

The last night before everyone went home for Christmas the second year we were in Chez Didsbury, so it must have been 2003.

It was a rare night for us, and we spent it in the house, well all of us apart from G Man that is. He was on his work's Christmas party, a messy affair by all accounts, but that's an entirely different story.

The chances of even one of us being at home on a Friday night was slim, let alone for four of us to be there at the same time. I couldn't think of a single occasion when it had happened before

We spent the night chatting, whilst drinking sensibly, if such a thing was possible. We had old records playing from the other room instead of all being square eyes glued to the television in the corner. We exchanged gifts and we all laughed. A lot. I doubt if Frank Sinatra was ever played in the house at all in the twenty-one months we lived there.

G Man eventually got home about two, and we had to pay for his taxi as he'd managed to lose his wallet, such was the night out. He tried to join the festivities, but was a bit out of sorts, which could only be shown by the fact that he tried to play the CD he had got as one of his presents by placing it on a turntable and putting the needle down. It certainly didn't sound like he was expecting it to.

As it turned out, G Man was due to be the first to leaving the house at Christmas. His parents were picking him up at six that morning on the way to the airport. He was off on a Florida and cruise family holiday. One that when his parents turned up he wasn't packed for. It wasn't the greatest packing job in the world, missing out important items such as underwear. But he probably broke the record for most items of cutlery taken into the US in a single suitcase.

The rest of us had packed them in his case for him, thinking that he would find them as he packed his clothes, but failing to take into account just what a state he'd be in after his Christmas do and with his somewhat irate parents breathing down his neck.

When he sent me an e-mail from Florida, he was wondering what on Earth had possessed him to pack all the cutlery. It was a long while after he got back before we told him he hadn't packed it himself. The downside of this hilarity was the fact we had no cutlery to use in the house, it meant we had to replenish from curry houses for the next few weeks.

Poetry Corner

Television Kills

The TV is on, there is vision and sound
And the watcher sits in front of it motionless
Their eyes are open, but nothing do they see
They are not deaf, but hear not a thing
All of that output for twenty-four seven
Yet not a jot of input touches their mind
Catatonic they sit there as it washes over them

A waste
Of time, of electricity, of programme production
It is all for nought in their isolated state

Wasting
Their time, their life, their money, their very self
And finally, their muscles waste away as well

And through it all still the TV plays on
It doesn't see
It doesn't hear
It doesn't care
It just carries on oblivious to its effect

This tragedy is not an isolated occurrence
Millions of people in millions of homes
Succumb to the same fate every day
Their life fades, ebbs away and then dies
With no one and nothing to hear their silent scream
And the world slips away from us all
As nobody thought to just switch it off
Instead, all that was left was the end of us all

Did I Really Blog That?

All That Glistens

Is worthless. What if that was true? What if, all those millennia ago, those that chose, chose differently?

Instead of "precious" metals being gold, silver and platinum, and "precious" stones such as diamonds, emeralds et al, how about they had gone with something else. So we went with excrement, sand, and hair for example. That humans hadn't turned out to be a race of greedy magpies, attracted to only the shiniest of items. Giving them a value above any other items found on the ground or under it.

Deserts wouldn't be seen as the harsh environments they are. They would be a hive of activity. All sorts of enterprises would spring up. Tourists would flock to see the vast array of riches spread out in front of them. When going to the beach, there wouldn't be the constant moaning about sand getting everywhere. Yes, we would still spit out the grains of sand that had found their way into our food and drink, but it wouldn't be in disgust. It would be in wonder at the value the little grain would hold. Those few grains of sand would be worth something. It could be exchanged for more sandwiches, or a drink, or a journey home, away from the beach and its riches.

Water companies would be paying us to take our waste away instead of charging us for the privilege. Every time we went to the toilet it would make us richer, make us useful, and there would be no inequalities in the supply. Polishing a turd would be the normal.

Hairdressers would pay you to cut your hair, and would be at the top of the food chain. Their skill would be valued. No more looking down noses at them. People would aspire to be hairdressers.

If we were to go back to the start and do this, would it have made a difference to how we are now? Probably not. Even with such a change in what we consider valuable, humans have the kind of dangerous nature that would overtake the upside of anything. The big corporations would still arrive and take over. Slavery would happen again. This time all of those not smart enough or quick enough to escape capture would be put into cages and force fed to make the harvests bigger. Humans would be harvested for their waste and hair so that others could get rich off it.

All the money would flow the same way as it does today. Only those not in control would be even worse off, they would have the fate of battery chickens, or intensively farmed cows. Only any use whilst they are producing. The bald would be turfed out to die.

We would end up in the same state, regardless of what was chosen to be valuable. It's just the natural way for the greedy human race.

Story Time

Home Truths

I collapsed, rather than sat in the armchair. And I looked at the bottle of rum on the coffee table next to the chair. There wasn't much more than a quarter, maybe a third left in there. I didn't remember opening the bottle, let alone getting through so much of it the night before. It was calling to me. Drink me it said, telling me I didn't need a glass. I was sat in the flat by myself. No one else would have been able to see me drinking straight from the bottle. No one else would care. Apart from me. I wasn't saying it wasn't tempting. I could taste the rum. My mouth was full of the taste of it, and I was licking my lips at the thought of it.

A quick swig before heading out to work wouldn't hurt anyone. The voice was nagging at me constantly. My eyes moved beyond the bottle and across the living room, and what I saw was more disturbing. It was little wonder I couldn't remember opening or drinking any of that bottle the night before. There were two empties on the sofa. I would have been surprised if I had taken a blood test then whether there had been any blood in my alcohol stream.

I pushed and struggled my way out of the armchair. Struggling to get my bulk and fat out of its loving embrace. I really shouldn't have sat down in it in the morning. At least it had arms I could push against to help me get up, unlike the middle of the sofa.

I picked the bottle up and fully intended to put it back in the cupboard over the fridge in the kitchen. But as I walked through the open plan living space, I twisted the cap off and let it drop on the floor. The bottle was up, and the spicy warming liquid was heading down my throat, and by the time I'd walked those few steps into the kitchen the bottle was empty, and it went into the recycling rather than the cupboard.

Opening the cupboard confirmed the suspicion I had. There was no more rum in there. In fact, the cupboard was bare. I opened the fridge looking for Pepsi to help wash the rum down, but the fridge had no liquids in it at all. I looked back into the recycling and numerous empty cans were there, along with an empty bottle of Chocolate Baileys. It looked as if I'd hit it good and proper the night before.

My head was feeling a bit tight. Now that I was older, I'd started to get the faintest of hangovers. But not enough to put me off caning it at every opportunity. I wasn't quite sure what had brought about the previous night's spree. Three and a no let's be honest, four bottles of spirits on a Tuesday night. At home. By myself. I liked to tell others that I was a social drinker. But it would appear I was quite happily becoming an anti-social drinker as well.

Mouthwash and a shower was a plan. Try to reduce the chance of me smelling like a distillery at work that day. I couldn't think what meetings I had. I didn't want to remember either. Maybe that was what the drinking was for?

I was in my own world in the shower. Singing to myself. A cat's chorus only good for bringing rain. And I certainly wasn't expecting to see anyone as I left the bathroom. And so, I jumped and probably let out a little squeal as I turned into the corridor and saw her standing there.

"We need to talk."

I wonder if those words have ever prefaced a good conversation. And she could have probably seen my eyes rolling in my head like the reels on a fruit machine.

"Don't roll your eyes."

Yes, she could see. I had stopped moving with the surprise of seeing her there, but it must have been off putting.

"Don't just stand there, go and put some clothes on and I'll take you for breakfast."

I stumbled past her and into the bedroom, putting on the first things I found in my drawers, resisting the lazy temptation to put on what was lying on the floor. I called out to her.

"Won't we be late for work if we go for breakfast?"

I heard a mumbled 'for fuck's sake'.

"No, you idiot, we don't work Saturdays."

That left me even more confused. What had happened to Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday? Did I even want to know?

"Are you sure?"

Marie came and stood in the bedroom door frame, looking at me with an expression usually reserved for the biggest idiots. Nevertheless, I continued digging.

“I could have sworn it was Wednesday.”

She just shook her head, sadness written all over her face.

“That is exactly why we need to talk.”

I kept trying to deflect.

“How did you get in anyway?”

“Shall we ignore the fact you have given me a key for the moment? And highlight that anyone could have wandered in here. The door was open. You had tried to close it, and you had turned all the locks, but not whilst the door was in the frame. You had locked it open.”

I giggled at that, which made Marie look even more annoyed.

“Just get dressed you idiot, and let’s get out of here.”

Dressing took longer than it should. I was taking it as slowly as possible as if I was a recalcitrant child. Once dressed, finding trainers was somewhat more difficult. I didn’t seem to have a complete pair. There were three odd ones sat by the front door (all left footed ones for some reason). I eventually found a matching one behind the sofa in the living room. Keys were the next issue. Not being in any obvious place on top of any of the units or tables, I started on the non-logical places, and there they were. In the fridge next to another of the missing trainers. I hadn’t noticed either of them when I’d been in the fridge earlier.

I had locked up and we were halfway to the café when I realised I’d left the trainer in the fridge. I thought it was funny. It was the last real amusement of the morning for me.

We ordered breakfast and sat down, and Marie started. I suppose it could be called an intervention. There was a long litany of exactly what an alcoholic idiot I was being. None of which was a surprise to me. It was all stuff I knew to be true. I was well past the denial stage by then. I wasn’t really looking at Marie as she spoke. I was looking around at the other people in the café. All of them trying to pretend they weren’t listening, and all of them failing miserably.

If I am being honest, which after all is why I am here, most of the words washed over me as if shame were a new fragrance and I was happily bathing in it. But then came the sentence that made me stop and take note. The fork stopped its journey to my mouth. The beans slid off and splashed tomatoey sauce onto me as they hit the plate below. In amongst everything else Marie had said.

“I don’t want you to die.”

It wasn’t anything I had thought about. In my mid-thirties in Manchester, housemates had often expressed the opinion that they were surprised I wasn’t dead yet. But now, in my mid-forties, it was the first time anyone had ever expressed a care about my mortality.

And it stung.

I got up and went outside. I wasn’t running away per se, but I didn’t want Marie, let alone all the other random people sat in the café, seeing me cry. I sat on the low wall behind the parade of shops the café sat on, and I cried my eyes out. I’m not sure how long it was before Marie found me, but I was still crying. I tried to turn away from her. Embarrassed, guilty, despondent, and so many other unrecognisable emotions floating around.

She didn’t say a word. She just sat down beside me and hugged me, and then held me. Held me until I couldn’t cry anymore. And she carried on holding me when I realised I could.

Eight years on, here I am, sharing this with you. It hasn’t been easy. I live with Marie now. It’s been the longest relationship of my life (if you don’t include the rum). And it hasn’t been easy – I know, I’ve said that before. Giving up was hard. Giving up is hard. And it took years for me, but for the last sixteen months I haven’t had an alcoholic drink. For the first time in my adult life I feel healthy. Both in body and mind. It turns out that sometimes the words “we need to talk” aren’t that bad after all. They certainly weren’t here.

Now, I’m not going to lie and say I don’t want to drink. Every time I see a bottle of rum, I lick my lips, and I can taste it. It fills my mouth like some kind of phantom spirit. But I have learnt how to resist now. A life without alcohol, but with

Marie, is better than any other life I have lived. And yet, one fact remains, there is still a threatening spectre lurking there in the background. All of the time, a shadow hovering just behind me, a reminder of the darkness.

My name is Joe, and I'm an alcoholic.

Chapter and Verse

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

Five Go Mad In Manchester – The Bank Holiday Bonanza Edition

Where to start this week? Well it's best to rewind to the early hours of Easter Monday to point out that Hopalong managed to puke into the cupped hands, and all down the front of his girlfriend while staying in Swindon, it might explain his absence from most of the action this week. Of course, of course, everyone knows that you came here to open the box and see what happened on the first ever Surerandomality night out, and therefore let's get down to business.

Hopalong had skived off work again and was hiding out at Lamb's house in the fear he may be dragged out. So, the only two residents of Chez Didsbury still in residence, Squirrel, and G Man, aided by the visiting Me Laird, started on the Stellas early. Squirrel and Me Laird, joined by Morning, got the first taxi to Scubar to start the proper drinking. By 9.30, everyone who was coming out had arrived in Scubar, giving a grand total of eighteen brave souls, they were: Squirrel, G Man, Me Laird, Morning, Garden, Blondie, Rah, Asset, Mogadon Man, Sally, Dylan, Lovelace, Shan, Kissme, Vek, Ven, Omi, and Ven (yes, a different person). Pints, wine, goldfish bowls, shooters, and champagne followed, some in copious amounts, before the first casualty of the evening was found to have disappeared home at 10 (Mogadon Man, so no great loss really).

The main party then set off to wind their way to 5th Avenue, but they had to make a stop at the cash point nearby, where, somewhat earlier than usual, the familiar tones of Gold were heard, much to the bemusement of anyone passing by. Shan, Kissme, Vek, Ven, Omi, and the other Ven had remained behind in Scubar, and except for Omi and Ven, stayed there for the remainder of the evening, before having to carry the seriously worse for wear Kissme home.

On the way to 5th Avenue, the party managed to temporarily lose Sally, Asset and Lovelace, to some unknown dodgy drinking establishment, but ploughed ahead relentless. Once inside, the vodka – red rooster combination kicked in, along with masses of various bottles, and the dance floor was hit virtually straight away. Sally, Asset and Lovelace caught up with the rest soon afterwards, and then Omi and Ven arrived, but before Omi could continue, a puke stop was required. Lots of dancing and vast amounts of alcohol followed, interspersed with photos from funny angles. The first to leave 5th Avenue was Me Laird, who headed off back to Chez Didsbury with Squirrel's keys.

However, he didn't have the alarm code, and 20 minutes of the alarm going off followed, during which time phones calls were ignored (well, they couldn't be heard), and text messages were laughed at and then deleted. Squirrel managed to hit the deck twice in quick succession dancing to out of space, and Blondie managed to fall over at the top of the dance floor steps. Morning was the next to depart, feeling worse for wear, something that continued the next day, with a near all day puking bout. Blondie and Rah headed off to Sankey's, though not for very long. Sally, who had spent most of the evening being chatted up by one of the bouncers, disappeared at some stage, before Squirrel, G Man, Garden and Asset got a taxi back to Chez Didsbury, leaving only Dylan and Lovelace in 5th Avenue, where they were til the end cos Dylan managed to lose his cloakroom ticket.

Back at Chez Didsbury, Squirrel wouldn't behave, at all. Jumping round the house, shouting "Sip Bacardi like it's your birthday" and generally being a pain in the arse, before going out for a walk. Meanwhile G Man and Asset were laughing on the floor in one of the rooms, before heading next door for the night. Garden went to bed and Squirrel returned to occupy his favourite sofa.

Saturday morning brought fun and games, as Squirrel crawled off the sofa in search of other people. Garden was asleep in bed, but was the only other person in Chez Didsbury. Me Laird had left at about ten, and G Man was still next door. A quick role call got things moving again, and G Man poured vodka shots at midday, which everyone refused except Squirrel. A lift into town with Asset from Garden, led to more mayhem. After dropping the camera in from the night before, Squirrel and G Man moved to Sinclair's Oyster Bar, for a couple of breakfast beers. Then it was shop, pub (pint & tequila shot), shop, pub (Stella and double JD's), then strolling up to the Train station in T shirts and sunglasses in the pouring rain, singing "Cos I Got It Like That", and getting strange looks from everyone they passed, who were trying to get out of the rain.

They later found out that they had narrowly avoided bumping into Mummy and Daddy G, who were on an unexpected visit to Manchester. Back at Chez Didsbury, the Vodka came out again, along with bottles of Stella, as they tried to persuade Hopalong to come out drinking. Hopalong was going out for a meal, but his departure was hurried along by Squirrel and G Man attacking the vodka with such gusto. Then at 7.30 disaster struck, after a vodka and Red Rooster, G Man came to an abrupt and alcoholic stop, and refused to move, not even the taking of his phone could persuade him to move.

So Squirrel headed to the Friendship, knowing that Dylan was out. Also out was his girlfriend Lyem and several of her friends. One of them mentioned that they were going to go to friends and family at the Roadhouse, so Squirrel got himself invited, as Dylan wasn't going anywhere due to the effects of the previous night, and being out drinking since one had caught up with him. So, Squirrel, El, Caz and Shiv went to Revolution, and then Glass, where some pissed up muppet came over to Squirrel and asked him whether he was Johnny Vegas, much to the obvious embarrassment of his girlfriend. Then to friends and family, before leaving at 2 for the long bus journey home, via a kebab shop. Garden meanwhile was also trying to get back to Chez Didsbury from work, but managed to get bumped on princess street, and then pulled by the police for being on the phone to Squirrel, ordering Kebab.

Sunday saw Squirrel get up with a bad back, probably caused by repeated falling on Friday, but not noticed due to the alcoholic anaesthetic that he'd been under since. G Man and Hopalong refused to leave the house, so Squirrel and Garden went to the Friendship for Sunday dinner and met up with Dylan, Lyem, El and Caz, all of whom started the afternoon off on soft drinks. Despite protestations to the contrary, Squirrel finally cracked just before 4 and had a Stella. They were joined briefly by Kissme, who was still feeling the effects of Friday. When the football finished Squirrel got a lift back to Chez Didsbury, and Garden went back home for the first time in ages. It must be said that for the remainder of the week, Chez Didsbury could hardly be called a hive of activity. So much so that there were stages where the residents couldn't even be bothered to get up and turn the lights on, and so sat in the dark.

Amazingly everyone made it to work on Monday, and G Man went down to London for a course. Ricky Organ arrived back in the country and is currently serving a 10-day quarantine from work, to preventing him from possibly passing on any SARS bugs he managed to catch in China. So, although he is back, he hasn't managed to make it back to Chez Didsbury yet. Rumours are that Thursday night might get messy, but Squirrel won't have time to update you on that this week, but if the casino (Viva Las Vegas) does beckon then it will be here next week.

Books

After years of prevaricating, I have finally gotten around to self-publishing some books. Since the last issue of this I now have three books available. The first is the novel which spent many years available on the Inkitt website. "Where The Lights Shine Brightest", this is available on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1738539601> .

Next up is a collection of drabbles, three hundred and sixty six of the little hundred word stories, under the title of "A Drabble A Day Keeps The Psychoanalyst Away", this is available on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/173853961X> .

Finally, there is an autobiographical work, released under my alter ego of Kevin Rodriguez-Sanchez, which covers a two-year period in the early noughties when I lived in Manchester – "Five Go Mad In Manchester". Again, this is available on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1738539628>

They are all available as paperback or eBook. And if you have Kindle Unlimited then they are available on there to read whenever. Please buy / read / leave reviews.

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.

Lots of stuff on my Medium page, clap, comment, or highlight any article. <https://medium.com/@onetruekev>

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.

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 X, 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/>

I have two Mastodon accounts, one on the central server, and one on the Medium server.

Recently I've added accounts on Threads <https://www.threads.net/@onetruekev>

And BlueSky <https://bsky.spp/profile/onetruekev.bsky.social>

E-mail any ideas or suggestions to kev@onetruekev.co.uk

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