

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 73

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 or wine or whatever), and enjoy the read.

On This Day – 17th July

1918 – Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and his immediate family and retainers are executed by Bolshevik Chekists at the Ipatiev House in Yekaterinburg, Russia.

1955 – Disneyland is dedicated and opened by Walt Disney in Anaheim, California.

1984 – The national drinking age in the United States was changed from 18 to 21.

2018 – Scott S. Sheppard announces that his team has discovered a dozen irregular moons of Jupiter.

International Firgun Day

World Day for International Justice

World Emoji Day

Births

1899 – James Cagney

1935 – Donald Sutherland

1952 – David Hasselhoff

1954 – Angela Merkel

1976 – Gino D'Acampo

Deaths

1959 – Billie Holiday

1995 – Juan Manuel Fangio

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1966 – The Kinks – Sunny Afternoon

Number 1 album in 1994 – The Prodigy – Music For The Jilted Generation

Number 1 compilation album in 2014 – Various – The Nation's Favourite Motown Songs

#vss365

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

Stan had always wanted to be in the #group. The problem was that he had no talent. He couldn't sing, couldn't dance, and couldn't play an instrument, couldn't even bang a tambourine in time.

Yet here he was on stage with them.

He'd give their families back after the gig.

#vss365

Joke

Cinderella, now 90 years old, and Prince Charming being long dead, sat on the balcony of her castle with her cat resting in her lap. Suddenly, the Fairy Godmother appeared out of nowhere. Cinderella was completely stunned. Wh... what are you doing here after all these years? asked Cinderella. Cinderella, you have lived a perfect life. You have never done anything out of malice, and you have been a wonderful wife to your husband until his death. Therefore, I am here to grant you three wishes. Cinderella thought about it for a good minute. After a while, she said: I wish for lots of wealth. And she immediately got surrounded by gold coins. Done, said the Fairy Godmother. And your second wish? I wish to

become young again! said Cinderella. All her wrinkles and warts disappeared, her back straightened up and she regained all of her youthful energy. Granted. And your last wish? I wish for my cat to become a handsome young man! As she stated her final wish, the Fairy Godmother vanished, and her cat jumped down to the floor. He then instantly turned into the most handsome man imaginable, at least twice as attractive as Prince Charming. He was so stunning that it felt as if time stopped running and the wind stopped blowing. They looked at each other for a long while, before the man bent down toward Cinderella, sensually caressing her smooth skin, and whispering with a manly, seductive voice: I suppose you regret cutting my balls off now.

Drabble

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

The Nosy Hand Dryer

Someone had scratched the letter "I" out from the sticky label on the hand dryer. The message now read,

"This Hand Dryer Is Nosy."

It made me laugh when I noticed it as I was having that clandestine tryst.

What I came to find out was it was a more accurate description of the hand dryer than we realised. It was recording sound and vision all the time.

The tryst was caught on film, and it found its way onto YouTube and other social media channels. And I found my way out of my house and relationship.

Damn nosy dryer.

Random Items

Facts

Lightning bolts generate temperatures five times hotter than the 6,000 C heat found on the sun.

A bolt of lightning can strike earth with a force as great as one hundred million volts.

Lightning strikes out planet one hundred times a second

Thoughts

Always yield to temptation because it may not pass your way again.

You can't win arguments by interrupting speakers

Eat Well . . . Stay Fit . . . Die Anyway.

Random Top Ten

The ten countries with the largest average monthly salary after tax.

Rank	Country	\$/month
1	Switzerland	6,187
2	Luxembourg	5,188
3	Singapore	5,058
4	USA	4,660
5	Iceland	4,264
6	Qatar	4,108
7	UAE	3,581
8	Denmark	3,545
9	Netherlands	3,541
10	Australia	3,370

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 Friday Of The Black

It was a well-known local festival. That of the Friday of the Black. No other colours were allowed to be worn. All artificial light was prohibited. No lamps, no candles, no electricity, no gas. All the blinds and curtains were closed. The tarpaulins were laid down covering the green grass, the pale walkways, and the roads. All vehicles were placed in their garages. Finally, the giant mechanical sunshade was activated and the whole town had the sun blocked out and had to spend the day in the dark.

Bunch of superstitious lunatics the lot of them. The cost of it all was phenomenal. The sunshade itself had taken decades to erect, and the town's fed-up residents were still paying for it now thirty years later. And most of them didn't have a clue why. They blindly (especially on the Friday of the Black) followed what the councillors told them to do. Which their predecessors had told them to do, and ad infinitum back into the furthest recesses of history.

Scientists had worked out what it had been. An exceptionally long solar eclipse had seen the sun disappear from the sky here for the whole of a day. It had been on a Friday, a special pagan feast day to celebrate the end of the storage of the harvests. And by a quirk in the line-up of the celestial bodies, there had been a second eclipse a year later on the same feast day. And so, the original feast day was changed, and it became the Friday of the Black.

Logan, Carmine, and Desdemona had plans for the Friday of the Black this year. They were going to show it up for the lunacy it was. They had been stockpiling the explosives, the flash bangs, the fireworks, for years. They were going to bring it all to a crashing halt.

The substations were the first to go. A spectacular blast of light and heat followed by sparks and crackling. The flash bangs lit up the sky and showed the faces of the horrified town folk who believed in this rubbish. The fireworks screamed into the sky, noisily waking those hiding from the day, and lighting up the town, reflecting off the inside of the massive dark sunshade.

Which was what had been saved until last. The explosives around all its supports going off at the same time. Causing it first to tilt, and then to gracefully glide to the side, cutting its way down deep, deep into the earth, and lighting up the whole town with the sun's rays as it would be on any other normal day.

And yet with that great act of defiance, the act of flooding the town with the light it should always have, came the real darkness.

The super massive sunshade had cut far beyond what was known beneath the surface of the planet.

It opened up the previously mythical underworld. A place only spoken of in tales to scare the children. Not a real place at all.

And yet it was. Out came the beasts and demons, previously trapped beneath the world for millennia. They erupted out of where the ground had been cut open by the sunshade, and they made their way straight for the town taking everything in its path and fouling it with the evil previously sealed away.

The town was gone, and still the demons and beasts carried on, rushing their way across the surface of the planet.

And the Friday of the Black became the Beast Feast.

Leicestershire

Alliance & Leicester

Alliance & Leicester plc was a British bank and former building society, formed by the merger on the 1st of October 1985 of the Alliance Building Society and the Leicester Building Society. The business demutualised in 1997, when it was floated on the London Stock Exchange. It was listed in the FTSE 250 Index, and had been listed in the FTSE 100 Index from April 1997 until June 2008.

After running into difficulty during the financial crisis, the bank was acquired by the Santander Group in October 2008, and transferred its business into Santander UK plc in May 2010.

It was fully integrated and rebranded as Santander by the end of 2011. The bank's international subsidiary based in Douglas, Isle of Man, Alliance & Leicester International, continued to use the Alliance & Leicester name until it was merged into Santander UK in May 2013.

The former building society was formed by the merger of the Alliance Building Society (originally based in and called the Brighton & Sussex) and the Leicester Building Society on 1 October 1985. In July 1990, the society acquired Girobank, a major provider of cash handling services to the government and large companies and current accounts, from the Post Office.

With other large building societies such as Halifax and Woolwich, Alliance & Leicester decided to float on the London Stock Exchange, generating windfall payments to members worth up to £5,000 each. Flotation took place on 21 April 1997.

Alliance & Leicester had to be offered a secret £3 billion credit line by HM Treasury in November 2007 to prevent insolvency and a run on the bank. On 14 July 2008, the board of A&L recommended that shareholders accept a takeover bid from Banco Santander for around £1.26 billion. This recommendation was ratified by shareholders at meetings on 16 September 2008. The takeover took effect on 10 October 2008, when shares of the company were delisted from the London Stock Exchange.

The bank transferred its business into Santander UK on 28 May 2010, following a hearing at the Royal Courts of Justice on 13 May 2010, as part of the procedure within the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.

Until this time, Alliance & Leicester was as a separate institution with its own banking licence while at the same time migrating customer accounts to the Partenon software system. Abbey and the Bradford & Bingley savings business were rebranded in January 2010. Branches of Alliance & Leicester were rebranded at the end of 2010.

The four business sectors were mortgage lending and investments, personal banking, commercial banking, and treasury. Alliance & Leicester provided current accounts, general insurance, life assurance, unit trusts, asset financing and commercial lending. The bank also operated Alliance & Leicester Commercial Bank. Credit cards were also provided through a partnership with MBNA until the acquisition by Santander.

Cards were subsequently reissued with MBNA branding, while Alliance & Leicester began solely providing Santander branded credit cards, provided by Santander Cards Limited. Selected investment products were also provided, together with those from Legal & General, which the bank had a partnership with.

Alliance & Leicester operated an international subsidiary based on the Isle of Man, which passed to Santander UK.

1852: Formation of the Leicester Permanent Benefit Society.

1863: Brighton & Sussex Equitable Building Society founded.

1945: The Alliance Building Society formed following a series of amalgamations involving the Brighton & Sussex.

01 May 1974: Transfer of engagements of Leicester Permanent Building Society to Leicester Temperance Building Society.

1985: Merger between the Alliance Building Society and Leicester Building Society to form the Alliance & Leicester Building Society.

1990: A&L purchase of Girobank from the Post Office in 1990.

1997 April: A&L converts from a mutual building society into a bank, and floats on the London Stock Exchange.

Cosby

Cosby is a village in the English county of Leicestershire. Cosby is located in the southwest of the county near the larger villages and towns of Whetstone, Blaby and Wigston. Its proximity to the city of Leicester means it is part of the Leicester Urban Area. The village is administered by Blaby District Council. Cosby has a brook which runs through the village and eventually serves as a tributary to the River Soar.

It is not known how the name originated, and it is first recorded as "Cossebi" in the Domesday Book in 1086 with forty families living in the village. Cosby was described as a "considerable village" in 1810 (with a population of 555) by historian John Nichols. In 1991 it had a population of 3,400 and in 2001 a population of 3,489, increasing to 3,506 at the 2011 census.

Cosby's 'Scandinavian' place name indicates that the village existed here several hundred years earlier, dating to the time of the Danish invasion in the earlier parts of the ninth century. However, it is possible that there may have been an even earlier settlement here in Saxon or even Roman times given that the Fosse Way bounds the parish to the north. The parish church is the 14th century St Michael and All Angels'. It also has Methodist and Baptist churches. Cosby has two schools, Cosby Primary School, and independent school Brooke House Day School. Cosby has football, rugby and cricket teams which all participate in Leicestershire's sporting leagues. The teams play their home games at Victory Park.

Close to the church is the early 17th century house known as Brooks Edge. This is the historic home of the Armston family who lived in the village for more than eight hundred years. One member of this pro-Royalist family escaped after the battle of Naseby and hid out in Whetstone Gorse. Cromwell's soldiers questioned many people as to his whereabouts, including his small son who refused to divulge his father's hiding place. According to the legend this took place in the family home at Brooks Edge and was celebrated in William Fredrick Yeams' famous painting "When Did You Last See Your Father".

In 1767, the medieval open fields of the village were enclosed by Act of Parliament, bringing to an end the system of agriculture, which had been practiced in Cosby from before the Norman Conquest in 1066. The post enclosure revolution in farming resulted in Cosby becoming a more industrial village with framework knitting followed by boot and shoe manufacture dominating the 19th and early 20th centuries. During this period, the population of the village more than doubled from 555 in 1801 to 1,351 in 1901.

Council houses were built along Park Road and in Lady Leys during the 1920s and 1930s, while the Settlement was established in 1938 when 48 houses each with a third of an acre to house out of work families from Wales and the Northeast of England. By 1951 the population had risen to 1,533, five times that of the village in the 17th century. In the 1960s large private housing estates were also built making the village one of Leicestershire's increasing number of dormitory settlements.

The Great Central Railway, the last main line to be built from the north of England to London, opened on 15 Mar 1899 and ran past the east side of Cosby on an embankment. Although there was never a station at Cosby, this section of the line was well known for the lengthy curve which for northbound trains was to the right (east), after coming out of which the city of Leicester would be directly ahead and the route would be almost ruler straight all the rest of the way to the centre of the city, a distance of almost 5 miles (8 km). Railwaymen referred to this curve as Cosby Corner. The line closed on 5 May 1969; today the rear gardens of many adjacent homes have been extended up over the embankment.

Life's What You Make It

Excerpts from life writing.

Gold

The Golden Jubilee was an entirely different kettle of fish. There were no street parties involved. I don't know if there were any held near where I lived in Manchester at the time, but if there was, I wasn't the kind of person you'd have wanted to invite then.

There may have been various proper celebrations in the city, but I was in too much of an alcoholic haze to follow much of what was going on.

Apart from the football.

The Sunday of the Jubilee weekend saw England play their first game of the 2002 World Cup finals. It was a 10:30 am kick off against Sweden. There was a 7:30 am game on before that, so I was up cooking double bacon cheeseburgers and drinking shots of Baileys for breakfast with one of my housemates.

After that first game we headed off to the student bar in Owen's Park – "Squirrels" – to watch the England game, having a couple of bottles of beer on the walk down there.

It was a Sunday morning, and although the bar was open, they weren't serving alcohol until midday. But being of the alcoholic bent, I'd planned to cover this dry hour and a half. The night before, at last orders, I'd bought six orange reefs and poured them into a large jug and placed the jug in the fridge behind the bar. I just asked for my jug and carried on drinking whilst everyone else was on soft drinks.

The game was tense, and not great quality, with the biggest cheer coming when the bar opened at midday. After the game, the bar emptied out, leaving a group of the regulars lounged out in their usual booths. Left to watch the two remaining games on that day. Ordering pizzas to be delivered to the bar from the Dominos we could see out of the window. And phoning the bar to order drinks instead of walking the three yards to it. Stockpiling drinks to keep us going for that 3 to 6 pm window when the bar would be shut again. Occasionally wandering off to play pool.

Word had reached our muddled brains that some of the clubs in the city centre were going to be open until two, and not just midnight as was usual at the time. And so, still wearing England flags as a cape we headed off to the city centre. We bounced around a few pubs, and then ended up in Satan's Hollow. There was more drinks and dancing involved (I'd learnt how to dance in the intervening twenty-five years), and people had started to disappear off home.

By kicking out time there was only me (of the original group out), and Cinderella's stepsisters (who worked in Squirrels) left out. It seemed a good idea to walk back to Rusholme. Made even better by the fact that half a dozen places on the curvy mile of Wilmslow Road were still open.

Curry (by now a firm favourite of mine) was the order of the morning. Twenty-five years to the weekend where I first tried it and hated it. Plus, more beers were involved.

It was 5 am when we got out and headed back. The stepsisters lived in the next street to me, but had no alcohol, whereas I knew there were lots of beers in the fridge in my shared house, plus I had bottles of spirits squirreled away in my room.

In no time at all it seemed, it was 7:30 am and the next day's fixtures were starting. Brazil vs Turkey. As it kicked off my house mate stumbled into the living room. He looked at the beer in one of my hands, and the glass of Baileys in the other, then at the stepsisters, one sat on the other sofa, and one asleep in my lap and asked WTF is going on, and was I still drinking from the previous day.

I nodded and told him it was his turn to cook breakfast in between games. The day didn't improve much and by the time we got a cab home from town that night it was already 2 am Tuesday morning, and the last day of the Jubilee weekend saw inert figures lying on sofas just about watching the football.

Poetry Corner

Alcohol

I say it does not bother now I have given it up
That I am fine living without having it in my life (or my mouth)
But it tempts me
It calls out to me

Sitting in a pub with a Pepsi or a lemonade
I enviously admire the alcohol around me
Bottles of ale and pints of golden coloured lager
Sweet smelling cider making me lick my lips
I hear the bottle glugging as the liquid is poured
Fill my pint glass with port please I think

I see the rum, I can smell it, yum yum
I want to taste it and swig it down
It's difficult as hell just sitting there
And not ordering Jager bombs all round
Or chilli Sambucas, or tequila slammers

It isn't all the time though
Some days I am fine
Some days I don't mind
But the urge rolls over me now and then
And I have to resist, pretend I don't mind

Because I am better without it, having not one drop
My body feels cleaner than it ever has before
My mind is stronger I'm not so mentally deranged
I can feel it inside, I know I have changed
People may mock the difference from the former party animal I was
But they don't understand

When I stood there with a drink in each hand it was all an act
Trying to join in and look as if I wanted to be there
To have friends
To be involved
To create an alter-ego
Alcoholic Kev

But I never really needed him at all
I needed real courage and not the Dutch variety
I should have been me, introverted and strange
It took more than thirty years for that to sink in
And so, I no longer drink enough to sink battleships
I'm just happy being me

Did I Really Blog That?

A Drive To Work

I swear to god that there must be a special secret news network that spreads the word the second that I get into a car to drive anywhere.

After the lunatic driving experienced on Sunday with people cutting me up left, right and centre, I ventured out in the car this morning to complete the relatively simple task of driving to work, via the petrol station.

I pulled out of our cul-de-sac on to Southgate Drive, not a car in sight either way, only to find a few seconds later a numpty right up behind me, flashing their lights and beeping, just because I had the temerity to be driving at the thirty miles an hour speed limit. So, with the numpty behind me, I carried on down the hill towards Southgate Avenue and the daily delight of the school run. Sure enough an overly long estate dived across the road in front of me to get a parking space so they could drop their precious little charges off for school, causing me to brake, and therefore in turn the numpty behind me to brake and use their horn again, before they parked up in the bus layby to drop their own kids off.

A relative period of calm followed, which was shattered as I turned into St Mary's Drive only to come face to face with a moronic cyclist coming towards me on the wrong side of the road, who shouted obscenities at me as he bumped up onto the pavement. Obviously, it must have been my fault he was on the wrong side of the road.

At the traffic lights to get under the railway bridge I was behind a large white Audi Chelsea tractor, which when the lights changed, went under the bridge, and got nearly as far as the turn off to Hazelwick school, only to stop on the bend. This stop in the middle of the road to hold up traffic was to let their daughter out of the car to go to the school. The Audi pulled off, and I restarted to follow, only for the stupid girl to decide to run in front of my car to cross the road.

After avoiding hitting her by centimetres I pulled into the garage, drove up to the second row of pumps, sat behind a Transit van. I put the fuel in and went inside to pay, the van driver was paying at the pump, and when I came out, he was gone, behind me was a BMW, whose driver was using their horn, before they leant out of their window to converse with me.

"Why didn't you use the front pump, instead of this back one, blocking me from using it."

I assumed they were joking, and tried to ignore them.

"Oi, I'm talking to you."

"No, you're shouting in my general direction, and for the record, when I got here, there was something in front of me."

"Why didn't you move down when they left?"

"Because I was inside paying, and as yet, the technology to enable me to be in two places at once doesn't exist."

"Just move your fucking car."

"I will, when I'm ready and sorted, and if you're too much of an impatient twat to wait for that, move to another aisle where there are free spaces, which is all of them."

I tuned out the stream of obscenities as I got back in the car, and deliberately took a lot longer than I needed to. As I moved forward, he drove and stopped in the space I had vacated, oblivious to the irony in him doing so, and then proceeded to drag the fuel hose across the car to the far side of it to start filling up.

As I made my way out from the garage, I was cut up by another Chelsea tractor coming from the car park side opposite the garage, by someone who was obviously unaware of how roundabouts and their priorities worked. Then they pulled up short of the exit back on to the road to let their little brat out of the car. At least he had the good sense to wait for cars to pass him by before trying to cross the road.

The Chelsea tractor was unfortunately going the same way as me, so I had to witness him cutting up other traffic on the next two roundabouts we encountered, but finally he was out of my way, and I made it into the work car park. Only to

be met with someone telling me that I should be parking my car in the small spaces on the other side, despite the fact it blatantly doesn't fit.

Only eight hours to go before I have to drive home.

Story Time

The Menu Of Memories

Matt had been a few minutes early. He hated being late. He had been shown straight to the booked table. And now he was waiting for Louise to arrive. Matt would be surprised if she were on time; she was usually 'fashionably' late. It was a trait that had used to wind him up, but as time went by, he let it go more. And he had picked up the habit of giving Louise a time fifteen minutes before the actual time they were due to be anywhere.

As he waited for Louise to arrive, Matt picked up the menu. More for something to do to fill the time in, rather than to pick something ready for when she did turn up.

He hadn't been to this restaurant before. It had only been open a couple of months. Another Italian restaurant in an already saturated market in the town. He wondered how long it would last. But he had heard good things about it, so perhaps one of the older, more established restaurants might get pushed out, or even one of the chains. Non one would be sad if Prezzo were to disappear. With its uninspired menu, their habit of microwaving pre-prepared food instead of cooking from fresh and the surly staff, it wouldn't be a loss to anyone if they withdrew from town. Apart from to the surly staff that is.

At the top of the menu was soup. How many hundreds of menus had he seen that on? It was the kind of thing that would be a fall-back option. A safe choice if there was nothing better in the starter or appetiser list. It was cream of tomato, which gave it more of a chance of being picked compared to other flavours. If he were lucky, it would be straight out of a can of Heinz. You couldn't go wrong with that. There was only the once where he had had a better tasting soup than the Heinz tomato soup. A little family run restaurant next to the River Camel in Wadebridge in Cornwall. That was an Italian, they had a tomato and basil soup to die for. He had been tempted to cancel his main course and have two more bowls of the soup instead. If it weren't over two hundred miles from home, he would go there once a week just for the soup.

Matt's eyes flicked straight over the words anti pasto. He had been put off for life with one he was served whilst on holiday in St Lucia. He had thought they couldn't go wrong with anti-pasto, only for the plate to turn up with three large lettuce leaves. One topped with prawns, the second with crab, and the final one with mussels. No cheese, no nice Italian meats, no olives, no bread. Nothing edible. He hated fish, the smell, the texture, the taste. He felt ill on the few rare occasions he had had any way back in the dim and distant past. And to top it off, between the anti-pasto starter - which he had pushed across to his partner Caroline - and the main course turning up, Caroline broke up with him. There was still a week left of the fortnight's holiday on the island. The longest week of his life.

With his distaste for fish Matt skipped the three fish options. At least there were non-fish options on this menu. Not like the time on honeymoon with his ex-wife Josephine. When the all-inclusive buffet had a sign up saying it was Margarita fish day, he hadn't bargained on it meaning every dish had fish in it. All the starters were fish. The mains were fish. The sides were fish infused. Even the fucking desserts were fish based. And when he had asked if they had anything without fish in it, they looked at him as if he was the madman. It was fish day, why would there be anything without fish in it? He was glad they were out on a trip the following week when it was fish day again.

Halloumi bites. Always a strong possibility. You could never have enough halloumi. As he had proved when he went on holiday to Cyprus with Louise, and their friends Andrew and Martin. From putting slices through the toaster for breakfast, a side at lunch, and some with dinner at night, there was only the one meal all week where he didn't have halloumi – the night they went to the Indian restaurant. The longer the week went on, the more incredulous Andrew and Martin became. And the happier Matt was.

Of course, there were the bread options on the menu. Matt was never one for the bruschetta. Too many healthy-looking salad vegetables on it for his liking. Dough balls could always be a possibility. As could garlic bread. This menu had garlic pizza bread, three choices – plain, with mozzarella, and with mozzarella and pepperoni. He would probably go for that. It reminded him of his last year living in Manchester when he lived in the flat above the newsagents in Burnage. There was a whole host of takeaways surrounding the flat. The pizzeria directly opposite had pizzas starting at a fiver. But the garlic pizza bread with cheese and pepperoni on was only two pound fifty for the same size. A no brainer for him. He probably got to triple figures of them in the year he lived there.

Matt looked around. There was still no sign of Louise, and he wondered if he would end up eating alone. It had happened to him once. He had gone on a date with a woman who worked for a different company in the same building as him in Manchester. He was meeting her for a drink first, but his housemates had been trying to get him to postpone due to the lairy mood he'd been in all day, but Matt had thought, what was the worst that could happen. Well, when he went to the

bar to get a drink for his date, there, stood next to him at the bar was his ex-wife's matron of honour. He wouldn't have thought it possible. Surely, she would have still been back in Leicester as well as his ex. But there she was. Matt made a couple of comments before returning to his date. Only for the matron of honour to come storming over to throw her drink over him. But she missed and soaked Matt's date instead. And having missed then threw the glass at him. That missed as well and went straight through the plate glass window behind him. All of which he found hysterical. His date didn't, and he didn't see her again. He went to the restaurant by himself that night. Which was another Italian one come to think of it.

He moved on to looking at the mains. Pasta dishes, pizzas, fish again, grill choices. There were always lots of meals on an Italian menu that sounded lovely. When asked he might say he was thinking of having the tortellini, or the baked penne with chilli and nduja, but when it came down to ordering the default choices would come out. It was a long-standing joke with Louise that when they went to an Ask, Matt would rattle off a few potential options, Louise would say 'sounds nice' to them, and then the waiter or waitress would turn up. Matt would open his mouth and the word calzone would come out. Apart from the one time when Louise beat him to it and ordered one of his mooted choices for him before he got the word calzone out.

Or if he weren't going for a bread followed by more bread day he would go for the lasagne. In fact, he would go for that off most pub menus as well. Somewhat of a creature of habit. Always used to being able to order the same things off any menu in an Italian restaurant in the UK. He did come unstuck in Vienna though. He'd trawled through the menu only to find no pizza (or bread of any kind), and gone to his backup of lasagne to find they didn't have that either. He had ended up with gnocchi. Not a bad third choice, but very dry there. Not a patch on the gorgeous gnocchi served in melted cheese he had had in the converted crypt in Shrewsbury.

Nowadays Matt didn't look at the prices on the menu. He had simple tastes anyway so it wouldn't be as if he would be getting a dish with truffle shavings or the 20oz fillet steak. Although if he did it wouldn't matter, he could afford it now. Not like the days when he was married and only just surviving. Going out for a meal with Josephine did lead him to a more varied set of dishes. He couldn't bring himself to admit to his wife that they were stony broke, so once out he would only have a main, and it would be whatever the cheapest dish on the menu was. He would then slope off to the counter to pay so she couldn't see him paying it with little bits off half a dozen cards and the odds clods of change in his pockets.

Matt may have been watching the costs in those days, but at least by then he knew what an actual restaurant was. His early dating had included taking Mandy to a Pizza Hut claiming it was an Italian restaurant. And taking Samantha to a Burger King. As far as he knew when he was a teenager, anywhere you could get food and sit inside eating it was a restaurant. He'd never been anywhere different growing up. Looking back, he could see why those early relationships never went very far.

The skinflint routine had led to the time they were in Scarborough for the weekend. One they couldn't really afford, and it was a meal out in another Italian restaurant. Matt was in luck as the lasagne was the cheapest main meal on the menu. It looked insipid to him when it turned up and so after letting them grate half a block of parmesan over the top of it, he'd added a load of salt and pepper to it before starting on it. Only for a bloke at a neighbouring table to comment to his date (who looked as if she just wanted to get out of there; if it were their first date, it would be their first and last) about how anyone could put seasoning on their food before tasting it. Matt leant across and said to the bloke, 'perhaps if you spent more time paying attention to your date and less to what other people were doing then she wouldn't look so terminally bored and have one eye on the door.' The bloke's date and Josephine both laughed. It was the best thing about the meal. And the trip to Scarborough.

Matt looked at his watch and glanced around. Louise was later than usual. He smiled to himself and thought of the fish and chip restaurant in Harrogate where it had been nearly half an hour before she turned up. But that was partly his own fault for being a numpty. And both of them for saying what they thought the other wanted to hear. She had gone to get changed and freshen up at the hotel. He thought she had the hump with him and so didn't go back. She turned up looking stunning, and he was sat there in his sweat stained t-shirt and shorts from walking around in the burning sun all afternoon. It looked as if she was a lady who had taken pity on a tramp and invited him for dinner.

He moved on to have a quick look at the desserts. He liked it when they were on the main menu so he could have a look before ordering anything. If there were some strong dessert choices then it could influence the ordering. He might pass on a starter, or get a smaller main. There was the usual fodder, tiramisu (which he didn't get at all), cheesecake, chocolate fudge cake, a fruit tart, and a back to the seventies selection of ice cream flavours – chocolate, strawberry, and vanilla, probably straight out of super-sized tubs of Neapolitan.

Nothing jumped out at him from the menu. Not like the fried dough sticks in sugar and smothered in warm Nutella like at Fatto a Mano in Hove. Or the immense Snickers sundae at the pub in Lamb's Green. It was a shame, so many places let themselves down with poor dessert options.

The waitress came over, 'Are you ready to order sir?'

Matt was about to say he was still waiting for Louise when it hit him. He lowered the menu and looked at the table. It was only set for one. Him. Louise wasn't coming this evening. She wasn't late. She was never coming again. Their last meal out had been her last meal ever. She had just said how lovely the sea bass had been when she keeled over and planted face first onto the fish skin on her plate. A massive coronary, and just like that she was gone. Somewhat unsurprisingly that had been at an Italian restaurant as well.

Three months had passed since then, and this was Matt's first visit to a restaurant since Louise had died. He ordered the garlic pizza bread with mozzarella and pepperoni and the lasagne. Just about managing to get the words out to the waitress. And when she walked away, he sat there and sobbed.

The last time he had cried in a restaurant had been the night he had proposed to Josephine, and she had said yes. That had been in Leicester; on the Meridian Leisure Park; a Frankie & Bennies. What a surprise. Another Italian restaurant.

Chapter and Verse

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

They're Here – Chapter 2 – Mavis And Bert

Mavis was at the window again, watching as the people walked past. Someone stopped dragging their case and sat on their front wall. She wasn't happy about it as usual.

"Bert! Someone else is sat on the wall."

Bert sighed, his wife spent a lot of time looking out of the window, and nearly as much time moaning about people sitting, or leaning, or resting, or having their feet or any of their belongings on their low front wall. But really, what did she expect?

"It's to be expected love. It's what happens when you insist on having to move to a house on the sea front."

"But why is it always our wall?"

"It isn't love; all of this row of houses gets the same thing. It's human nature in a seaside town like this."

"But I can never see the sea with all these people."

"That's got nothing to do with the people love. No one sees the sea in Skegness or anywhere up this coast. All those years coming here on holiday, I don't think we ever managed to get far enough out to actually paddle in the sea."

"Why did they call these the sea view cottages then?"

"So, idiots like us would buy them love."

"We need a wall like Bob and Elsie's, get some concrete and embed some sharp rocks in it. That'll stop them sitting on it."

Bert shook his head; she wouldn't go through with it. She'd lose a big topic to moan about. He was grateful; if she was moaning about the wall then it meant she wasn't moaning about something he hadn't done around the house.

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 one hundred 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

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