

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 91

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

Welcome to the new quarterly edition of Flanagan's Running Club, I've shifted from monthly to allow me to do other things.

These editions may come at any time during the quarter depending on when I manage to fit them in.

On This Day – 13th March

1639 – Harvard College is named after clergyman John Harvard.

1781 – William Herschel discovers Uranus.

1930 – The news of the discovery of Pluto is announced by Lowell Observatory.

1996 – The Dunblane massacre leads to the death of sixteen primary school children and one teacher in Dunblane, Scotland.

2020 – President Donald Trump declares the COVID-19 pandemic to be a national emergency in the United States.

Kasuga Matsuri (Japan)

National Elephant Day (Thailand)

Africa Scout Day

Births

1770 – Daniel Lambert

1939 – Neil Sedaka

1950 – Joe Bugner

1973 – Edgar Davids

1989 – Peaches Geldof

2004 – Coco Gauff

Deaths

1842 – Henry Shrapnel

1906 – Susan B. Anthony

1938 – Clarence Darrow

2021 – Marvin Hagler

2021 – Murray Walker

2022 – William Hurt

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1978 – Kate Bush – Wuthering Heights

Number 1 album in 1984 – Thompson Twins – Into The Gap

Number 1 compilation album in 2019 – Various – MTV Rocks - Indie Revolution

#vss365

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

As she huddled in between the crates in the hold of the ship she was stowing away in, she reflected on how she came to be in her current predicament.

Her mother and a line of mothers before her had had this power. As the ship pitched in the sea, she wished she were #normal.

#vss365

Joke

A man runs into the vet's office carrying his dog, screaming for help. The vet rushes him back to an examination room and has him put his dog down on the examination table. The vet examines the still, limp body and after a few moments tells the man that his dog, regrettably, is dead. The man, clearly agitated and not willing to accept this, demands a second opinion. The vet goes into the back room and comes out with a cat and puts the cat down next to the dog's body. The cat sniffs the body, walks from head to tail poking and sniffing the dog's body and finally looks at the vet and meows. The vet looks at the man and says, "I'm sorry, but the cat thinks that your dog is dead too." The man is still unwilling to accept that his dog is dead. The vet brings in a black Labrador. The lab sniffs the body, walks from head to tail, and finally looks at the vet and barks. The vet looks at the man and says, "I'm sorry, but the lab thinks your dog is dead too." The man, finally resigned to the diagnosis, thanks the vet, and asks how much he owes. The vet answers, "\$650." "\$650 to tell me my dog is dead?" exclaimed the man.... "Well," the vet replies, "I would only have charged you \$50 for my initial diagnosis. The additional \$600 was for the cat scan and lab tests."

Drabble

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

Eyesight Of The Blind

It wasn't that her eyes were completely opaline that had freaked me out when she looked at me. What did freak me out was the fact she saw me all too well despite her blindness.

She saw what no one else could, that no one with fully seeing eyes ever did. She saw the deep darkness of my soul which I kept hidden.

And now I was worried that the girl would tell the police all about me and what I had done.

Well, I thought that she might if she ever managed to escape from her dungeon that was.

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 Lucky Stone

He had seen the small piece of semi-precious stone laying on the ice on the pavement whilst walking in Murmansk. Even though it was small and pale it had caught his eye, and he had bent down to pick it up.

Doing so had saved his life. The bullet intended for his head had buried itself in the stone wall to his side, and the retort of the rifle echoed through the deserted streets.

With the stone in his hand he dived and slid for the corner whilst the unseen gunman was probably reloading. He made the corner of the street, and once round it ducked into a convenient doorway.

Having survived the attempt on his life, and when no one had ambushed him on the way back to his hotel, he decided to give up on that deal and leave Murmansk, and Russia, for good. The taxi driver didn't want to take him over the border, but would drop him at the crossing point. He had walked over the border and into Finland without looking back. That was nine years ago, and the little polished stone had never left his person since. It had been too small to drill a hole through and make into a necklace, and it was an odd shape making it nigh on impossible for it to be mounted onto

a ring, and so it went inside a locket which he wore on a leather strap around his neck. He considered it to be his good luck charm.

No one else had tried to kill him since Murmansk, at least not as far as he knew. His work had taken off since then as well, to an extent where he was employing others to do some of the grunt work. The boring research, the bank records, that kind of thing. The clientele had improved in leaps and bounds as well. No little desperate wannabe criminals with tatty ten-pound notes pleading for help. He had corporate clients now. Money was no object as long as he got what they wanted.

The only thing was he wasn't enjoying it anymore. He was missing that old raw feeling the old clients brought with them. It was what he had grown up with, and beneath the sharp suits and hand stitched shoes he wore now, it was what he still was.

He opened the locket and took the stone out. He felt its smooth surfaces between the roughness of the skin on his fingers and thumb. He traced the small deep orange veins through the milky stone with his eyes, seeing them as being veins full of blood just beneath the surface of translucent white skin.

And then the train lurched. One of the crammed in passengers lost their balance and the stone was knocked from his hand as they fell into his lap. Despite the noise of the tube he clearly heard the tiny stone hit the floor. He helped the fallen woman back to her feet and got to his own to look for the stone, scanning the blue vinyl floor of the carriage for it as the train slowed to enter the next station.

He caught a glimpse of it as it was kicked unintentionally by an unknowing passenger towards the door, only for another one to knock the stone through the threshold as the doors opened at the station.

The stone wasn't large enough to mind the gap and it disappeared down to the tracks. He got off the train and waited for it to leave before peering over the edge of the platform.

As he did, he heard a whisper in his ear. It was a Russian accented voice he hadn't heard in years.

"I won't miss this time."

Leicestershire

William Carey

William Carey, the oldest of five children, was born to Edmund and Elizabeth Carey, who were weavers by trade, in the hamlet of Pury End in the village of Paulerspury, Northamptonshire. William was raised in the Church of England; when he was six, his father was appointed the parish clerk and village schoolmaster. As a child he was naturally inquisitive and keenly interested in the natural sciences, particularly botany. He possessed a natural gift for language, teaching himself Latin.

At the age of fourteen, Carey's father apprenticed him to a cordwainer in the nearby village of Piddington, Northamptonshire. His master, Clarke Nichols, was a churchman like himself, but another apprentice, John Warr, was a Dissenter. Through his influence Carey would eventually leave the Church of England and join with other Dissenters to form a small Congregational church in nearby Hackleton. While apprenticed to Nichols, he also taught himself Greek with the help of a local villager who had a college education.

When Nichols died in 1779, Carey went to work for the local shoemaker, Thomas Old; he married Old's sister-in-law Dorothy Plackett in 1781 in the Church of St John the Baptist, Piddington. Unlike William, Dorothy was illiterate; her signature in the marriage register is a crude cross. William and Dorothy Carey had seven children, five sons and two daughters; both girls died in infancy, as well as son Peter, who died at the age of five. Thomas Old himself died soon afterward, and Carey took over his business, during which time he taught himself Hebrew, Italian, Dutch, and French, often reading while working on the shoes.

Carey became involved with a local association of Particular Baptists that had recently formed, where he became acquainted with men such as John Ryland, John Sutcliff, and Andrew Fuller, who would become his close friends in later years. They invited him to preach in their church in the nearby village of Earls Barton every other Sunday. On 5 October 1783, William Carey was baptised by Ryland and committed himself to the Baptist denomination.

In 1785, Carey was appointed the schoolmaster for the village of Moulton. He was also invited to serve as pastor to the local Baptist church. In 1789 Carey, became the full-time pastor of Harvey Lane Baptist Church in Leicester. Three years later, in 1792, he published his groundbreaking missionary manifesto, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*.

Carey finally overcame the resistance to missionary effort, and the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen was founded in October 1792, including Carey, Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, and John Sutcliff as charter members. They then concerned themselves with practical matters such as raising funds, as well as deciding where they would direct their efforts. A medical missionary, Dr John Thomas, had been in Calcutta and was currently in England raising funds; they agreed to support him, and that Carey would accompany him to India.

Carey, his eldest son Felix, Thomas and his wife and daughter sailed from London aboard an English ship in April 1793. En route they were delayed at the Isle of Wight, at which time the captain of the ship received word that he endangered his command if he conveyed the missionaries to Calcutta, and they were delayed until June when Thomas found a Danish captain willing to offer them passage. They landed at Calcutta in November.

During the first year in Calcutta, the missionaries sought means to support themselves and a place to establish their mission. They also began to learn the Bengali language to communicate with others. A friend of Thomas owned two indigo factories and needed managers, so Carey moved with his family north to Midnapore. During the six years that Carey managed the indigo plant, he completed the first revision of his Bengali New Testament and began formulating the principles upon which his missionary community would be formed.

Dorothy Carey died in 1807. In 1808 Carey remarried. His new wife Charlotte Rhumohr, a Danish member of his church was, unlike Dorothy, Carey's intellectual equal. They were married for 13 years until her death. In 1820 Carey founded the Agri Horticultural Society of India at Alipore, Calcutta, supporting his enthusiasm for botany. Carey's second wife, Charlotte, died in 1821, followed by his eldest son Felix. In 1823 he married a third time, to a widow named Grace Hughes.

Internal dissent and resentment was growing within the Missionary Society as its numbers grew, the older missionaries died, and they were replaced by less experienced men. Andrew Fuller, who had been secretary of the Society in England, had died in 1815, and his successor, John Dyer, was a bureaucrat who attempted to manage every detail of the mission from England. Their differences proved to be irreconcilable, and Carey severed ties with the missionary society he had founded, leaving the mission property, and moving onto the college grounds. He lived a quiet life until his death in 1834, revising his Bengali Bible, preaching, and teaching students.

Harvey Lane Baptist Church in Leicester, the last church in England where Carey served before he left for India, was destroyed by a fire in 1921. Carey's nearby cottage had served as a 'Memories of Carey' museum from 1915 until it was destroyed to make way for a new road system in 1968. The artefacts from the museum were given to Central Baptist Church in Charles Street. A Baptist Hall was named after him on Harrison Road as Carey Hall, which is now run under the Zion Word Missions Baptist movement.

Thringstone

Thringstone is a village in north-west Leicestershire, England about three miles (4.8 km) north of Coalville. It lies within the area of the English National Forest.

Until 1875, Thringstone had been a township within the ancient parish of Whitwick. The township of Thringstone, based on a feudal (manorial) division of land carved out during the Anglo-Saxon period, comprised Thringstone village (then known as South Thringstone) and the hamlets of Peggs Green and Rotten Row in an area known as North Thringstone. Thringstone became an independent and autonomous civil parish in 1875, though this was dissolved in 1936 when outlying parts of the parish were transferred to other surrounding parishes and the remainder was transferred to the civil parish and Urban District of Coalville. The geographical area known as Thringstone today bears little resemblance to that known as Thringstone before World War II and today Thringstone is an unparished area and therefore has no parish council.

The 2001 population of 4,325 compares with 901 in 1801 - the growth in population being a result of the industrial revolution, particularly local coalmining.

Lying on the western fringe of Charnwood Forest is a geological structure, not exposed at the surface, known as the Thringstone Fault. Formed during prehistoric volcanic times, the fault runs from Bardon Hill to Ticknall and forms an abrupt boundary to the eastern part of the Leicestershire and South Derbyshire coalfield.

The name Thringstone is probably derived from an amalgamation of the Danish (Viking) personal name, Traengr (this area having come under the Danelaw during the ninth century) with the Anglo-Saxon suffix, tun, meaning 'farm' or 'village' - hence Traengr's tun. Another source suggests that 'Thring' may mean land that was difficult to work. Thringstone is mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086 as the Derbyshire village of "Trangesbi". A watermill existed here in the 13th century and survived till about 1935. Some dilapidated outbuildings and the old dry mill race remain. Grace Dieu Priory was built at about the same time.

In 1309 the Manor of Thringstone passed into the hands of one Robert Tebbe. In 1360, it is recorded that Adam, son of Robert Tebbe, was the owner of the Manor and watermill of Thringstone. In 1391, Henry Tebbe of 'Threnguston' had a

violent quarrel with the Benedictine priory of Upholland in Wigan. Tebbe, who farmed part of the Whitwick tithes, refused to pay, was arrested, but on paying a fine was pardoned and released.

In 1462, King Edward IV granted land at Thringstone previously in the possession of John Beaumont to Richard Hastings. However the manor was back with the Beaumont family by 1494, when Thomas Beaumont was in possession and by 1550 it had passed to another John Beaumont.

In 1552, this Beaumont, who had been given the office of Master of the Rolls, was 'discovered to have grossly wronged the King', having purchased for himself lands with royal funds, amongst a host of other dishonest deeds. Beaumont subsequently surrendered his possessions to the King and in 1553, the Manor of Thringstone was granted to Francis, Earl of Huntingdon.

It was this same John Beaumont who, in 1534, had abused his position as one of the commissioners appointed to visit Gracedieu Priory following its dissolution, by buying the nunnery buildings at his own valuation. When his misbehaviour at the Treasury was uncovered twenty years later, Gracedieu was also granted to the Earl of Huntingdon, though Beaumont's widow managed to regain possession of it in 1574.

The Manor of Thringstone is recorded as having been the property of Henry, Earl of Huntingdon in 1640. A return of the year 1564 states that there were in that year 26 families in Thringston (sic), seventeen in Whitwick and twenty-five in Swannington. The district had been devastated by the Black Death a century before, and this accounts for the very small population.

In 1846 it is recorded that "J. Boulton, Esq., is lord of the manor; but the greater part of the soil belongs to E. Dawson, Esq., and the Cropper, Piddocke, Green and other families". In 1871, the Lord of the Manor is recorded as T. Boulton, Esq.

Population would have grown significantly during the 18th century, when Thringstone and Whitwick became concerned with the framework knitting industry. The work was carried by journeymen to and from the manufacturers in Loughborough and Shepshed. In 1844, Thringstone is recorded as having 160 frames.

In 1885, the parish was reduced in size to enlarge Coleorton Civil Parish with the area known as "Rotten Row". But by far the most radical geographical and social changes to the village came during the 20th century, beginning in the years after World War I. In April 1936, Thringstone Civil Parish was dissolved, and outlying parts of the township were transferred to Belton (68 acres), Coleorton (98 acres), Osgathorpe (482 acres), Swannington (70 acres) and Worthington (12 acres). The remainder of Thringstone (142 acres) was transferred to the Urban District and Civil Parish of Coalville. Thus, the old parish of Thringstone had a much larger area than that known as Thringstone today, having also included the hamlet of Peggs Green. The village proper that we now refer to simply as 'Thringstone', was at that time referred to as 'South Thringstone', with outlying parts known as 'North Thringstone'. The boundary changes, dissolving an ancient manorial division of land, meant two notable landmarks formerly classed as being in Thringstone were ceded to other villages - namely the Stordon Grange moated farmhouse (to Osgathorpe) and the Thringstone Smock Mill (to Swannington, and now known as the Hough Windmill).

To some extent, Thringstone has become an extension of Coalville (within living memory, it was relatively isolated) although, thanks to contiguity with Gracedieu Wood and the preservation of other greenbelt areas, it manages to retain something of an individual identity and has not been absorbed into the urban sprawl of Coalville to the same degree as parts of Whitwick, Snibston and Hugglescote.

One of the oldest properties - The Gables on Main Street is thought to date from the mid-17th century and an extension to the west bears the date, 1682, carved into a stone recess. The Gables is one of several buildings with Grade II listed status. Others are The Old Manor House on Brook Lane (formerly thatched, 17th century); Forest View House (adjoining the now demolished Rose and Crown public house on The Green, with blind central windows, possibly bricked up to avoid window tax, three-storeyed, 18th century); St Andrew's Church, Main Street (by St Aubyn, 1862; the tomb of Charles Booth in the church yard is also a listed monument); Lily Bank Farmhouse (17th/18th century) and Lily Bank Dovecote to the rear (18th century). Some of these, and other houses and buildings of interest in the village, have recently been provided with blue plaques.

The old schoolhouse on Main Street was built in 1844 on land donated by E. M. Green, Esq.; a plaque can still be seen above the main entrance reading, 'Fear God Honour the King. South Thringstone National School. AD 1844'. This was a Church of England school until transferred to Leicestershire County Council in 1950. Few buildings can have had such varied usage as this over the years: the building was originally also used for Anglican services on Sundays, until the parish church of Saint Andrew was opened in 1862.

A new county school was built off John Henson's Lane in 1967, at which point the old premises was sold for industrial usage. It served as a small hosiery factory until the 1980s, after which it was converted into a restaurant, operating under a succession of names, including Lal Quila (Indian); La Dolce Vita (Italian) and School Cross (English). For several years now, the building has been used as a residential home for adult individuals with learning disabilities.

Small coal workings existed in the area from medieval times, but until the 20th century, the coalfield was hampered in its competition with the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire fields even for the Leicester market owing to poor transport facilities. Toward the end of the 18th century Joseph Boulton, the tenant of collieries at Thringstone, and others fought to change this and were successful in getting opened the Charnwood Forest Canal between Thringstone and Nanpantan in 1794.

Horse-drawn tram roads were built to transport coal mined at Swannington and Coleorton to the canal wharf at Thringstone Bridge, and once at the Nanpantan terminus the coal was re-loaded on to a further stretch of tram road to take it to the main navigation at Loughborough. These railroads are said to have been the first in the world to use the standard gauge, and a deep cutting left by one of its branches can still be found in the field at the back of the Glebe Road housing estate in Thringstone.

Thringstone was once the centre of another industry unique to this part of Leicestershire, and which still leaves its mark in the name of 'Bauble Yard'. Bauble was the local term for a variety of alabaster ornaments, some manufactured by John Tugby in around 1850 at Pegg's Green, which was then in Thringstone parish. The alabaster came from Derbyshire. Another bauble firm was Peters and Son, who came to Thringstone from Coleorton in 1870 and set up their works in what became the "Bauble Yard". They also kept the Star Inn on Main Street. They made plates, jugs, views, eggcups, and other trinkets which were sold at the local monastery. Others were exported to America and some sold at fairs and at the seaside and the industry flourished for some years. It eventually came to an end around 1900 in the face of cheap imports from the European continent.

Saint Andrew's Church is a small cruciform structure built in 1862 entirely from Charnwood Forest stone in the Early English style. The building was designed by James Piers St Aubyn (1815–1895) and has an unusual plan, consisting of a broad nave with shallow transepts and a round-ended sanctuary, with a round-ended vestry on its north side. A small bellcote containing one small bell sits at the western end of the nave roof and a south porch was added in 1911, in memory of the first vicar, Edwin Samuel Crane, MA, designed by Thomas Ignatius McCarthy of Coalville.

The church was paid for by grants and public subscription, zealously elicited by Francis Merewether, MA (Vicar of Whitwick and Rector of Coleorton) and cost £750 12s, building work being undertaken by the firms of Messrs William Beckworth of Whitwick and Elliott of Ashby-de-la-Zouch/Burton. Merewether was a theologian of markedly Low Church views who preached and wrote prolifically against Ambrose de Lisle's Roman Catholic mission and was incensed by such developments as the founding of Mount Saint Bernard Monastery in his parish and the opening of a Roman Catholic day school at Turry Log, within the township of Thringstone, in 1843.

There can be little doubt that, quite apart from the rapid population growth that affected the area following the opening of large collieries, Merewether was motivated to build the church (and also a school) to help counteract the perceived papist revival. Merewether - along with Sir G H Beaumont (ninth Baronet of Coleorton Hall) - was the chief benefactor of Saint Andrew's Church, each donating £100.

Until 1875, the building acted as a chapel of ease to Whitwick and was served by curates under the jurisdiction of the Whitwick vicars. Thringstone became an independent ecclesiastical parish on 29 October 1875, since which time there have been nine incumbents. Despite becoming a parish in its own right, the church at Thringstone retained the ecclesiastical title, Whitwick Saint Andrew-cum-Thringstone until the 1980s. The church is one of forty-two nationally in the patronage of Her Majesty the Queen (in Right of her Duchy of Lancaster).

In 2003, the building's impressive truss rafter roof was restored to its original appearance, having been substantially boarded over in 1952 as part of a cost-cutting exercise. The roof and the building's semi-circular sanctuary combine to afford an extremely attractive interior, whilst externally, the building's simple pointed style and use of local granite is also aesthetically pleasing and the building is perhaps most commonly described as, 'pretty'.

A primitive Methodist chapel was opened on Loughborough Road, near to The Green, in 1863. A contemporary newspaper account of the opening reads, 'the comfort of the worshippers has been taken into account by the introduction of two gas stoves... and the chapel is to be lighted with a handsome gas chandelier of twelve burners'. The erection of the primitive chapel was followed by the opening of a Wesleyan Methodist chapel almost directly opposite in 1872. The two movements were united nationally in 1932, after which time the chapels at Thringstone became known respectively as the Loughborough Road and Main Street Methodist Churches.

This arrangement was continued until about 1964, at which point the old Wesleyan chapel was sold off for industrial usage. The Loughborough Road Church was then used by the amalgamated congregations and still exists as the Thringstone Methodist Church. This premises was extended by the addition of a hall and connecting corridor at the rear in 1975. The former Wesleyan chapel was occupied by a number of knitwear companies before opening as The Chapel Fitness Centre in 1996.

In 1901 Charles Booth purchased an 18th-century farmhouse on The Green, known as 'Thringstone House', for the purpose of providing local inhabitants with a meeting place for social, recreational, and educational activity. This venture, which became known as the 'Thringstone House Club', proved so successful that in 1911 Booth engaged his cousin,

the architect Harry Fletcher of London to add the imposing two-storeyed hall to the rear of the premises and founded The Thringstone Trust, a registered charity.

The Trust deed states that the institute and its grounds shall be used in perpetuity for the benefit of the inhabitants of Thringstone and the surrounding parishes of Whitwick, Swannington, Worthington, Osgathorpe, Coleorton and Belton. Architecturally, the community centre buildings have a great deal of character, comprising a gabled, white-washed 17th-century farmhouse fronting The Green with, at the rear, a large two-storeyed hall overlooking the rural valley of Thringstone Brook. The hall carries a louvred ventilation turret on its western gable which, together with brick buttresses erected to reinforce the north and south walls in the late 20th century, gives the building a distinctly ecclesiastical appearance.

Thringstone is represented on the North West Leicestershire District Council by David Everitt and Leon Spence, who maintain the village's long tradition of electing Labour candidates. Since May 2013 Thringstone is also represented at County Council level by Leon Spence, as part of the Whitwick electoral division. The late Mr Walter Johnson and Mrs Agnes Smith served as district councillors for Thringstone for many years during the twentieth century; Mr Johnson was the grandfather of current Thringstone Councillor, Leon Spence.

The ruins of Grace Dieu Priory stand on the outskirts of Thringstone in a valley bounded by a small brook (Grace Dieu Brook) at the edge of Cademan Wood, part of Charnwood Forest, and situated on the A512 road from Loughborough to Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire.

The ruins are known as one of the most haunted locations in Leicestershire due to the site's association with a 'White Lady' apparition, most commonly seen drifting across the A512. The most famous sighting is said to have occurred in 1954, when a 'bus driver is said to have stopped to pick up a woman waiting by the shelter opposite the ruins, only to find on drawing up his vehicle that she had vanished. Sightings of unexplained phenomena in this area are well documented and are also referred to in Paul Devereux's book, 'Earth Lights' (1982)

Following its dissolution as a religious house, the priory came into the possession of the Beaumont family, who converted it into a residence, so that the few remaining ruins are partly medieval, but chiefly domestic Tudor (e.g. fireplaces and chimneystacks). Francis Beaumont, the great Elizabethan dramatist, was born here in circa 1584. In the 1690s, the priory was acquired by Sir Ambrose Phillipps of Garendon Abbey, though by the 1790s the buildings were ruinous, with only two sections still roofed.

Life's What You Make It

Excerpts from life writing.

Speech Therapy

I had forgotten all about it. for more than forty years it had never entered my mind. There was a casual comment from my mum when I was up in Morecambe a couple of weeks ago. She was joking about me being taciturn and that I didn't really speak much as a child, and that was probably why I couldn't speak properly when I did go to school.

And then it came back to me. I used to have to go to speech therapy. I couldn't pronounce S's properly. I had a lisp and any words with an S in them came out as F's. (So it was probably a good job there wasn't a lot of call for me to be saying suck in those days, the glass of washing up liquid infused water would have been at my lips a hell of a lot more often than it was.)

Every week I would be collected from school one afternoon (I can't remember the day, but it wouldn't have been a Friday). I would get to leave early which any normal kid would probably have loved, but I was a weirdo back then as well, and preferred to be at school. My mum would escort me onto a bus and into the city centre.

I was surprised that I remembered the building the therapy sessions were in. A tower block on the corner of Charles Street and Lower Hill Street above the Wilkinsons. Years later I would work in the tower block opposite it on the other side of Lower Hill Street, but even then, I had forgotten all about the speech therapy.

The little exercises they gave me involved lots of words beginning with an S. A lot of them were more like tongue twisters, things like repeating over and over 'seven sissling sausages. I was supposed to practice at home between each of the sessions. But knowing how bad I am and certainly was then at any kind of set homework, I would have pretended to do it, and then would have spent the bus journey into town repeating the phrases to myself in a last-minute dot com style.

There is one session I remember more vividly than any other now I think back. And it relates to my childhood obsession with football cards and stickers – which is another piece completely. My obsession drove my mum mad, and she had warned me about not having any cards or stickers with me, or mentioning them at the session.

But I had been at school, and had been playing in the playground, and had a load of cards in my pockets. And so when the therapist had listened to me trying very hard to say 'seven sissling sausages' over and over again, she (I can

remember it being a woman, with glasses which covered most of her forehead) asked if there was anything else I could try reading out. I'm sure she was expecting me to get a schoolbook out and read from that, but no, I fished into my pockets and pulled out a little pile of football cards, and went through them picking out the ones with names beginning with S's in them. Steve Heighway, Stewart Houston, Gordon Smith, come to mind now. And I was doing well, until my mum came back into the room and saw me with the cards and bellowed, 'what did I tell you about those ruddy cards?'

I think I ended up going to the speech therapist for a full school year, and it must have worked. The lisp disappeared. So much so I hadn't even thought about it for most of my life.

I may not lisp or mispronounce anymore, but I still don't like to talk to people much. Which is probably why I end up writing so much.

Poetry Corner

The Watcher

People are strange
As I am sure I am as well
I sit quietly and watch them
As they pass me by
Or as they are settled in their own spot
Doing their own thing
Safely ensconced in their own world
They rarely return my watching gaze
Barely aware even of my presence
Of my curious glances in their direction
Noting their little tics
Their idiosyncrasies
Playing out to an audience
They are not fully aware of
Not thinking
Or the inquisitive tendrils
Emanating from the quietly watching man
Seeing the woman chuntering to herself
Or the man picking his nose
And then wiping the offending finger on his clothing
The superstitious one avoiding the cracks
Between the paving slabs as they walk along
The seated coffee drinker
Swirling the contents of their cup
Trying to catch all the foam
Before licking out the remnants
The furtive newspaper reader
Glancing up every thirty seconds or so
As if to make sure there is no watcher
As if being seen reading is shameful
Or that someone may disagree
With the politics of the paper they peruse
An elderly man sits quietly at a computer
Furiously scribbling notes onto scraps of paper
As if solving the greatest riddles of the time
Children squirm and contort themselves
Trying to escape their parent's jurisdiction
But none of them escape my prying gaze
And being immortalised
As my pen records their actions
Upon the lined paper of the pad
In front of me
My thoughts converted
And recorded
For posterity

Did I Really Blog That?

Time To Explore

Friday was better, the idiot laptop didn't keep dropping out, and I was able to get some work done. Quite a lot of work in fact and was virtually caught up by the time the weekend started, but feeling annoyed at every little thing. Not even pizza helped that as the delivery driver ran off without leaving the dips that should have come with it.

Saturday morning, I had positioned myself in the usual seat at the kitchen table, staring morosely out the back window. Helen intervened and said perhaps it was time I went out for a walk that didn't involve just getting fizzy drinks and crème eggs from the local shop.

So I went and did something really really exciting. I took photographs of street name signs. I had done this the weekend before full lockdown kicked in, taking those of the streets close to where I live where the streets are all names after occupations.



This time I was going a bit further afield and I was going after explorers. Fourteen of them in all. I had plans to move on to painters, and cathedral cities, and even people linked to London, but I hadn't charged the camera, and it called an end to my wandering by running out of power just after the last explorer had been found and photographed.



I still did some shopping, but being on a different parade of shops from normal I found that the Co-op still had a supply of crème eggs. I resisted the temptation to buy the whole box on the counter and kept it to just the ten.

In the evening we were out in the garden in the dark, with clear sky and stars above us, using the barbecue as an impromptu fire pit. Charlie was mithering for us to throw the ball, well single juggling sack I'd been given at the last SUG conference. His eyesight isn't the best and so he can't see where the ball is being thrown, he only reacts to the sound of it landing and then finds it by sense of smell. Most of the large bush down the side of the garden had been removed, so some of it was in the green bin, and more was on the ground. Instead of bringing the ball straight back he was going through a routine. He ran around the bin, through the bush remains before coming and dropping the ball under the rose bush at the edge of the patio. He then would do his version of Riverdance, emitting a strange squeaky growling noise whilst staring at where he dropped the ball. When we didn't move, he would pick the ball up from where he had "buried" it in the bush and then drop it in the large plant pot so we could see it and throw it again. Every single time. And he would stand there looking hurt as to why I was killing myself laughing at him.

Back inside the TV was turned on, and as usual it was on Dave. But unfortunately it was an ad break and therefore sponsored by some company where they have a bloke carrying a dog asking, "is there room for Mr Snuggles". There is no limit to the number of suggestions for where exactly he could stick Mr Snuggles. None of which would be printable.

Going to bed we found the cat with his nose pressed to the gap of where our bedroom door would open whining to be let in. As if he was desperately trying to find somewhere Charlie free for the night. This isn't a surprise as every time the poor cat passes the dog, Charlie busily tries to stick his nose up the cat's backside.

Anyway, Helen picked the cat up, and he looked most put out as he was placed in the spare room instead. It did sound like he was tapping away on the keyboard of Helen's laptop after the door was closed. I had visions of the cat writing up his Trip Advisor review.

"I booked a comfortable double room with extra body heat, but couldn't get into it. The hotel owners placed me in a single room instead, with no coverings or facilities. The blind didn't work, and it looked more like an office than a bedroom. I tried typing up this review on the computer in there, but despite my furious tap dancing across it, I found there was no power, and no warmth in the device when I settled down to lie on it."

Sunday saw my turn to do the weekly shop, so it was off early to a not very full Sainsbury's. (Full of people that is, the shelves were fine, got everything on the list.) They also had boxes of crème eggs so another top up happened; I've got enough for another week or so now. Even with less traffic on the roads it's still amazing just how bad Crawley drivers are. I wonder if it's got anything to do with the layer of sand that seems to have settled over all the cars in Crawley in the last week and that they can't actually see where they are going.

I have mentioned that the bush in the garden was being removed. It was completed on Sunday, and so Monday morning there was a forlorn, confused looking cat. It had been a couple of weeks since the fencing had been set up in its current format, and the daily changes had stopped, and so the cat was nicely settled into a routine. So he wandered over to where the bush had been, turned all around to see if he'd walked in the wrong direction and then sat in the spot where he would usually be covered by the bush and scowled at Helen putting the washing out. I think the previously low Trip Advisor score may well become a minus score now.



I know the feeling, after what was quite an animated weekend for me, the general feeling of meh! had kicked in again by the time it got to midday on Monday. The poem written over the weekend might have had different lines (or even missing lines) towards the end if I'd written it on Monday.

What day is it please? Does anybody really know?
Not that it matters of course, I've nowhere to go.
Nothing to do except maybe gaze out of the window
And get fatter eating pizza and some hot cookie dough

The lockdown at the same time both sucks and blows
And when it will end is something nobody knows
The lack of motivation for me to do anything grows
And my stomach is so big now I can't see my toes

I stare at a screen for countless hours every single day
Whether working or personal use all I feel is dismay
All the colour is gone and now all around me is grey
For someone to shoot me I might just fork out and pay

I wonder if the next time I move will it be sometime in May
Or will it be later in the year just in time for Santa's sleigh
By which time God only knows how much I will weigh
And I'll have forgotten how to speak, instead I'll bray

The news is depressing it's all about death and misery
Or people who are self-obsessed chanting me me me
I sit and wonder how on earth it is they can't see
How their selfishness affects absolutely everybody

It's not rocket science and they don't need a degree
To see that there is more to life than taking a selfie
It isn't as if everybody in the world always has to agree
But wouldn't it be good to try and make others happy

Now I know I'm not known to have on my face a smile
And that every day in lockdown can be such a trial
It's difficult to prevent my usual outpouring of bile
But perhaps a change of outlook would be worthwhile

I could go la la la, fingers in my ears in a state of denial
And keep everything the same on my personal file

But I am going to try and go that extra mile
So that I end up being at the top of the dial

I may have framed my jigsaw, but it still hasn't made it up onto the map wall, and it sits next to me at the end of the kitchen table. We still haven't started on the next physical jigsaw, but I'm keeping my hand in online. Reading has slowed, only three books this week. I did think about writing, but only got as far as writing a list of chapter titles. It all adds to the word count I suppose.

I've been seeing a lot of people online have been doing online diaries. I did think about doing this, but got distracted (and a little dyslexic), and so my only entry has been.

Dear Dairy,

Thank you for your supplies this week. It has been good to upgrade from semi-skimmed to full fat milk, it is just a shame that you no longer do gold top. With crumpets for breakfast, and additional baking in house, can I get an extra pack of butter delivered each week please? Yes, and keep the cheeses coming, double the halloumi order, keep the Cheddar, Feta, Mozzarella and Danish Blue at the same level, and some nice Applewood slices would appreciated this week to put on the burgers. Don't forget the yoghurts and double cream; we have to keep the deserts going as well if I'm going to achieve the pudding look before lockdown ends.

Grrr. I mentioned meeting sociopaths last week. There are some more I need to add to this. Those that add meetings in over possible lunchtime hours. Now half an hour or an hour isn't that bad by itself. It's those who add them in when the rest of the lunchtime period is already booked that need a good slap. And as for those who book two hours meetings from noon to 2pm, they need Eddie Honda to come and do his signature hundred handslap move on them. And now it's raining most of the time. There are some positives to this. The sand has been washed off the car, and there are fewer morons out and about. Plus there's less chance of having to go out and exercise if it's raining. Onwards and upwards.

Story Time

Bury Yourself

I wasn't alone when I buried the body. Perhaps it would have been better all round if I had have been. It wasn't as if they helped with any of the hard work either. No. I was the only one toiling away, making my hands red raw as I dug and kept digging the hole. The blisters took ages to finally disappear, and by then it had gotten out of control and was all over with.

I'm not built for physical exertion either. By the time I got to three feet deep I was a sweaty mess, dirt stuck to my skin and clothes, and I looked more as if I had clawed my way out of the cloying thick soil. But then I hit bedrock. I wasn't expecting to, but the copse was on a hill and my long-ago education should have told me that the pre-Cambrian landscape here wouldn't have deep soil deposits over it. It should have been more of a surprise that the trees took root in such shallow ground.

Being able to go no deeper was a relief to me, but it was going to be a problem in the long run. A body buried at anything less than six feet deep would start to attract the wildlife after a time. And when it did that would attract a lot of other attention. Not the kind which I would want, or any of the spectators there on that night either.

If I am honest, I was expecting the gunshot. I was also expecting to feel the pain as the bullet burrowed its way through my body. But I didn't feel a thing as the expulsion of the breath I'd held involuntarily whooshed out once I heard, more than saw, the collapsing body of Gary McClintock.

There being two bodies in the hole when I shovelled the earth back in made the bulge more obvious to me and I spent more time than I needed to try to flatten the ground out around the grave. And then more time than anyone else wanted me to as I hacked branches and pulled leaves off trees to try and cover up part of the site, to make it seem more natural and less like a burial ground.

Not that anyone came to this godforsaken part of the country anymore.

Nobody spoke to me that night, and the two remaining McClintock brothers made me lie in the boot of their Audi on the journey back. Curled up with the shovel I had spent so much time wielding that night, and in with the smell of Jimmy Wilson's dead body which had permeated the boot on the journey out.

When the boot opened, I was glad there wasn't a gun pointing down at me. There was nobody there, just a voice shouting.

"Get out of the fucking car."

Which I did. I struggled over the lip and collapsed down in a heap on the potholed tarmac road of the town. I dragged myself to my feet and started to stumble off. Only to hear another shout.

“And take the fucking shovel with you Dougie.”

I shuffled back to the car and took the shovel and headed off back to my tenement slum and heard the boot close softly and the car head off behind me. The shovel went in the river as I crossed the bridge, and I was tempted to follow it. But I was unsure whether it would be to drown myself after what I had done that night, or to try and wash all the dirt off me. The feeling passed and I made it back to the flat. I binned off all my clothes and spent an age trying to get all the dirt off my skin, scrubbing myself and trying to rinse in the miniscule sink in the corner of the room. And I tried to sleep.

My exhaustion should have made it easy, but my mind wouldn't shut off, and the low sun came through the broken blinds preventing any rest. But when I got out of bed there was a note under the door. I must have drifted deeper than I thought I had as I can usually hear every creak, every door in this condemned building.

The note was short and confused me,

You should have buried yourself at the same time.

The only other people who knew anything about last night were the two surviving McClintock brothers, and they had had the chance to bury me along with Jimmy Wilson and their brother Gary. Why be sending me notes like this in the dead of the night? They could have broken down the flimsy door and killed me as I lay in my bed. But no, I get a passive aggressive note instead.

I didn't leave the flat that day, not that I had anything to eat in, but I still felt the soil on my skin, and in my hair, no matter how many times I rinsed and scrubbed over the sink. I tried to sleep but every time I closed my eyes all I could see was myself knee deep in mud trying to shovel out as much as possible. Everywhere I touched hurt, although it dawned on me it was the touching that hurt the most, my hands were a mess.

It got dark early, black clouds rolled in, only for it to start to brighten again as the snow started to fall. Eventually the hunger and exhaustion took over and I fell asleep.

When I woke the next day, it had stopped snowing, but a white coat covered everything outside as I peered out of my window. I turned and saw more paper by the door and wondered if I had just dropped the note from the previous morning. But when I picked it up it wasn't.

Pretty handy with a shovel aren't you?

If it wasn't freaking me out so much, I might have laughed. I doubted whether I was even remotely handy with a shovel. Were the McClintock brothers mocking me? I flung the door open and stepped out into the hallway. There was no one there, no wet footprints. I rushed down the stairs and threw open the front door to a blast of frigid air. There were no footprints leading to the door, no signs of any disturbed snow outside the tenement. As expected. No one came here unless they really had to.

A car beeped as it passed, and someone shouted an almost incomprehensible piece of abuse my way. I looked down at myself. I was wearing a tattered vest and y-fronts that had seen better days. Not anything I, or anyone else would want to see when passing by.

I closed the door and spent the next twenty minutes banging on every door in the tenement. There was no answer. No sign of life. I hadn't seen anyone else in here for weeks. Hadn't heard the old tell-tale creaks of uneven floorboards or stair risers. Whoever had left the notes had done so without making a noise or leaving any trace. A wraith in the night. I pulled out some clothes from under the bed and went to head out, only to realise I didn't have my wallet or keys and so I had to dig through the bin to find the discarded trousers to get to my pockets. I had five hundred quid in crisp twenty pounds notes from the McClintocks for the night's work. It was more money than I had seen in months. The temptation to go out on the lash and blow the lot was high, but I took sixty and put the rest back in the bin and went out.

I picked up some food, a four pack and some new trainers, trousers, and a couple of tops from the Sally Army shop on the Leith Road, and I picked up a local paper when I saw the headlines as I passed the newsagents and scuttled home as quick as I could. At the door of the tenement I stopped and had a good look around to see if there was anyone watching me. I couldn't see a soul about and went in. I put the ready meal in the oven and sat on the edge of the bed to read the paper. The headline read,

“Gary McClintock Missing”

It continued, “well-known local man believed to be missing, businessmen brothers Sandy and Gus appeal for anyone who has seen him to get in touch.”

I suppose the term businessman was less libellous than well-known two-bit gangsters. But anyone reading it would know that’s what the term meant. And the cheek of them, appealing for news of the brother they shot and had me bury. Jimmy Wilson may not have been front page news, but he did make page twenty-six. They weren’t as polite about him. “Local criminal missing after suspected jewel heist.” Two missing person cases they weren’t going to be solving anytime soon.

I ate my dinner, drank my beer, and stretched out doing nothing over the rest of the day. Cursing myself about not getting any ointment or plasters for my hands. There was always tomorrow.

Which brought another note with it.

Did you enjoy reading about your handiwork in the papers?

Another note left without a trace, not even the McClintocks were this batshit crazy to be leaving me these notes. Which didn’t leave a lot of possibilities really. No matter how impossible it would appear to me, there must have been someone else up in those remote woods three nights ago. But why torment me about it? why not go to the police, why not be tormenting the McClintocks? Wait. Perhaps they were. I needed to ask.

I had some breakfast and set off. I should have thought and bought a cheap phone yesterday. It had been a while, but I didn’t need one to remember numbers, numbers lived in my head. I would have rung from a payphone, but they don’t exist around here. Those the telephone company didn’t remove, the wasters destroyed. Handsets torn out to bash other wasters’ heads in. and so I just turned up at the scrap metal yard. Probably the McClintock’s only legitimate business, and even that got a bit out of shape. It wouldn’t have surprised me if the police had been down there checking the crushers for DNA. It wasn’t just the cars that went into them by all accounts.

Gus was the brawn of the operation. He may have been the elder of the twins, but he had difficulty stopping a runny nose, let alone being able to run a supposed business empire. He wasn’t pleased to see me.

“What the fuck are you doing here you stupid scrote?”

If he wasn’t pleased to see me initially, he was positively apoplectic by the time I’d told him about the notes under my door. But he didn’t know what to do. So he rang Sandy, and the next I know I had an envelope with two grand in it and instructions to fuck off out of town for a few weeks.

Which was a great idea. But I’m stupid. I bought more food and drink and holed up in the flat instead. And the notes kept coming.

That wasn’t very clever was it?

Shouldn’t you have left town by now?

Why haven’t you run away yet?

I had stayed up all night before that last one. Waited until the light came in through the broken blinds and there was nothing. I went to the khazi and there it was when I came back. Thirty seconds I was gone. I ran out of the door, down the stairs and out the front door. There was no one in sight. I went back through the tenement, kicked every door open. No one was there. Nothing. And still the notes kept coming.

What will you do when the police find out?

When are you going to have to dig your own grave?

Perhaps the McClintocks were right. Perhaps I should’ve left town. Instead of taking the money and staying. I went out. Sneaking around every corner, checking every face for any sign of recognition. I bought more clothes from the charity shop, a hat and scarf, some sunglasses. I knocked the lenses out. No one wears sunglasses here in winter. Or summer either if I’m honest. But I wanted to change my appearance.

The headlines drew me into the newsagents again. It was with trembling hands that I managed to pass some money over to pay for the paper. I didn’t run back to the flat, but it wasn’t a slow walk I was doing. I wasn’t checking for anyone. I locked the door and moved the bed up against it, dumped the bags on the floor and read the paper.

“Police investigating suspected suicide of Angus McClintock.”

A man, later identified as Gus has been found hanging from one of the cranes at McClintock's scrap yard. Although no suicide note has been found, police are not treating the death as suspicious at this time. His brother Sandy wasn't as sanguine. "There is no way my brother hung himself. The police can say what they like, but I won't rest until my brother's murderer is brought to justice. There is an obvious vendetta going on against the family here. First my younger brother, Gary, goes missing, then my twin is found hanged, and yet police claim there are no suspicious circumstances. The whole thing stinks."

I could see where Sandy was coming from, or perhaps would be more inclined to if he hadn't been the one to shoot his brother Gary. I doubt he would have hung his own twin, but I did doubt Gus would have hung himself in a bout of regret. I could also see the police wanted nothing to do with it. One less crazy gangster would have been a plus in their books. And I drank to pass the time and to blot out the fear I was feeling. I didn't move the bed. I passed out in it where it was, barricading the door. When I woke the next morning with a thick head and a dry mouth. I moved the bed back to where it usually sat. Only to find another damn note underneath it.

Who's next?

And I was still too stupid to leave town.

What are you going to do now?

I was going out and getting the paper every day now. Waiting to see what would happen next. It would appear Sandy wasn't taking the death of his twin very well. The papers were full of fires, hospitalisations, and destruction in an ever-widening circle emanating out from the McClintock scrap yard. Anyone the McClintocks has ever had a disagreement with was being targeted. Of course, Sandy wouldn't be getting his own hands dirty. With Gus gone he would be hiring in talent to go on the rampage. The police may have him as the number one suspect for the lunacy taking over the town, but he would make sure he had a cast iron alibi for everything that went down.

He will come for you.

Exactly what I was thinking and worrying about. I went out and walked for mile until I found a working payphone, and dialled the number of Sandy McClintock's mobile from memory.

He was not happy to hear from me. Wanted to know why I hadn't left town yet. I said I had. He said he knew I hadn't. And I realised the phone box would have the local dialling code and it would have shown up on his phone's screen. I told him about the notes. He shouted for me to leave town now and never come back, and never to contact him again before he hung up on me.

I got lost walking back. I was distracted, and when I got to the tenement there was a new padlock on the door and posters telling everyone the building had been condemned. I went in through a window of one of the basement flats. Easy to kick in and then slide in afterwards. I must have caught myself on a shard of glass as when I got to my flat, I found I had blood on my clothes and tears in several places. They went in the now full bin with everything else scrubbed myself in the sink again.

And in the morning, there was another note.

Tick tock

I went down to the front door. It wouldn't open, there was the new padlock on the outside. I spent the rest of the day drinking, trying not to think.

You're the only one left now

I left the tenement through a rear first floor window. The wooden roof of the shed below nearly gave way from my weight, but I scrambled down and out through the alley. I went straight to the newsagents, half expecting what the headline might be. But it was worse than I could have imagined.

"Alexander McClintock found brutally murdered in bloodbath at family home"

I can't really remember walking back to the flat or how I got in. Or what I did the rest of that day. I just remember waking up the next morning to another note.

It's all your fault

Which was a bit harsh I thought. But who was sending the damn notes. All the McClintocks were dead. I sat there in a trance, trying to pull myself together. I should pack up and really leave town as I should have done days ago. But I didn't

move. Not even when it sounded like a stampede of feet outside on the stairs. And only slightly more when my door crashed in, and half a dozen armed police piled into my room.

They read me my rights, had a whole list of charges, and lead me away in handcuffs. There was no one around to see them take me. I don't know how long they questioned me for, but that was when everything was a bit hazy.

Being in police cells meant that the drugs weren't available. My system purged itself. The fog lifted, and so by the time I was sitting in the dock at my initial court hearing I understood everything and more that was coming as the crown laid out its case against me.

It all started with the jewel heist. I Dougie Donnelly had taken part in one. It was Gary McClintock's idea. He wasn't being taken seriously by the twins and had wanted some serious cash of his own. And so he put a small crew together, bringing Jimmy Wilson and myself in with him. Only Jimmy and I weren't the sharpest tools in the box, but what did he expect hiring junkies.

The robbery had gone OK until we got back to the car. I accidentally shot Jimmy at point blank range with the shotgun. What was left of him was dumped into the boot. Gary went berserk, said we had to bury him somewhere he wouldn't be found. I said I knew a place. My father had taken my hiking there when I was a kid. When I had a family. All the while I had been digging, Gary had been mocking me. His brothers were never there, that was something I had told myself to believe. When I went to get Jimmy's body from the car, I picked up his gun and shot Gary with it before he could shoot me. And then I buried the pair of them. What I didn't know was that I'd lost my phone getting Jimmy out of the car, and Gary had his in his hand when I shot him. There were two phones lying on the ground up there, and when Gary was reported missing the police found a signal out there and found the phone. And mine. And the poorly hidden grave. And the two bodies in it.

I had driven back to town in Gary's car and abandoned it in a disused lock up. The Audi had a tracker. Of course it did. The police found it, and all the trace evidence in it. Jimmy's blood, the dirt, my fingerprints, and DNA. They found the shovel as well. They had followed CCTV of me from near the lockup until the dead zone near the tenements and seen the shovel disappear. Turns out it wasn't in the river. I couldn't even do that right. It had landed on the bank instead. Perhaps I should have thrown myself in.

This wasn't my only CCTV appearance. I had been seen arguing with Gus McClintock at the scrap yard, and again a couple of days later, on my way to and back from the scrap yard late at night. Skin and pus from my blistered hands were all over the rope Gus was hanging from.

It continued. I was picked up on CCTV going towards Sandy McClintock's house on the night he was murdered. And again soon afterwards, but looking all dishevelled and with blood all over me. My fingerprints were all over the knife left sticking in the side of Sandy's neck.

When the police searched my flat, they found all the evidence they would ever need. The muddy and bloody clothes from the burials were still in my bin. They were covering the bag with two-point three million quid's worth of gemstones in it and one hundred and fifty grand in cash. And Jimmy Wilson's gun. There was the grease covered jumper matching that from the scrap yard. And the ripped and bloody clothes from the struggle to kill Sandy.

There was no shard of glass when getting into the tenement. They had been condemned for months. I had been using the basement window to get in all the time, and the first-floor window to get out.

I could remember it all clearly now. And when they asked how I pleaded, all I could say was guilty. It would save them the cost of a trial. It was the least I could do now that they would be giving me bed and board for the rest of my life.

And what about the notes? I wrote them of course. The handwriting matched mine. They found the notepad they had all been torn from, and the pen I'd written them with. Somewhere in my drug addled brain was a logical me. It was trying to get me to do the best thing. Run.

But I never was one for any kind of running.

Chapter and Verse

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

Where The Light Shines Brightest – Chapter 7

He let another three trains pass while he sat at Hatton Cross, as he still had plenty of time to check in, he decided he would get on the next one, he'd given it enough time, as he didn't want the Keera look-alike to be waiting for him as he got off the Tube at Heathrow, nor did he want to still be here too much longer, just in case, if for some reason she came back to look for him.

He got on the next Tube and completed the now short, journey to Heathrow, he gingerly stuck his head out of the carriage door and looked up and down the platform, but there was no one there, and he made his way up to the airport and through the terminal building to the check in.

He was surprised to see just how close to the check-in closing time it had got to be, he felt as if time had rushed by him, as if in some kind of Narnia state. He checked his case in and made his way to the security line.

The queues weren't bad, and he set about putting all his metal items into his jacket, so that he could just put his jacket into one of the plastic trays for scanning. He pushed it towards the conveyor belt, and with just his ticket in his hand, he waited to be called forward through the scanner.

He always worried about going through the scanner, that the beeping would start, and numerous sets of eyes would be drawn to him, and he'd have to get a deeper search. This was despite the fact he knew he had no metal, and there was nothing on him that would set the alarms off.

He held his breath as always as he walked through the scanner and that split second pause as he got through the other side to see if there was any noise. As normal, there wasn't any alarm; he managed to exhale again, before going over to get his jacket from the plastic tray.

He took a couple of minutes to get everything out of his jacket pockets and put them back into their normal places, before making his way through into the vast shopping area, and immediately searched for a departures screen so that he could check where his departure gate was. Typically, when he found a screen, there was a gate showing, and judging by the number showing, it was going to be quite a trek to get there. He got his bearings and set off.

It took him about fifteen minutes to get to the gate, and when he did get there, the plane to Philadelphia International Airport was already boarding, but he knew that as a first-class passenger, he didn't have to rush to fight for a decent seat, as it had been pre-booked. He ambled up to the queue, and waited as the passengers had their tickets scanned and were let through to the plane.

He always booked a central aisle seat in first class, which allowed him to sit next to someone else as opposed to one of the two side window seats, which meant he would be sat by himself. Even though he wasn't the most outgoing person in the world, he liked to try and talk to someone new on the plane, as it took his mind off the flight, allaying some of the nervousness he had about it, even after all the years and flights he had experienced. He hoped that he would get some interesting conversation from his plane neighbour, and that they weren't the kind of person who'd rather not speak to anyone.

He got on to the plane and was pointed in the direction of his seat by one of the stewardesses. He had no hand luggage to stow, everything he wanted for the flight was in one of his pockets, and he liked to keep his jacket on until after the plane had taken off, and everything had settled down.

He found his seat easily and sat straight down, and sorted out his seat belt, adjusting it to fit him, so that it was tight enough to be useful, but not so tight he felt trussed up like a turkey. He turned to his right to see who he was sat next to, and to introduce himself, and his heart almost stopped, he was sat next to his mystery woman. She was busy rooting through a handbag, and as usual didn't even seem to notice he was there. He looked straight ahead, and tried to control his breathing, he couldn't believe that he would get the chance to speak to her after all this time and perhaps get some answers.

This thought was interrupted by someone calling his name from the left of him, in a voice that seemed all too familiar. He turned slowly with a sense of dread, knowing that he would find Keera's look-alike in the seat across the aisle from him.

Even though he knew it, it didn't make the shock any less in seeing it was her, a pain hit him, and a blinding white light filled his head, and he drifted away again.

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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