living memory

a creative writing anthology and workbook
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## CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

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INTRODUCTION

This anthology came out of two ten-week courses in Life History and Creative Writing organized and funded by the WRVS Heritage Plus, held at Peacehaven Library and at the Hillcrest Community Centre in Newhaven.

During the course, we considered different aspects of life history, did some short writing exercises and produced a longer exercise using a different creative writing technique each week. This anthology contains a selection of those pieces, separated into different sections under the topics and exercises used.

Exploring our own and each other’s lives was fascinating and inspiring and full of richness, regardless of whether people had travelled the globe or lived in one town all their lives. We were able to celebrate and condole, ponder unsolved mysteries (always a good spark for fiction), and produce writing of an impressively high standard considering the amount of ground we covered in just ten two-hour sessions. Each group also gave a performance reading at the end of the course.

The exercises we used are given here, so, apart from being instructive and entertaining, this book can be used as a guide for recording some of your own memories. Why not try them yourself?

Umi Sinha, Tutor
CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Writing Exercise: An incident you remember from your childhood written from a child’s perspective, using a child’s level of understanding and vocabulary.
There are fairies at the bottom of the garden, so they say. But are there? Who really lives at the bottom of the garden?

The sun is shining, the sky is blue, the birds are singing and there is only a very slight wind which occasionally blows a leaf across the grass or rustles through the bushes. My long-haired cat is in the garden playing with the leaves or anything that dares to move. She crouches with her bottom wiggling and then leaps on her prey, perhaps imagining it to be an unsuspecting bird or a mouse. She darts first one way, then another, and finally lands on her ‘victim’, then casts a sheepish look at me as though to say ‘I’m not stupid, I’m just practising so I can successfully catch the real thing – just you wait and see!’

So far this is a lazy afternoon and I am curled up in my bucket chair trying to read my book whilst enjoying the unexpected bout of warm weather. My parents have gone out and left me in charge. The phone rings but I don’t answer it. The washing machine beeps to let someone know it has finished – I ignore it. The cat has disappeared. Suddenly she appears on the garage roof and lies down, exhausted by her earlier antics and preferring to watch the birds, occasionally making the odd strangled sound that cats make when they have spied a likely victim.

A helicopter buzzes briefly overhead and then disappears over the horizon. In the distance I hear a train rushing through the local station. Then I hear the da da of a police car or ambulance. Everything seems to be conspiring to distract me from my book.

I put it down and wander to the pond at the end of the garden and watch the fish gliding through the murky water and hiding under the leaves of the water lilies. Then I hear a sound in the bushes to my left. I listen, but all is quiet again. My eyes strain to see through the masses of lupins and delphiniums that are just beginning to come alive in the warm air but I can see nothing. A long worm slithers across the soil and I remember my dad telling me that if you accidentally cut a worm in half while digging the
garden you get two worms, because each half lives on. How can that be, I wonder. Does it grow another mouth and another set of eyes?

Then the noise comes again, and a clump of something or other seems to move, but perhaps it is my imagination or the breeze. I crouch down and put my hands in the bush to part the leaves and something jumps. I lose my balance, topple backwards and scream with fright. When I recover, I can see an enormous green frog. Who’s more scared, him or me? His huge eyes are looking at me. His throat is pulsating and he’s making little croaky sounds as he leaps away into another bush.

I turn round to make sure the cat has not witnessed this and is not about to launch an attack on the frog. She is still asleep on the garage roof.

I turn back to where the frog had been and from behind one of the trees steps a tall, dark, handsome stranger – the man of my dreams, the hero of my book. I rub my eyes and blink in disbelief – perhaps I am dreaming or have read too many books. I look again and the vision has disappeared, but the frog has made his way to the pond and is sitting there croaking at me.

The phone rings and rings – I must answer it, my parents are probably checking to make sure I’m okay.

The spell has been broken.

Chris Cooper

AUDITION

The very mention of an exam, test or audition has always filled me with fear. How could it be that I would always perform and reach my goals normally but would completely disintegrate when faced with anything that tested my abilities?

I sat in the ante room of the studios clutching my coat around my shoulders, elbows on knees, my chin cupped in my hands. What on earth was I doing sitting here, waiting to go in for a ballet audition? It was all right for the others: they were graceful and swan-like, whereas my arms and legs seemed to do their own thing half of the time. Chronic nerves had overtaken me. My
stomach kept doing somersaults and, worse still, I wanted to go to the toilet. ‘No you don’t. It’s only nerves and in any case there isn’t time,’ I was told.

It did nothing to quell my fears when Rosemary came back from her audition and burst into tears. It wasn’t that unusual; Rosemary often cried, but I just wish she hadn’t cried today. Fussing around her, her mother assured us that she had had a tummy upset and was just relieved the audition was over. Lucky you, I thought, my ordeal is yet to come. I had been leaning on my knees for so long that my elbows felt sore from the net skirt of my tutu. Suddenly the door opened and my name was called. I stood up abruptly, dropping my coat onto the chair behind me, and with last minute instructions from my teacher ringing in my ears, walked on stiff legs through into the studio.

I had been told that there would be two judges, a lady and gentleman, but no one warned me they would look so scary. The gentleman looked really menacing, with his coat draped around his shoulders and wearing a black trilby hat. The lady had her hair drawn back into a tight bun and wore spectacles perched on the end of her nose. They both sat behind a green covered table and the pianist sat at the piano to their right.

I stood in the centre of the room in my ballet position with trembling knees until the lady, dipping her head slightly to look at me over her spectacles said I could begin. I shot a desperate glance at the pianist, hoping for encouragement, but she turned to the keyboard and began my introduction.

Panic swept over me. I couldn’t remember how to start, but as my cue came my arms and legs went through the motions like a puppet having its strings pulled. All last minute instructions abandoned me in my desperate need to get the whole audition over and done with. But at last it was over and breathlessly I made my final curtsy.

Silence settled on the room, broken only by the whispering of the judges. After lots of writing on their notepads and consultations with each other, the lady thanked me and told me I could go. Desperately resisting the urge not to break into a run, I turned and walked as sedately as I could from the room. ‘How
was it? Did it go ok?’ I was asked. With as much conviction as I could muster, I said, ‘Great,’ before rushing off to the toilet.

My mother and father had made huge sacrifices in time and money to send me to ballet school so it was with enormous pride that several weeks later they sat and watched as I, slightly bemused, and wondering if they had called the wrong name, received my award.

Valerie Roden
A WEEKEND AWAY

My sister and I had decided to join Mum and Dad for a weekend in their campervan.

Mum was now sifting through our bags, leaving behind everything apart from what we stood up in: one change of clothes and a coat each. We stood there, gutted, as our nice clothes went back in the wardrobe. My sister, who could have refilled the cosmetic counter in Boots with her vanity bag, watched in horror as this too was now being sifted and most was staying at home. That ordeal over, we left home in fair spirits.

The campervan was actually a baker’s van that Dad had picked up for a reasonable price and, being amazingly handy at turning his hand to most things, he had transformed the van into quite a respectable campervan. It had nice little blue curtains and a matching seat with storage under, which converted into a double bed. At the end of the bed was a tiny wardrobe. Opposite this was a cooker, sink and draining board, with storage under, housing the calor gas bottle and some pots, pans and cooking utensils. This area finished at the sliding side door of the van. Although compact it was ideal for the two of them. The problem was, where were my sister and I going to sleep?

The decision was eventually made that my sister, being the shortest, would sleep across the front seats and I would sleep on a plank of wood balanced across the sink area with the foot end balanced over the back of the front seat. In principle this was an excellent idea. The problem was what to do with the plank of wood when I wasn’t using it. We sat on it; we balanced it along the cupboards; we put our feet on it; but whatever we did with it, it seemed to always be in the way. Today’s argument was over this.

My sister and I hung back as they argued but when I saw the plank being hurled over a hedge it was too much, and I ran round the hedge into the field and retrieved it. This, after all, was my bed. As I arrived back, my Dad took the plank and hurled it over the hedge once again. Once again I ran off round the hedge into the field and retrieved it. This time it stayed.
Our weekend away continued until Mum and Dad dropped us off on Sunday evening, ready for work on the Monday whilst they continued their holiday.
My sister and I never went again.

Sheila Roberts
LUCKY DOG

It was a Saturday morning and Mum wanted to go shopping before we went to visit her friend who lived in Malvern, to visit the shop which sold material and cottons. It was on the main road, the same side as ‘The Guild Hall’ but not as far up. As we went along Lowesmoor Street to the crossroads that everyone called ‘The Cross’ on the Worcester Road, we could hear a lot of cheering and clapping. The big church, where there was always a message from God on the notice board, was on the corner of the main road and when we went round the corner the pavement was crowded with people shouting and talking.

We wondered what had happened so Mum asked someone what was going on. I went up the three steps to the church door. It was a really big church too, not quite as big as the cathedral near the Deansway, but a lot bigger than our chapel and bigger than Saint Barnabas’s down the hill from where we live. The steps were not high enough for me to see over people’s heads so I pushed my way through legs, shopping bags and push-chairs to see what I could see.

A red double-decker bus had stopped in the middle of the road, the sort with stairs on, and a man, a little white dog with a brown spot on one of his ears and a policeman were there as well. The dog’s fur was really white, it made the road look a dark grey colour. You could see the driver in the front of the bus in his shirt sleeves, and I wondered if he had run someone over but I couldn’t see any body on the ground and there wasn’t any blood. I heard different voices saying things like:

‘Good bit of driving, very lucky.’
‘Did you hear that scream?’
‘Where did it come from?’
‘Is it the man’s dog?’

I struggled back to where Mum had last been and saw her looking for me. She said that the little dog had run into the road when the bus had moved and, though the driver did not see it, the dog had gone under the front of the bus between the wheels. He had heard a scream and saw people waving and shouting and
when he stopped the little dog had run out from under the side of the bus between the front and back wheels and he was all right. The man had gone to tell the driver about the dog and the policeman was trying to find his owner.

I wondered if the little dog had been reading the messages from God on the notice board on the side of the church and forgotten to look where he was going. I told my Mum’s friend about the little dog who had a guardian angel but she said that he was just a very lucky dog.

Jayne Marshall
ROBYN AND MINNIEHAHA

As a child in London I remember the milk being delivered on a horse-drawn cart. My mother would send me out with a bucket and shovel to collect the manure for the garden. The horse seemed huge - the smell of it sweet somehow - with feet the size of dinner plates, a gentle giant who would placidly stand with its head in a sack-bag chewing on hay, whilst I waited patiently for a delivery! My love of horses was fixed from that time.

When I was eleven, my uncles bought my first ‘proper’ bicycle. I couldn’t wait to explore my new Hertfordshire environment, and was so excited when I found Mimram Stables in Digswell village, about a mile or so from my home. The stable was owned by Robyn Wells, the granddaughter of H.G.

Robyn was a woman in her late 20s or early 30s, of strong build, with a fresh rosy complexion, robust nature and an easy relaxed smile. She had a sense of humour that I did not always understand. I now believe she was quite an eccentric character.

Robyn’s garden was beautiful, with a working water mill, a stream and a small bridge over which the cottage/house was reached. The stables and stalls were positioned higgledy-piggledy, with cobbled stone flooring that was really difficult to sweep. The tack room smelt of leather and saddle soap. Saddles, bridles, bits and boots filled the space. The office was small and cosy with just enough room for a desk and chair. I remember the horse riding lessons written in a large book by Robyn in her neat italic hand writing. There was a loft hatch, and inside a space where we, the helpers, would go to eat our lunch. It was a haven.

At weekends I spent as much time at Mimram as I could, helping with stable duties, and was repaid with riding lessons.

My favourite horse was a skewbald mare called Minniehaha. I wanted to do everything for her, collect, brush, feed, and ride her. Luckily other helpers preferred other ponies, so I had complete monopoly. I really was quite jealous when Robyn’s clients rode her.

I was besotted with Minnie and she was besotted with Coppella, Robyn’s beautiful 17hh bay mare. It was terrifically hard
to hold Minnie back when she spotted Coppella. I was given a blue rosette by Robyn for doing just that; my arms ached and my hands were quite sore. Minnie was a smaller version of the milkman’s cart horse: robust, stocky and very solid.

The first time I cantered on Minnie, I was attached to Robyn on Coppella by a lead rein. My stomach rolled over and over. I felt I had never travelled so fast, so far off the ground. It was a similar feeling to riding the big dipper when it goes whizzing downwards. I felt sure Minnie was in heaven being so close to the lovely Coppella! I can remember Robyn shouting ‘Hold on to the pommel’ as we cantered faster and faster.

I have no memory of how long I visited Mimram Stables, or why I suddenly stopped. But horses stayed in my blood. I trained and qualified as a riding instructor. I travelled to Greece and around Italy working with horses. I am now lucky enough to live near horses and get to see them every day. Who knows, maybe I will have one of my own one day.

Jackie Worth
Writing Exercise: Describe a memory of a place you have lived, remembering to include things you observed through all your five senses.
TILDEN LAKE,
NORTHERN CANADA

I grew up at a fishing and hunting camp in the Temagatti Forest Reserve where winters hit forty below and summers brought plagues of mosquitoes and black flies. The camp was on the shores of Tilden Lake, surrounded by bush for hundreds of miles. This was teeming with wildlife and the fishing was marvellous. During the spring, summer and fall the camp was full of tourists, fishermen and hunters. My young life was spent in the lake, on the lake and in the bush.

Muriel, who owned the camp, was a Canadian woods-woman, hunting guide, artist and one of the great characters of the North. She smelt of apple blossom and could skin a bear in nothing flat, was a true shot and downed a six pack with rum and coke chasers. When hunting, she wore the vivid huntsman’s plaid jacket and carried a backpack with a two pound jar of Ponds Cold Cream and several vivid lipsticks. She drove a fabulous red Cadillac and painted delicate silk scarves with animated bush creatures.

We had a log cabin on the shore of the lake, basic in construction, and the deliciously sweet smell of its cedar and pine stays with me forever. There was no electricity, just a stove: a big wood burner whose gargantuan appetite ate forests day and night, and the paraffin lamps which cast their soft glow over the shellacked floor.
Rifles, fishing rods, snow skis, water skis, skates and outboard motors festooned the walls and low rafters from which baby bats dropped. It was an outdoor life which I revelled in.

Nature came in when the door was open: one day Mum hollered, ‘Onto the bed, quick!’ as she dowsed a rattle snake with coal oil as he slithered away. When they shed their skins, we collected the rattles from their tails. Once a skunk family took up residence under the veranda – it was my lot to be bathed in tomato juice to rid me of the terrible stench when I was squirited.

Cheeky chipmunks would come and stuff their cheeks with fat pink marshmallows, deer would pick their way daintily along the trails and Zeek the hound dog would pay the price for messing round with porcupines. In my youth a truck had gone over Zeek and a lone straggle tooth projected from a wickedly understated jaw. When the wolves howled he mournfully yowled to be let in. I don’t blame him; they sent shivers up your spine, especially in winter when they would drive the deer onto the frozen lake where they didn’t stand a chance.

I taught myself to swim when I was four by jumping off the dock and splashing my way somehow to shore. That done, you couldn’t keep me out of the water. I had a real birch-bark canoe and explored fine sandy beaches collecting driftwood sculpted into wonderful shapes. This could be carved into lamps, ashtrays and other knick-knacks and sold to tourists. Paddling along in the utter tranquility of a Tilden morning, a loon would call and then dive into the depths to emerge with a pike or a trout. Sometimes standing in beds of waterlilies, a moose would be seen munching, oblivious to looking rather foolish with pink and white blossoms dangling from his antlers. Once an otter clung playfully to the paddle, playing catch me if you can. These little charmers became the first study for conservation by the famous Grey Owl. He was from Hastings and left the two old aunts who had brought him up for a more celebrated life masquerading as a Red Indian. Grey Owl was before my time, but thanks to him we are all more aware of the time bomb ticking for the forest folk.
Old Baptiste, a Chippewa Red Indian, taught me to track. With his fringed buckskin jacket and trousers, beaded moccasins and long beaded braids, he was my buddy. Together we hiked up the pipeline into the deep bush, me trying to emulate his graceful stealth. He never had a lot to say but what he knew was useful and could have saved my life.

One day I took it in my head to visit the camp across the lake. I set off in my swimmers with a jam jar for collecting frogs and took a logging trail into the bush. The wrong one. Hours went by; night fell and the Ontario Rose were called out. At 4am I was found asleep on a rock, having crossed a big dam and survived the bears and whales. Old Baptiste had traced my footprints and I was quite okay.

Poor Mum - my ability to lose myself in other parts of the globe would come as no surprise.

Tarzan, who had Beaverland camp, was another character, sporting a plaid Tam O’Shanter and a spittle of chewing baccy from the plug in his cheek. He would disappear for days, tending his traps, and then sell the furs: fox, mink, ermine, beaver, musquash, rabbit. Tarzan was my hero because he built a marvellous contraption which he christened the ‘The Thing’: basically a raft with a motor used for transporting the garbage up the lake to the dump. I was allowed to be tiller girl and as we puttered along there was a good chance of seeing the bears at the dumps. Bears were all over the place and the dump brought them from miles to rootle in its enticing smells. They used to come into camp and knock the garbage cans over and were dangerous and best avoided close up.

One of the magical places was the beaver dam. These mini engineers
cleared vast swathes of bush, stripping the felled cottonwood of choice saplings. They were transported to their magnificent lodges where the kits were reared. Thwack, thwack, thwack went their tails across the ponds. Watching them industriously fixing a break in the dam with willow tree branches was a marvel. We never tired of it.

Tarzan played the fiddle at barn dances held in the little school house. I loved him doing the calling:
'Take your partners, swing them to the left
Swing them to the right, do the dosy-do.'

With everyone wildly stomping, three sheets to the wind, a good time was had by all. One night, coming in from a blizzard, Tarzan’s stew smelt mighty fine, so good I had seconds but wasn’t too sure of its provenance when I found a bristly tail in the pot.

The lake looked its best when the maple trees dressed in their fiery reds and yellow reflected their glory. ‘Winter may be coming but look at me now!’ Vast skeins of duck and honking snow geese would swing their way to James Bay; the bay would sound with rifle shots and hunters left with their trophies.

Then one day you’d go out and smell the snow coming; you could tell it to the day. The lake froze over and the temperature plummeted to forty below. And we got snowed in. This meant climbing on roof tops and shovelling great swathes of snow off and breaking the huge icicles. It was a winter wonderland and time for skating up the lake; snowshoeing through the bush following little animal tracks and doing a spot of ice fishing. Then the breath would freeze on your lashes & eyebrows and ice them up and your wolverine hood was a frosted collar.

This was my little kingdom. I was so lucky to have had the freedom of the forests and lakes to grow and love nature. I will always respond to the call of the wild.

Jill Hazel
SEAFORD AND NEWHAVEN - TRULY BLESSED

Joined by a path, the small towns of Seaford and Newhaven perch on the edge of the south coast, battered by the cruel wind and tides. The partially successful nature reserve struggles to prove itself. If your cup is half full, the area is frequented by migrant birds, quite a variety of wild flowers are now developing and you can pick scrumptious blackberries, when in season, as you walk through to the beach. It is a wonderful path for families to use, either cycling or walking, safely and easily connecting Seaford with Newhaven. Previously the safest way to walk to Newhaven was along the beach. If your cup is half empty, the cyclists need to negotiate the dangerous A259 at either end of the path and, due to some mistake when it was first developed, the water doesn’t settle in the basin, causing it to dry up in the summer months, leaving little natural habitat for water loving creatures.

Mums and Dads cycle along the path with their tiny offspring often attached by tandem to the back and resembling the children in ET. You imagine any moment they will be flying up over the coastal path to Newhaven Fort, which is full of wonderful historical interest and open to the public most of the time. On the edge of the cliffs at Newhaven, the Fort looks protectively out across the channel. It was a main defence during the war. There is a great place to picnic on top of the cliffs just before the Fort, where you can look down on the closed off harbour wall and across to Seaford bay. My family and friends have spent many a happy hour on that beach, now also closed to the public, walking along the wall, watching the fishermen with their welly boots, nets, flasks and sandwiches. First to get there gets the best spot.

‘What have you got in there?’ asked little Chris, and the fisherman would usually be quite happy to talk about his catch.

Of course you got the odd grumpy one, but a little smile as we walked by would deal with him. Maybe he had had row with his wife and come out to get out of the way. What a lovely way to spend a day, and with the chance of taking supper home.
There are of course other embattlements on the cliffs of Seaford overlooking the Cuckmere, but they are few and unprotected.

I consider the view from the cliffs of Seaford overlooking the Cuckmere towards the coastguard cottages to be the best view along this stretch and often picnic on top of the escarpment here. I could sit for hours watching. Just watching. I watched as half a dozen young people pushed, dragged and carried their bicycles as they stumbled up the side of the first of the Seven Sisters by a notice that says PATH CLOSED - DO NOT CLIMB. Thank heaven they all made it safely. You used to be able to walk from here down that closed path, across the beach, past the coastguard cottages and eventually onto the seafront at Seaford. This obstacle means you need to walk round the top and down before turning left to reach the beach.

Down there, other folk were going about their pleasure, canoeing, swimming, dogs chasing sticks and diving for stones, kids paddling and splashing about with Mummy and Daddy. More visitors were by the cottages taking photos, walking along the levy and around the meanders. There were a large number of swans on the river, a flock of Canada geese in the fields and a heron dipping in the meanders. The distant Galleon was packed with diners admiring the view from the opposite direction.

We are truly blessed.

Sheila Roberts
OVER THE REC

Thinking back I don’t know why it was *over* the Rec, but that was the accepted terminology. It was never *to* the Rec, *on* the Rec or even *in* the Rec; we always went *over* the Rec.

The Rec featured large in my childhood – it was a vast expanse of scrubby grass scattered with trees, a playground at one end and the canal path at the other, which separated my back garden from The Factory.

This being Swindon (originally Swine Down) the factory was the home of the railways – GWR – acre upon acre of lines, engine sheds, workshops, sidings, storage depots, coal, lots of coal, and water towers, all encased behind high red and black brick walls, or iron railings at the bottom of steep banks where we would stretch through to pick bunches of wild pink sweet peas.

It was the workplace of my father, Gordon, my uncle John and my granddad, Papsy. They, like hundreds of others grateful for work in post-war Britain, spent all their days at the factory, regulated by the Hooter. The sound of the Hooter could be heard pretty much all over town and signaled to the workforce the rhythm of their working day. The first blow of the Hooter would see streams of men ambling along or cycling in small groups across the Rec. The second blow caused a quickening of pace and a purposeful lengthening of stride. By the third whistle the stragglers could be seen sprinting in their heavy boots, blackened jackets flapping, or peddling furiously to catch the throng; desperate to avoid losing time by being last in the clocking queue. The first whistle was at 7.15 ready for a 7.30 start. Dinner was at 12.30 sharp and the day finished at 5.30. The ebb and flow of this tide of men shaped our lives too. We kept out of the way as the men came and went across the Rec; their marching feet beat out a warning to keep the path clear. The lunchtime hooter had wives all over town draining veg and mashing potatoes. I was allowed to wait by the gate until my father appeared and then to rush across the grass to hug him as he swung me into the air.

The Rec was where we collected kindling wood to light the fire; it was where I learnt to ride a bike, watched my brother
break his arm, made daisy chains, twisted my ankle by catching my foot in a goalpost hole. It was where we played hide-and-seek and Rin-tin-tin, and many years later it was the secluded way home for a quiet goodnight kiss with a new boyfriend.

The Rec was the view from my window. I knew its moods and its seasons. If the grass was high and waving, I could wear a thin cotton dress with yellow flowers and lie in its soft cocoon to watch clouds roll by. If the grass was stiff and white, it signalled struggling into a stiff liberty bodice over my vest, long socks, scratchy woollen kilts and thick hand-knitted jumpers. They kept the body covered, but by lunchtime my knees would be red-raw and chafed by the cold. I never felt warm again until the green buds swelled on the trees.

One particular winter, the service road that ran behind the back gate, before the Rec grass started, was being re-tarmaced. I couldn’t resist the small of tar and loved the clanking of the steam roller as it trundled along. If I was lucky I might be allowed to ride alongside the driver. He was a friend of my father and couldn’t quite believe that a little girl could love the steam roller as much as he did. He was a big man with a ruddy face, huge arms and a leather waistcoat. He smelt of coal and tar and knew every cog and piston of his strange machine. I could see the steam roller inching along the road away from me, just past Billy Vincent’s house.

I began to run along the verge, calling as I went, hoping he’d hear me above the engine. Just as I got close he turned and shouted something I didn’t quite catch. Distracted, I caught my foot and sprawled headlong into the wet tar. I struggled to my feet, tears welling up, and looked at my coat. The entire front of me glistened black and sparkly. My knees and palms stung with pain and felt the warmth of the tar, but worse pain would come later when my mother saw the pale camel coat.

‘You okay?’ enquired the steam roller man.

I nodded a tearful face in his direction, and then sadly limped home to face the music.

Maggie Ordever
THE PARADISE THAT WAS PEACEHAVEN

Once upon a time we discovered the paradise that was Peacehaven. We had left the mournful clouds of Scotland with its many sombre castles and tenements, mist shrouded mountains, mysterious changing moods, its rugged highland cattle staunchly facing the moody atmospheres, rather as the sea is never still or constant, relentlessly driven by uncontrollable forces of Mother Nature.

It is 1969; we are planning our new life in this paradise betwixt country and sea. Here in Peacehaven we are dazzled by the brilliant, almost blinding, sunlight. I need sunglasses to escape the imminence of rainbow flashes of migraine. We skim along in the estate agent’s car, admiring green fields and lush grass verges beside the straight, seemingly endless, Roderick Avenue. Stepping from the car, we are bewitched by the scent of golden tree lupins. So fresh, so fragrant - we breathe deeply - aaaaaaah, already we are in love. The bungalow is painted simply in lemon and white that blends perfectly with the flowers, azure sky, greenery and open countryside. We glimpse the intense blueness of the sea and our hearts are captured.

It is my dream to breed my dogs in such a perfect location. As we walk around the garden, already we are making plans where our kennels will be placed. The access track to the bungalow leads to the wildness of the Tor; as we look around, we see how secluded and distant are the other dwellings; surely this will be the ideal spot to set up our home and kennels.

Within three months we have waved farewell to Scotland with its craggy mountains and lochs for this tiny patch of heaven. I find Peacehaven strange, with its regimented roads that climb relentlessly from the coast with its snowy cliffs, its many brilliantly whitewashed bungalows where the sun’s reflection enhances the cleanness of this town. Trees are few and windswept. I learn that the layout of the roads is on a grid system; so many are just tracks filled with ash from fires, bricks, tar, and any builder’s surplus material.
We were astounded to learn that the few other children living in our road shared our children’s Christian names: two Lindseys, two Justins and two Julians. Our son was born a few years later at the Sussex County Hospital. These children had heavenly childhood fun playing either in our garden or in the surrounding fields with no worries of traffic to spoil their pleasures, although during the summer months I had a fear of the surrounding cornfields catching fire. There had been a fire on Telscombe road where fields and a lone house were destroyed.

The school in Edith Avenue with its wooden huts was where young children learned and played. Mrs Larter was one of the teachers; she also ran the local Brownie group. No nonsense there then.

We bred our puppies and the children loved to hug those warm cuddly creatures that would play for hours. I worked for a while in local boarding kennels, which were along Valley Road.

A concreted road descends from the top of Roderick Avenue down to the valley, then rises steeply to the crest of the Lookout. A wonderful view of the Downs greets the eyes of those who care to linger in this perfect setting. We can see Mount Caburn and Lewes.

A walk east of the Lookout led to the riding stables named ‘Timbers’. Our children spent many hours and summers there, one year clearing fields of the poisonous ragwort. Most evenings I wandered the unmade rough tracks across to Telscombe Tye and circled from there down to the sea and back through parts of Telscombe Cliffs, the dogs running freely, sometimes chasing the race horses that galloped past at high speed. Those really were halcyon days.

Anonymous
BRIGHTON

Brazen naughty, serene. Beautiful curving crescents, elegant squares, narrow winding lanes brimming over with antiques and bric-a-brac; the Dome and Corn Exchange linked by underground tunnels to the Prince of Wales’s magnificent Royal Pavilion, with its intricate Indian design exterior and elaborate Chinese-influenced interior. Two long Victorian piers, a mile apart from each other pointed like fingers out to sea, where people could stroll and take in the sea air, attend the theatres and restaurants, eat fish and chips, play the slot machines or sit lazily in deckchairs.

The more athletic could walk all along the beach from the Palace Pier to Black Rock and swim in the Lido, then ride the electric railway with its tram-like cars back to the Palace Pier.

This is where war-weary Londoners arrived in search of relief from the terror and nightmare of the Blitz and created an alternative home, often referred to as ‘London by Sea’. It was against this background that I grew up.

With great sacrifices my mother sent me to ballet & tap lessons. Sadly for her I was never destined to be another Margot Fonteyn, but she was enormously proud that twice I was selected to appear at the Dome in the annual musical festival. However, any thought of a dance career was brought to an abrupt end when I had to have an operation on my back, but by then I had found another passion: drama.

The highlight of my year was our annual visit to the Christmas pantomime at the Theatre Royal with its glorious regency auditorium. I still remember the mounting excitement as I was settled into my seat, bolstered up by a pile of coats to afford me a better view. I was so lost in the world of make-believe that I was completely oblivious to the ice cream trickling down my arm until, in mid lick, my mother reached over and, dampening her handkerchief, wiped the ice cream from my face and hands. Because my uncle was a member of the cast, we were all invited backstage to see him at the end of the production.

Entering through the stage door was like stepping into a different world. Men were busy shifting scenery and huge piles of
props, and lighting was being adjusted. We had to squeeze against the wall when a rather stout lady with a tape measure hanging from her neck and a costume looped over her arm passed us muttering under her breath, ‘Stupid woman, I keep telling her she’s not a size 12.’ The musicians were packing away all their instruments and they joined the steady stream of actors and actresses anxiously hurrying home to their beds.

In the dressing rooms the costumes I had seen earlier in the evening now hung lifeless on coat hangers. I sat perched on a stool with my legs swinging, waiting for my uncle. I watched in awe as the actors, chatting animatedly, dipped their hands into huge pots of cream and removed all traces of their pantomime character and were transformed into normal people again. Later, with the smell of the grease paint still in my nostrils, I drifted off to sleep, dreaming of becoming an actress when I grew up.

Whilst I continued to dream of becoming an actress, I became a Methodist in a rather unorthodox way. Following in the family footsteps, I had been brought up to attend Sunday school at St Albans Church. I never enjoyed going to Sunday School, partly because the church was so dark and always smelt strange, and the services seemed to go on forever. At 11 years of age I never knew why it was referred to as High Church except that I knew it was a rather tall building.

Sometimes I stayed with my aunt and uncle who were devout Methodists, and would accompany them to church. I felt very grown up as the Minister, who greeted us on our arrival, stooped down and shook my hand. Whether it was winter or summer it always seemed bright and airy. The hymns were lively and led by an amazing mixed choir, of which my uncle was a member. We sat on cushions and knelt on hassocks that had been embroidered by my aunt and other ladies in the sewing circle, and the whole atmosphere was happy and friendly.

Sitting in the church one day, with my mind drifting during a long sermon, I gazed around at my surroundings: the sun streamed through the stained glass windows and threw psychedelic patterns onto the floor; the polished honey-coloured pews, the white walls and blue and gold embellished pulpit, and
tugging slightly at my aunt’s coat I whispered, ‘I want to stay here. I don’t want to go to my church anymore.’

I am sure the Methodist church would be disappointed to know that I became a member not on religious grounds but purely and simply on the ambience of the establishment.

Valerie Roden
Newhaven Sands

I walked Newhaven’s captive sands
On a moonlit night in June,
Savouring breaths of loneliness,
Tasting sea, seaweed and moon.
Alone it hung on heaven’s shore
So I took it in my hand,
Just to hold a piece of heaven
As I paced the empty sand.

Then I tossed it like a pebble
Out, far out, in Seaford Bay.
Picking a crèche of infant stars
Hand to hand I let them play
Hide-and-seek between my fingers
Till worn out they fell from sight.
Now washed and cleaned the moon looked down
At a frosty sea pure white.

Now the naughty stars keep hiding
Behind clouds that ebb and flow
Like all uncontrolled emotions
One hour high, the next low.
Against the wind Nature struggles
Far away clouds are drowning
Confused now I retrace my steps
Leaving the cold moon frowning.

I’d said a prayer there on the beach -
It wasn’t a prayer of mine
But I sent a prayer for healing,
Launched it on the sea of time.

David Boxall
PEACEHAVEN GROWING UP

Peacehaven was born seven years before me. I only came to learn our origins some years later. Like me it grew up with a stigma, one that took years to shake off, if it ever has completely. It was the only place I knew till I reached maturity, so I could not compare it with other places of abode as my elders might, whether in rural or urban England. It was neither; a hybrid that was slowly acquiring a character, unsure of where it belonged – whether to the ‘Wild West’ or Suburbia.

I noticed some interesting traces of an earlier existence – one that partook of the ancient villages around: a flint wall here and there, a well that had once been in use, remnants of a sunken road that still bore a few primroses on its banks, or a patch of native bluebells amongst a rare clump of trees. But it was all so open, so windswept, where it was not parcelled up into pathetic little plots of 25 or 50 feet width. Their bungalows (they were mostly bungalows) were given names – no numbers then – that matched their tawdriness: ‘Toycot’, ‘Minzabitta’, ‘Imaida’, though no doubt their owners were proud of them. Others bore more exotic or pretentious names, such as ‘Kenya House’, ‘Samarkand’, ‘Belvedere’ or ‘Nirvana’. Some residents chose to use their own names spelled backwards – usually making nonsense. . .

The empty fields that had once borne crops in the Great War now produced docks, thistles and coarse cocksfoot grass, and occasionally saw encampments of Territorial Army units or genuine gipsy caravans. Gorse and brambles proliferated, and after hot, dry summers, brush fires were common, perhaps deliberately started. Then smut-grimed men strove to beat them out with wet sacks where they threatened outlying wooden shacks.

Fifty or so shops were strung out along the 1½ miles of the South Coast Road between the pylons. The other roads, marked out on a strict gridiron pattern, were mere rutted cart tracks, puddle-filled in wet weather. Telegraph poles, and later electricity ones too, marched along them. (Some wag dubbed the place ‘Polehaven’.) A few gas lamps shed their scanty rays on one or
two roads at night, but they did not hinder one from seeing the starry heavens at their best before the advent of modern sodium lighting. Two or three old farm cottages, survivors from an earlier century, still existed in the Lower Hoddern area. The local chimney sweep lived in one of them. Here and there were chalk pits that had been used to lime the fields or provide flints for road metal. Those near the sea had more likely furnished the chalk for a chain of small white heaps that marked the way for the Customs officers who had once patrolled the cliff-tops at night. One large pit on the track leading up to Hoddern Farm served as a rubbish dump for the residents, before Chailey Rural District Council took over responsibility for Peacehaven and instituted a fortnightly collection. The cesspool-emptying tanker (a pay-as you-go service) made use of the same pit to discharge the filth, near where Southern Water are now set to build their vast sewage treatment works to cater for the whole of Brighton and Hove, as well as the local area.

The turf on the Promenade was kept mowed by the rabbit population in those days, and they in turn were kept down by foxes that patrolled the avenues at night. I recall two or three safety fences having to be replaced over a period of fifty years as the cliff edge inexorably retreated. In summer, families picnicked on the Promenade, or descended the hundred steps to where a rocky and pebbly beach provided some interest, as it still does, and a rough-and-ready bathing pool was kept topped up by the incoming tides. The dell behind the old Pavilion Cinema – which accidentally burnt down in 1940 – was laid out as a public garden with spring bulbs and flowering shrubs.

Children of school age were free to wander in Peacehaven and make their own amusements: there were no recreation grounds as such. Indeed some had to walk up to two miles to attend the ‘Old Tin School’ – a pair of corrugated iron huts at the east end of the parish, which catered for all between the ages of five and fourteen. It was very primitive with no electric light and outside bucket closets: there were forty to fifty children in the classes.

A popular pastime for those living in the Annexe area was to construct a go-cart (probably with the help of their dads) from a
wooden box and a set of discarded pram wheels, which they would then race down the little dip in Roderick Avenue near Firle Road. This was the only avenue surfaced with tarmac. There were few private cars, so little traffic to worry about.

Once in a while a gang of ‘space-suited’ men accompanied a machine spraying hot tar and shovelling grit, followed by a real ‘live’ steam-roller. This road was used by the hourly Southdown 12A bus service up to Telscombe Road. However the local doctor ran an old Ford jalopy, unlicensed, so he kept to the rough unadopted roads. The local carrier, who plied to Newhaven Station, drove a tall ramshackle van travelling at walking pace, permanently in low gear. The oil-shop man ran his pony and trap round the district calling out ‘Parrrrr-a-fin oil’. Many homes depended on oil for lighting and heating, though a few were wired up for electricity, supplied in the earliest days by a small private generating company situated in Lincoln Avenue. Our home was connected up in 1936, but by then the utility was supplied from the National Grid.

A small printing works operated near the Old Tin School (which I attended from 1932 to 1938). When about seven years old I was attracted by the ‘pup-pup-pup’ of the oil engine powering the press, and pressed my face against the window of the asbestos-clad building to watch the compositors going about their work, and seeing the copies of the Peacehaven Gazette being ejected from the machine. In the end, the printer came out and gave me a penny to go away!

Peacehaven has changed a lot since those early days. It is now a town in its own right, rather than being neither one thing nor the other. The roads are all paved and well lit and provided with main drainage – one exception being the road that borders the Promenade. We had to wait nearly sixty years for all this to be achieved! Unlike most towns, the buildings are nearly all single or double storey – only a few blocks of flats stand up like sore thumbs. There is endless variety in style, and at least half are still detached bungalows.

The town was given an artificial heart in the shape of the Meridian Centre, though this is not obvious to anyone driving through on the A259.
We were once told that trees would not grow in Peacehaven, but that has been disproved.
I grew up with Peacehaven: would I have chosen it otherwise? I don’t know.

Reuben Lanham
THE YOUTH CLUB AT SALTDEAN

How many people know the story behind the Terrapin Nursery in the Oval Park? Not many, and yet it is an interesting tale.

It all began back in 1980 when the Postmaster in Saltdean Vale found a youth vandalising the phone box and tried to stop him. The boy’s father took him to court and won his case – the Post Office paid the fine but the Postmaster moved away. There was an uproar among the residents and a public meeting was called at the Lido with the police, the residents and the young people of the area to discuss how and why this had happened and what could be done about it.

The Secretary of the Residents’ Association (Phyllis Gill) was very concerned at the lack of facilities in the area for young people. She contacted me and asked would I meet her, together with the Park Keeper, before the meeting as she would like to suggest the barn be made into a meeting place for teenagers and wanted to know if this was possible. She knew that prior to being ill I had been running the Youth Club, so knew something about what would be needed.

As soon as I saw the inside of the barn I said, ‘No way’. It had so much wood in its construction it would be a fire hazard. However, just outside it was a tumbledown Nissan hut that had a concrete floor, low brick walls and then a curved corrugated top. This seemed a better prospect if the corrugated iron was replaced, as it was leaking badly. It was agreed that she would suggest this and she asked if I would go along and back her up.

Came the night of the meeting and I arrived to find a hall packed with people, but NO PHYLLIS GILL!!!! She had been taken ill with the flu. The meeting started and after much discussion about the recent events, the Chairman explained Phyllis had the flu, which was unfortunate as she was going to put forward a proposition to solve the problem of where young people
could meet. Then, to my horror, I was asked to tell the meeting of her idea, having been with her and the Park Keeper the day before looking at the site.

When I put her idea forward, it was amazing the reasons given as to why this could not be, and no one had a good word to say for it. Standing in the front, looking at the hostile faces of the adults on my right and the glum faces of the youngsters on my left, I’m afraid I saw red.

‘It’s all right for you adults,’ I said. ‘You adults have your tennis courts, your mini golf course, your many activities here in the Lido. What have the young ones got? The use of the upstairs of this building on a Friday night and that’s all. No wonder you have a problem,’ and with that I went and sat down.

Dead silence for a moment and then everyone was talking at once. The Chairman eventually restored order and asked for a proposal as to what should be done. Suddenly I found myself Chairman of a steering committee to look into the possibilities of the Nissan hut, and so the story began.

The first step was to take advice on the Nissan hut, which was no good. Not only was the corrugated roof useless, but the walls as they were wouldn’t take the weight of a suitable one. As it happened, at that time the Saltdean Estate Office was selling up and moving out and they had a number of portacabin type buildings along Saltdean Vale which they put up for sale. One of them was very dilapidated, so I wrote to the company telling them of our project and asking if they would consider donating this building as they wouldn’t get much for it if they sold it, but it would be invaluable to us. They agreed we could have it as long as we had it moved by a certain date, as they wanted to build some bungalows on the site. I had a builder friend look it over and was told it was perfectly sound except for the windows, which needed replacing.

The firm that made the portacabins was contacted and agreed not only to replace the windows, but also to move it for a very reasonable fee. We found it was made up of four separate units. The young people were asked to come at weekends to remove the central heating and other items, so that there was just the shell to move. A meeting with the Head of Parks and Gardens
was arranged to look at the site and it was agreed the building could go in front of the barn – where it stands today - and we would pay a pepper-corn rent for the land.

Meanwhile, Phyllis had persuaded a gentleman she knew to draw up the plans for the foundations. Next came a trip to the Town Hall to find out if the main path through the park would take the weight of a low loader, as it would have to enter the park at the Lido end, and travel through to the site. I discovered that the path used to be the road through Saltdean long ago, so our low loader was no problem.

While all this was happening, of course we needed to raise some money to pay for it. So I went round talking to various organisations about what we were trying to do and a gentleman came to see me. He offered to help me fill in the forms to apply for a grant from a charity he knew of, also to fill in the forms for the Princes Trust. With his kindly help, we obtained £2000 from his charity and £1000 from the Princes Trust, which changed the picture quite a bit. People who had been laughing at our efforts began to sit up and take notice. Many things were organised to raise money, including a Carnival and fun day on the Oval, which brought the whole community together.

As soon as the building was in place, the water and electricity were needed, so once again it was down to the Town Hall and to my amazement no plans could be found showing the layout of the water pipes under the road. It was a tense time while the water people worked out where it should be and, luckily for us, when they dug the hole – there was the pipe!

In all it cost about £17,000 to complete the project and for a couple of years it was a very successful Youth Club. But, sad to say, as the people running it had to give up for various reasons, no one would sacrifice the time to run it and so it closed.

After a while the Terrapin people opened it up. Now I like to think the little ones using it are the children of the teenagers we did it for.
Brenda Bryon
OBJECTS

Writing Exercise: Write about an object you possess linked with your family history. Then take three objects you remember from one of the homes you lived in and try to weave a story round them.
NAN’S MACHINE

The black metal frame of the machine filled the window space. Sunlight filtering through the lace curtains highlighted the dust clinging to the oil around the wheel edges and glinted on the gold insignia of the front plate.

I watched carefully as my Grandmother licked the end of the cotton between her lips and skillfully passed the end into the small hole at the top of the bobbin. With a flick of her hand she sent the wheel into motion and her foot started the rickety-rack sounds of the treadle as she loaded the bobbin. The bobbin was an inch and a half long metal spindle, not like today’s little round plastic things. Once the bobbin was full of thread it was slipped into the long shuttle case and this was fitted in place under the footplate. It was a wonderful machine so complex, yet so smooth in its operation and so beyond my reach. It was definitely a ‘look but don’t touch’ sort of thing.

Along with sharp knives and cut glass it was forbidden.

Maggie Ordever
CONFIRMATION: 3 objects

When I went into the bathroom I found my new white dress laid out on the bedding box.

Mum had been making it for weeks, all hand sewn because we didn’t have a sewing machine. The neckline was square and fastened with press studs down one side of the bodice. A row of little pink rosebuds followed the line of the neck and the fastening all the way to the waistline where the silky fabric was softly gathered. It was a very special dress for a very special day.

I had been preparing for this day for months, attending the Wednesday evening classes at the vicarage with Rev Wilson and eight other classmates from the Parish School. Confirmation was the next step after six years at the Church school, and my catechism was word perfect.

Inspired by the Wednesday classes, I had been saving for the hymn book I had seen in the window of Mabel’s Haberdashery on Dale Street. Her window was covered on the inside with strange orange cellophane film to protect the colours of the displayed knitting yarns and embroidery silks from bleaching by the sun. Among the yarns were a few choice gifts for special family occasions – a silver spoon, a coloured brandy glass with an inquisitive china mouse perched on the rim, and a leather-bound hymn book embossed in gold. I had dreamed about holding that book in my hand, smelling the leather, and hearing the rustle of that fine crisp paper that is apparently reserved for Bibles.

Mabel had let me hold it for a while when I had gone in to ask how much it cost.

‘Twelve and six to you, pet.’

It felt like a king’s ransom to an eleven year old with sixpence a week pocket money. I went without my Beano comic, my sweets, and all other treats for twenty weeks and by Whitsun I was in reach of my goal.

On Whit Friday morning I went around all the relatives and friends of the family, collecting small cash rewards for ‘paying my respects’ before the Whit Walks. The next day I was able to buy
my treasure. Now I would be able carry it proudly as I stood before the Bishop this afternoon.

But... what was this laid out on top of the pristine white dress? A suspender belt of broderie anglais with 4 elastic straps ending in little rubber buttons and steel clips. An instrument of torture to hold up the pair of nylon stockings still folded in the packet nearby. And a lipstick! A Sugar Pink lipstick.

I stared at these symbols of feminine maturity. I had never worn such things before. I had not asked for them: I did not want them. Was this confirmation ceremony a rite of passage into the adult world?

I felt sick. I wanted to call it off. I wanted to put on my grey pleated skirt and play marbles with John and Brent in our familiar dirt marble pitch.

I couldn’t stop the proceedings now, so I emerged, eventually, scrubbed clean and wearing my white dress and veil, nylons and lipstick. Mutely I followed the family down the ginnel to the church, and stood in line before the altar with my friends.

‘I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead...’ I recited the words under my breath while all the time screaming in my head, ‘I DON’T! I DON’T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS.’

And I wondered if a thunderbolt from the sky would strike me dead on the spot.

Anonymous
FOOD

Writing Exercise: Write about a particular or typical family meal, using the senses. Describe the food and people present, and try to introduce some dialogue.
FIVE PENN’ORTH OF CHIPS

The cobblestones on Charles Lane were made smooth and shiny with the drizzly rain as I hopped down the stone steps from the front gate. I was clutching a sixpenny bit and four big copper pennies in my hand to bring home two portions of chips for dinner.

I had strict instructions not to call at the chippy on our lane, where Mum could tell the fat was old and getting rancid. Through the open door I could see one customer - Mr Shaw with his dog, jawing over the wooden counter with Mrs Taylor. I turned on to the main road and passed Mrs Schofield’s high garden wall, pulling my school gabardine closer around me to keep out the cold.

At the bottom of Chapel Hill was the second of the four chippies in our little village. This one had a long queue filling the shop front and snaking out into the road. The fluorescent lights shone through the enormous plate glass window into the grey day and lit up the stainless steel counter inside, with its sparkly front of opaque green glass and the sizzling frying pans. The delicious smell of freshly fried chips wafted through the open door.

I joined the queue behind Audrey Wellings and hopped from foot to foot with impatience. I knew Mum only had a short dinner break from work and needed these chips ‘sharpish’ to feed the family and get back to her shift. Once I had them in my hands I would run like the wind to get them back to the house still hot and steaming... But now I had to wait my turn. The file moved quickly and soon I was inside the door.

‘Pudding and chips with mushy peas, please luv.’
‘Salt ‘n’ vinegar, John?’
‘Aye. Just on ‘t chips.’

Each meal was deftly wrapped, first in greaseproof bags then in layers of newspaper to insulate it well on the way home.

‘Fish and chips twice. One with a pickled onion for Dad please, Sheila.’
The scoop scraped over the steel, lifting mountains of golden bars of potato with that delicate crispy edging, again and again. My nose was just level with the spotless counter top and if I stretched I could see the fluffy crinkled batter wrapped around parcels of fish, lying in the warming shelf under bright lights like beauties under a sun bed.

‘Hello our kid. What can I get you?’

‘Two fivepenn’orths,’ I replied, already warm with anticipation of the hot parcel against my chest.

‘Oh. Didn’t you know, luv? Our smallest portion went up to sixpence last weekend.’

The news dropped like a stone on my ears – I only had ten pence. Two ‘sixes’ would be a shilling. I stood stunned for a moment not knowing what to do.

‘Do you want to pop back home and ask yer Mum for the extra?’

The words were barely audible through the bubble of sound that surrounded me. Sheila moved on to serving the next customer and my shoulders curled as I shuffled out of the door and peered up the road. I wondered if I could still get two ‘fives’ at the chippy on the lane but wouldn’t dare to risk it.

I ran back letting my coat fly open as I swung my arms to pick up speed.

‘WHAT?’ What do you mean you didn’t get any?’

Mum didn’t seem to understand.

‘I didn’t have enough money,’ I repeated in a hushed tone.

‘NO! Not for two sixpenn’orths but you could have got one large portion for tenpence. I’ve got nothing else in to make up that quick, so you’ll just have to go without till teatime. You can call at your aunty’s for bread and jam.’

She buttoned her coat and shut the door behind her, returning to the mill and leaving me to stand, feeling foolish and hungry, holding my little sister’s hand.

Anonymous
It was a Wednesday and we shut shop at 1pm and that meant half a day to do as I wished. Pat had a half day, the same as me. I could not see her ahead, so I sat on the seat by the post box and waited for her.

Now Pat was about fourteen months older than me and did a lot of swimming. She was well built and had everything, and I thought she was great. She spotted me first and called my name, then hopped up on to the cross bar and off we went.

‘Feel like a walk later?’ I asked.
‘It’s not the walk, it’s what happens after,’ she replied.
‘Well, you must enjoy it. I know I do.’

‘Call me later,’ she said, smiling, and I did just that. You see, Pat only lives two doors down and we are real good friends.

We were walking across the farm field when we came across a rabbit, which was twisting and jumping around. It had been unlucky and got into a snare. I untangled the wire but the poor thing died as I untied it. I said to Pat, ‘Ever had wood roasted rabbit?’

‘No,’ she replied.
‘Right, you find all the dry sticks you can.’ I started on preparing ‘Thumper’. Once that was done, I got the fire going and we sat talking for a bit.

There’s a great feeling between the two of us, but as usual our feelings got the better of us, so while ‘Thumper’ slowly cooked, we had dessert. It might not be a dinner our mums would dish up, but it’s a dinner Pat and I will always remember.

Poor Thumper. It was three years later that Pat and I got married at the local church. Pat had her rabbit’s foot tucked into her something blue garter. Thank you, Thumper.
Ron Chilvers
The Hilsleys

Hilda Hilsley was the mum I always wanted. She smiled a lot, and smelt wonderful, of perfume and warmth.

Ron and Hilda ran the local greengrocers’ shop, and Monica, their daughter, was my playmate. Hilda always made me feel welcome. I could not wait to be with them, and visited at every possible opportunity. I loved the warmth of the environment: the rickety winding stairs that led up to the flat above the shop, banisters adorned with coats; shoes and bags lying in scrambled intertwined heaps. All this muddle seemed to add to the feeling of family unity, love, connection and inclusion.

Hilda calling up Ron for his morning toast, coffee and boiled egg. Those smells were so welcoming, tempting; watching the butter melt down on the slices of hot toast, the sugar cubes ‘blop blop’ into the brown steaming mass. Omo, the off white boxer dog, waiting in expectation for the odd stray crust that may come his way. Watching the long elastic strings of slobber drip from the sides of that velvet mouth. The little stubby tail moving very fast.

Monica and I would play in the shop after closing time, weighing out produce, taking it in turns to be customer and salesperson. Later Hilda bought the local florist, and on Saturdays Monica and I would sit on the step outside selling bunches of daffodils to passers by. As we got more confident we’d yell, ‘Five pennies a bunch.’ The smell in this shop was beautiful, fresh, floral: roses, lilies, so much colour, texture, shape and form. At the end of the day there might be the joy of chocolate mousse, small individually wrapped parcels covered in thick waxed paper that promised the most delicious smooth treat imaginable.

With the Hilsleys there was harmony. And Hilda was consistently the warmest, most sparkling adult I knew – even when she was angry, you’d hardly know it.

Jackie Worth
The best family meals were the picnics on Saltdean Beach. Most of the beaches were pebbly, but there was one beautiful sandy one. We called it ‘Our Beach’. Unfortunately so did everybody else. My mother, my grandmother and I went to this sandy beach, and with us came my friend Sandra, who lived across the road. Both of us were only children, and we liked to pretend that we were sisters. Sandra and I went into the sea with my mother. My grandmother, who did not swim, prepared the picnic, taking the carefully packed food from the green and white basket.

Going in the sea was fun, but also cold and rather frightening. There might be sharks or sea monsters. A tidal wave might sweep us all to oblivion, or a strong current might carry us away. The seabed might suddenly dip down so you were out of your depth and anything might lurk in the dark squelchy seaweed.

Coming out into the warm air, and sitting snuggled in a sun-warmed towel after the perils of the ocean was deliciously cosy and felt safe and secure. The picnic reposed crisply on the tawny sand. I remember the sharp tang of egg and cress sandwiches mixed with mustard. The cold pink squares of ham, thin slices of bread and butter spread with pale creamy triangular cheese that felt like satin on the tongue. Sandra and I collected cheese labels and we would peel them off the silver paper and unwrap the smooth triangles, which had not been spread but left whole. There were rosy tomatoes, crisp lettuce, crunchy celery sticks, whole carrots, and scrunchy hot radishes. There were tiny round biscuits with piped rainbow coloured icing. They tasted sugary. There were chocolate marshmallows already beginning to melt. There was a steaming flask of tea for my mother and grandmother, while Sandra and I drank Ribena, rose hip syrup, or orange juice. We talked of the coldness of the sea, while revelling in the warmth of the sun. We marvelled at the sand castles built by those around us or the deep holes they were digging.

‘They’ll get to Australia soon!’

Sandra and I really believed this was possible.
Grated bits of sand seasoned our food and we made dreadful jokes about ‘SANDwiches.’ I would shuffle my bare feet into the dry sand. Below it the damp sand felt smooth and cool.

Sitting with my sand slippers on my feet and the hot sun baking my shoulders, I listened to the seagulls mewing, the dogs barking, the children shouting, and the drowsy drone of a plane overhead. This was a magical feast, something you wanted to hold onto forever; the happiness and sweetness holding a germ of sadness because it would eventually have to end. Then came the crowning glory of the feast: Choc-ices bought at the corner shop and kept cool in those pre-fridge days by wrapping them in newspaper and putting them under the eiderdown. Now, like the marshmallows, they were beginning to melt a little, but this made them all the better. They weren’t too cold to taste and they didn’t hurt your teeth. They were perfect, the sweet vanilla spurting through the cracking chocolate.

After a decent interval, Sandra and I went back into the sea, no longer frightening for it was as warm as a bath and the tide was miles out. We danced through the little pools glittering in the ridged bumpy sand that was dotted with dark little worm casts. There were fragile shells and wonderful stones, whose marvellous colours were always disappointing when they dried, but one of which, if we were lucky, might turn out to be a mermaid’s egg. It was my dream to find an abandoned egg and hatch it out a mermaid.

At the end of the evening, cool began to sweep the beach. The moment of twilight sadness had come. When we returned to the shore, the picnic had disappeared into the green and white basket and reluctantly we began our walk home. My mother and grandmother carried the picnic basket between them like Jack and Jill’s bucket. Sandra and I skipped along in front of them talking of mermaids’ eggs.

Anita Gilson
SCHOOLDAYS

Writing Exercise: Describe an event from your schooldays that stands out in your mind – a treat or an outing, winning a prize or an injustice that rankled.
AVEBURY

I’d never been on a school trip before. I’d been on Sunday school outings, but that was always with Mum and Derrick and Linda. I thought this would be very exciting, going on a proper coach with a packed lunch.

When I got up in the morning it was a bit drizzly, but Mum said it was going to brighten up. She said I could wear my green gingham skirt and my new white blouse with the cardi that Nan had knitted. It was apple green with a white rabbits’ ears pattern and I liked it lots. I had new socks and Daddy had polished my sandals last night so they looked tidy.

Mum folded my pink plastic mac and put it into the bottom of a bag along with two luncheon meat sandwiches (which I hated but I’d try to swap with Mary later if she had Marmite). There were two rock cakes and a bottle of pop with a funny metal stopper. We also had to take a pencil and some paper, so Aunty Margaret gave me a little note book with a spiral wire top and a kitten on the front. She also gave me sixpence to spend in case Mum didn’t have enough.

When I got to school my tummy felt funny as we lined up in the playground. When I saw there were two coaches I was very excited. Mr Gwyther’s class went on the first one and my class with Mrs Reader got on the second. After a long drive we had to stop so Billy Cook could be sick. The bus smelt horrible after that and I didn’t like it.

The first place we stopped was Silbury Hill. It was something famous to do with History and it was very steep. We had to climb to the top and it was slippery because of the rain. You could see ever such a long way from the top. When we came down again some people slipped over and skidded on their bottoms, so Mrs Reader got cross and said the next person who did it would have to stay in the bus.

Then Stephen Wicks shoved me in the back and I slid nearly all the way down the hill on my bottom. I laughed at first but then it felt scary so I cried. My knickers were wet and I got grass stains on my skirt and my new socks. I knew Mum would be cross. Mrs
Reader shouted at me and sent me back to the bus. It was horrible sitting there on my own with wet knickers and very cold.

Then the others came back and we drove to another place called Avebury. I wanted to see Avebury very much because of the people who made it long ago, but Mrs Reader was still cross and said I had to stay in the bus again.

The driver went off to get a cup of tea and everybody else went to look at the giant stones. I stayed in the coach, shivering in my wet pants. I hate Stephen Wicks for pushing me. I hate Mrs Reader for shouting at me and making me stay behind and I hate school trips. I don’t want to do school trips any more.

Maggie Ordever
LUNCHTIME AT THE
‘OLD TIN SCHOOL’

Commendable initiative by regimental headmaster
In the Thirties’ Depression, with dads on the dole –
No need now to consume in the cold: jam sandwich or two –
Since the new canteen hut is exuding steam;
Been bustling all morning, Mrs Makeready’s team.

At quarter past twelve in the top class one sees
The monitors don white hats, aprons and sleeves.
They fetch the containers with hot fuming loads
From across the school yard to bench ready waiting;
While teachers direct: the desks pushed together,
Their lids propped up level and spread with white sheeting.

Servers stand by their charges, large spoons at the ready,
Or wait with chipped plates for the signal to go . . .
Grace said by the Head – then file quickly past.
We’d all paid our shilling to ‘Miss’, Monday last.
Chatter and clatter! What have we got?
Mince again with mashed spuds and sad greens, grown in
school plot.

All invariably swamped with that gooey brown gravy
Ugh, how it revolted me! ‘Eat it up anyway…’

Then guess what’s for ‘afters’ – rice pudding perhaps,
or custard and
prunes?
(In September there’d be stewed blackberries for sure,
For we’d picked them from hedges the day before.)
Hurray! It’s Friday – and today it’s jam tarts,
Waiting on tin trays, ready cut into parts . . .

‘Clear the tables!’ Clatter and chatter! ‘Off you go now!’
Then run round the playground and burn it up anyhow!
GOING TO VALHALLA

We’re sitting in old Wally’s class listening to her talking about the Norsemen. Wally, or Miss Walbrook, is about a hundred years old, flabby and musty with crinkly grey hair. She looks just like Miss Owl on my Woodland Happy Family cards. She tells a good story though. The Norse Myths are very exciting.

‘The Norsemen,’ says Wally, ‘believed that when they died they went to Valhalla. There they spent all day fighting and at night they came home and ate huge meals.’

This does not sound like heaven to me. I can’t think of anything I’d hate more. I begin to worry, how can I get out of going to Valhalla when I die? When I want to get out of doing gym, I hide in the school toilets. If I go to Valhalla, I shall have to spend eternity hiding in the toilets and you can’t fool the gods the way you can fool teachers. Some horrible Valkyrie will be sure to come and find me and order me out to join the fighting.

At break I go out to play with my friends but my mind is not on our games. I can’t stop thinking about going to Valhalla. No one else seems worried. I envy the others. I want to ask someone if I have to go Valhalla, but it seems a silly question so I just let it grow heavier inside me, weighing me down.

I’m so quiet at home that my mother and grandmother get concerned. I nearly tell them what is worrying me, but I choke it back and say there is nothing wrong. I know I’ll have to ask about Valhalla though or I’ll worry all night.

It’s time for my bath. One of the nicest things about living in a small bungalow is that you can talk while you’re bathing. Somehow it seems easier to ask my question when I am in another room. I take a deep breath: ‘Mummy, does everyone have to go to Valhalla?’ My voice sounds shaky but I feel better at once now I have asked.

‘What did you say dear?’ My mother sounds surprised.

Perhaps she’ll think I’m just asking about the stories, not for myself.

‘Does everyone have to go to Valhalla?’
'Oh no,' my mother answers airily. 'Only heroes went to Valhalla.'

Relief rushes through me. I’m shaking, my head aches with relief, but I don’t care about a headache. Only heroes! That lets me out. Why, Odin would only have to check my record at the dentist to know that I am no hero. I splash happily, I could float away I feel so light and free.

Now we are learning about the Ancient Egyptians. They worshipped cats and when a cat died she went to live with the beautiful Cat Goddess, Bast, a lady with a cat’s head. I wonder if she speaks words or miaows? Wait a minute - there must be billions of cats there, and they must need billions of people to feed them and comb them and change their litter trays and cuddle the kittens who might feel scared in a strange place.

That’s where I’ll go when I die.

Anita Gilson
OLD PHOTOGRAPHS:
EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

Writing Exercise: Choose a photograph and make a list of statements, questions, exclamations and commands about it. See what you discover. Then write the story of the picture – anything you know about it, including what might have happened before and after it was taken.
BUTLINS BEAUTY:
The story of a photo

Jenny, my favourite Redcoat of all, looked over the line of girls with kind eyes.

‘Stand tall, and straight, look at the table of judges, and smile your very best smile.’

We paraded onto the stage of the Regency Ballroom, with a ball of mirrors turning above the rustling audience. The smell of stale cigarette smoke and beer lingered from the night before, creating a very grown up feel to the event.

The loudspeaker boomed, ‘And now ladies and gentlemen. The ‘Junior Holiday Princess of 1957.’

Dad had always called me his ‘little princess’, and I stood confidently in my best summer frock with the square sailor collar. My white socks were brand new, and the ribbon tied in a bow on top of my head matched the pattern of the dress. I held the number 47 on a card like a handbag in front of me.

I just wished Mum hadn’t put the plaits over the top of my head in that excruciating halo. At breakfast I had asked for a ponytail, but wasn’t heard over the din as hundreds of families scratched cutlery over plates of bacon and egg, and called across the tables. Just as I opened my mouth a waitress dropped a plate
and the whole dining hall cheered. Each House competed to make
the most noise. We were in Windsor House, and Dad had already
won some points for our House in the ‘Knobbly Knees’
competition. Mum would do the running races. She was very
good at sport.

Silence fell as the judge stood with the microphone.
‘Third place Number 47.’
I gritted my teeth through the smile. Not last, but not first. As
I stepped off the stage to get the rosette I kept my eyes on the
panel of judges, avoiding the audience.
‘Second place Number 17.’
‘And first place to Number 75.’ The audience whistled,
cheered, clapped and stamped their feet.
She had a pony tail, and what sort of mother put her in a
swimsuit instead of a frock? I could have won with a pony tail
and a swimsuit!
‘You’re still my best princess,’ said Dad, as he bought
celebration glasses of Coca Cola float for everyone. I bobbed the
blob of ice cream up and down in the tall cone-shaped glass of
fizzy drink.

Outside the Ballroom Dad did his impersonation of Frankie
Vaughan. His leg punched the air in a high kick and he twirled
the imaginary walking cane and top hat as he sang,
‘Don’t know what they’re doin’
But they laugh a lot
Behind the Green doo-or.’
Mum laughed and my smile grew wider. I like it when Mum
is happy.
The afternoon sun shone on Dad’s Brylcreemed hair as we
chased him to the Peter Pan train: the miniature train that rattled
and shook us back past the fountains, past the rink, past the Pig
and Whistle and along endless rows of chalets to our destination.
We skipped down together to our chalet with the blue door,
yellow walls and curtains with little blue boats. Quick change into
shorts for the boating pool, and off we go.
Butlins is great. Fifty weeks’ fun rolled into one.
Anonymous
Hello Dad,

I woke up the morning of your funeral having had this dream about you. You were in a cream raincoat and you just kept walking.

I told Louise about the dream. She said, ‘What did Granddad say?’

I said, ‘He never said a word.’

Louise and I got ready and left for the church. It was a beautiful sunny day and we were so busy meeting and greeting guests that I forgot about the dream. Aunty Alice said she had some photos for me but she had forgotten to bring them.

I said, ‘Not to worry, just post them to me’.

It was such a lovely day. Everybody remembered you being kind, never in a bad mood, always joking and laughing. Such lovely memories of my beautiful Dad.

The next morning I took the dogs for a walk at Cuckmere. I bent down to look at a bird and thought: my dad would have loved this bird. As I walked you told me you were at peace and where you wanted to be.

Saturday morning arrived. I picked up the post to find a picture of you and your sister when you were children. The other photo, of you on your own, was exactly as I had seen you in my dream. I was astonished; I had never seen these pictures before.

I asked you, ‘Where were you going? Or coming from?’

‘I was going home from work and I was walking to the bus stop.’

‘Where did you work?’

‘I worked for a printing firm. It was my first job. I was a training apprentice in the shop, learning to do silver and gold leaf work for bookbinding.’

‘Did you enjoy it?’

‘Yes, I really did.’

‘Where did you work?’
'Rotherhithe High Street.'
In the picture I notice there is a tram in the background. 'Where was the tram travelling to?'
'It is going to London to see the Queen!'
I smiled. 'Oh Dad, you’re always joking! What time of the year was it?'
'Well it was at the end of March, beginning of April. On my way home I went to the recruiting office to sign up. To go to the war.'
'But you were only 16 years old!'
'I told them I was older. I was really keen to fight for my country. I remember that evening well. It was a cold day and people walking in the streets were dressed in their warm clothes.'
'Who took the photo of you?'
'That was my best friend, Jimmy. He’d met me from work. On the way home he was telling jokes to make me laugh so he could take this photo!'
'When the photo was developed how did you feel about the picture?'
You replied, 'I was young and free'.

Maggie Glen
The picture portrays a happy family – mother, father, four young girls at the back, and an older girl sitting by the side of the mother in the front row. All are dressed in their Sunday best and smiling for the camera. There is a pompous, slightly arrogant air about the man who sits with his head tilted upwards rather than at the camera, and has his hands intertwined on his lap.

Did they dress up especially for the camera or had they been to a special family event? The picture looks as though it was taken by a professional but since it is a copy of the original, I have no idea.

The mother is my great-grandmother on my mother’s side. She was always referred to as Grandma Stacey. As a young child I can just remember visiting her in Woolwich. I remember going on buses and trams and lots of walking. The house was very dark with a long narrow hallway leading to the family room and the scullery. There were other people in the darkness – a young boy called Lennie who had a motorbike in the hallway, and a woman called Maud, and I didn’t know who either of them were. I now know that Lennie was Maud’s son.

Once I can remember a girl a few years older than me with such long thick black plaits - they were down to her bottom. She was the daughter of Doris and four years older than me. Later in life we became great friends.

I can remember my great-grandmother dying, although my parents always protected me from death and illness as though it were not part of my life. But of course I listened to the grown ups.
talking – she was in her nineties and thought she had piles, but 
eventually she couldn’t sit down so they took her into hospital, 
where she was diagnosed with cancer. I heard my mother telling 
someone how very thin and fragile she had grown. And then 
there was no Grandma Stacey and none of the occasional visits to 
the house in Woolwich.

But back to the picture... the man is Grandma Stacey’s 
second husband – the first had died in the war and was buried in 
India. I never knew either of the men. The four pretty girls at the 
back are their daughters – May, Maud, Gwenda and Doris - and 
they were all very close as a family. The older girl in the front row 
is my grandmother and her name was Winifred. She was the only 
daughter of the first marriage, so the other girls are her half-
sisters and quite a bit younger.

I only came across the picture about seven years ago when 
May died at the age of 94, and I was immediately captivated by 
such a happy yet formal family photo. But I was also puzzled: I 
had never thought that the four girls could have been so pretty 
when they were young, since they all seemed quite old even when 
I knew them as a young child. It was so strange to see my own 
grandmother smiling. I don’t remember her ever smiling or being 
happy; all I remember is a sombre lady who never touched or 
kissed me. It was a Sunday bus ride and visit that I dreaded.

My grandparents had separated before I was ten. My 
grandfather had been the one who played with me, bought me a 
piano, made me a doll’s house with furniture and sat me on his 
knife. He went to live with ‘another woman’ and I remember on 
one occasion he came to collect me from my grandmother’s and 
took me round to his new house for tea. There was such a row 
when he brought me back and they discovered where I had been! 
This caused a family feud for many years and I didn’t see my 
grandfather until just before he died, in an old people’s home.

When my first two children were babies – fourteen months 
and one month – I went to stay with my parents and persuaded 
my mother to visit my grandfather. He broke down in tears when 
he saw me and my two babies. We took him to the zoo and had a 
memorable day out.
Sometimes my uncle (my mother’s younger brother) was at my grandmother’s house. He was a tall, gaunt man, a bachelor who spoke only rarely and had a dry sense of humour. He loved classical music and the house often resounded with the sound of sombre chamber music, thumping music by Beethoven and, what I then thought to be, stuffy opera. He once bought my grandmother a new-fangled Hoover and then caught her waving it in the air, expecting the dust and dirt to jump into it.

Looking at the picture, I am also struck by their clothes and general air of well being, as I had always been led to believe that my mother’s family were poor.

I wonder again about the circumstances in which the picture was taken. I wish my mother was alive so I could ask her some of these questions.

Chris Cooper
UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTERS

Writing Exercise: Describe someone who has been important in your life: someone who influenced you in a positive way – who made you feel your life and story were important - or someone who influenced you in negative way - perhaps someone you have tried to avoid being like.
My mother, my paternal grandmother, my sister and I lived in a four storey mews house, in Brixton, London. My father, who was a theatrical costumier, left us when I was about five to set up home with an actress. It was a fractious time, but Nanny Worth provided much needed stability.

Nanny occupied two rooms at the top of the house. A cosy kitchen/diner where the smell of tasty dinners lingered. Lamb chops and greens were a favourite. The room comprised a stone sink where she washed her clothes and herself, preferring this to the large cold bathroom with the geyser that lit with a ‘boom’, hissing and gurgling alive like a monster. A small gas cooker where she would heat a black lead clothes iron, spitting on it to check the intensity of its heat. A small wooden table upon which my sister and I would sit on Sunday mornings, dangling our feet close to the warmed oven, whilst eating white bread and butter that Nan had dipped in the sugar bowl. There was a built in larder, and one easy chair where Nan would relax with her crochet hook and coloured wools. I would often watch her hands: the hook clicked against her wedding ring as she worked the wool very quickly.

Nan’s bedroom, in comparison, was empty but for a bed and small set of drawers. I remember it always felt cold. Nevertheless, it was Nan’s bed that offered comfort when I had mumps or tummy aches. And when I had nightmares it would be Nan’s room I was trying to get to. Chairs were placed at the foot of the stairs to block my way. It was for my safety, but I would happily have spent all my time with Nan if I had the chance.

Nan stood about five feet tall, had just one front tooth, and was almost always in a pinnie. She never said much, but it didn’t matter. She never told me she loved me, but I knew she did. She had a warm, generous spirit and an accepting nature, and provided much needed emotional stability. I would clop around in her shoes, and dress up in her coat and hat, sit at her table pretending to smoke an imaginary ‘fag’ as she called them,
chatting to imaginary friends whilst she looked on in quiet amusement, seeming to enjoy watching me play-act. If she needed to tell me off it would be quick and over with, and then we would be all right again. I felt I could trust Nan completely.

When I returned home from school I would race to Nan’s kitchen, and every day there would be packets of sweets waiting for my sister and me on her kitchen table. Always the same for us both so there would be no arguing: sherbet dabs, flakes, black jacks and fruit salads. Occasionally she would leave threepenny pieces; I always felt slight disappointment, but soon perked up, going to choose sweets at Mr Smithers tobacconist shop.

Life can change so suddenly.

My mother remarried and the firm for whom she worked offered her a transfer to Hertfordshire. We would have to leave Nan; she would not be coming with us.

For the first two years Hertfordshire was exciting, with lots to explore and an opportunity to have a closer relationship with my sister. For a while I was not the pest; all this newness meant we needed one another.

Nan never came to visit. She had never liked my stepfather, so when the relationship between my mother and stepfather failed, life got difficult again. I was sixteen when I sought Nan out. She was living in Leicester. Although our relationship was different she was still the loving, giving person I remembered, and I was glad to have her back in my life.

Jackie Worth
MR MORRIS

I dislike sport and I really do not like our PE instructor. She wants me in the netball team because I am tall and can score. I have to find a way out of this. I thoroughly enjoy my music and Mr Morris has obliged me by insisting I need to practice as I am to be lead clarinet in our orchestra in the special event being held for our families. I practice.

Mr Morris is a slightly overweight Welshman in a grey suit with thinning mousy hair, who is inclined to sweat with exertion. His hair falls in long strands, with a clump hanging over his right eyebrow. His temper is easily aroused and he spends a great deal of time banging his baton enthusiastically on his music stand in an effort to get us to perform with perfection. I watch the baton of course, but it seems to be in competition with the hair over his right eyebrow, which is bouncing around in unison with the baton. His body is also bouncing around. Now the clump of hair is reaching gale force as his body wobbles and the baton whips the air, bringing the orchestra to a crescendo. That hair must hurt his eye. Surely it must. His right eye does look a bit red but he seems okay. He is a good music teacher and we are a good orchestra. Our special event has gone off extremely well.

Sheila Roberts
Fred was a young lad who joined our Youth Club in Hastings. One night we heard that he had had nothing to eat all day, so we gave him some sausage rolls, and after that we kept an eye on him.

One evening we had organised a treasure hunt. After it was over, Fred came and asked if he could travel back with us. He told us he was worried about going home because his mother had left them, and all his brothers and sisters had been taken into care that day. He had six brothers and sisters, the youngest being twins a few months old. As he was seventeen at the time, and working as an apprentice builder and decorator, he had been left with his dad.

Some weeks later he asked if he could have a word and we knew there was something wrong, so we invited him home for a cup of tea and to tell us what the problem was. Mum was divorcing Dad and was trying to make him say things to help her. Dad had found out and kicked him out of the house, so he had nowhere to go. What should he do?

As Marilyn had gone to New Zealand, her room was empty so we said, ‘Stay the night here and tomorrow we’ll sort something out.’

Next morning we explained to our children, Norman and Wendy, why Fred was with us and instantly they said, ‘Why can’t he stay here with us?’ We explained it wasn’t that easy as Fred had grown up in a different home to ours, and we explained to Fred he would have to live by the same rules as Wendy and Norman if he stayed. It was decided to try it for three months and see if it would work. And that’s how Fred became one of the family.

He lived with us for almost four years until he got engaged and we moved to from Hastings to Saltdean. We became ‘Mum’ and ‘Dad’ and now he is like a son to me, always there when needed.

People are always too quick to judge others by their appearance. At the time we were ostracised for daring to bring
such a character into the road, but we knew that under that rough exterior was a good, honest lad who knew right from wrong but had never had a chance in life.

Anyway, at the end of four years, neighbours were coming to us and saying, ‘Do you think Fred would do up a room for us?’ And these were the people who had taken their children away from the Youth Club because we allowed characters like Fred in. It really opened our eyes.

Fred is happily married with a grown up son of his own now. He works for himself as a painter and decorator and has his own house with the most beautiful garden – thanks to a helping hand when he needed it.

Brenda Bryon
MEMORABLE EVENTS

Writing Exercise: Think of a story that is told in your family about some significant event, or an event that you remember happening in your lifetime.
The Doodle Bug

The flying bomb was known as a Doodle Bug, the precursor to the V2 rocket. They were used towards the end of the Second World War to hammer London into submission. They were nowhere near as fast as the V2s, which were virtually unstoppable. As these bombs were launched from an angle and distance favourable to hit the City, we used to see, or hear, them coming almost daily over Newhaven. The sound they made was terrible. Intimidating. Frightening. I guess they were called Doodle Bugs because they were black and reasonably slow-moving due to their thick casing. They were driven by a jet engine on the top rear of the bomb. Obviously, as long as the power source fired we were safe, so we just stood and watched them pass over. I assume our Fighters were only armed for inter-air combat and did not have armoured piercing bullets, but even at this time I believe some more skilled pilots turned them back out to sea using their wing tips, or - who knows? - maybe this incident made fighter command work out this more reliable strategy?

It was almost mid day. Saturday, so no school. I was playing indoors with my sisters and heard the rolling drumbeat from the south getting louder and louder. It had to be a Doodle Bug. The shuddering growling seemed to be calling, ‘Come and look at me. Look at my power. I represent Germany.’ Mother grabbed my sisters; I just ran out to the back garden. Bob, my friend next door, ran out as well. I reckon half Newhaven was looking up instead of cowering under cover.


Then coughing, spluttering out of the darkness the wounded plane limped toward us, and in the silence somehow I became the pilot. Slowly losing altitude, he side-slipped right over our heads. I saw the young man’s hands and then arms pushing, pulling, his
cockpit’s canopy back. I saw the white flapping of his parachute. Too late. Too low. I felt all of us must have shared his agony. He slumped back, or sat. The plane shuddered, turned one last time, away and down. Spiralling into the marshy fields beyond the river.

Out of this silence came clanging bells and hooters as fire engines and police rushed to the crash site. I was off as fast as I could go and it was only about half a mile away, yet already the police had cordoned off the area. Firemen were in control. Above them all stood the undamaged tail. Upright. Silent. Standing at attention.

‘Get back. Get right back,’ a policeman said. A fireman came from the giant cross. He was carrying an airman’s boot carefully in his right hand. I saw grey wool lining? Padding? Or? I ran for home then, not wanting to see more.

Later I read he was a young lad just out of college, from Scotland. His mother had been buried here in the town cemetery, just under a mile away from where he came down.

You can still see the water-filled hole across from Sainsburys store. Untouched. Silent. In no man’s land.

David Boxall
ON THE BUSES

I have an early start for work – 0700 hrs - but then I must expect this as I’m the new boy at the garage. I’m a bus driver for London Transport and working out of Sutton garage in Surrey.

On my first day I reported well on time, thinking, ‘I’ll soon be up in a cab. At least it will be warm,’ but to my disappointment they had nothing for me so I had to report to Clapham garage where they soon put me to work.

I had to go to the canteen to find a conductor by the name of ‘Zacchaeus Smith-White’ – yes, he was from Jamaica. I asked the first chap I came across, who just gave one hell of a yell: ‘Zac, you’re wanted.’

I introduced myself to Zac.

‘Okay, man. Take a seat. We have plenty of time before we take over.’

We left the garage and walked the short distance to the take over point. Our vehicle arrived five minutes early; the crew had tickets to the Fulham football match and were very eager not to miss the kick off. I climbed up into the cab, adjusted the seat and awaited the first bell of the day. Ding, ding, and we were off.

I was enjoying the day now; driving a bus in South London is an experience I shall always remember. We were heading towards Stockwell when I realised that I had to make a turn to the left and had no idea which one to take. I called Zac round and asked him.

‘It’s no good you asking me, man. I can’t help you. This is my first day out on my own and I’m having a bad time of it back there.’

‘Sorry, Zac. Don’t worry, I’ll take the next one.’

‘Okay, man, let’s get going!’ And he made a beeline back to his passengers.

The next left arrived and as soon as I turned I knew that it was wrong. In front of me was a street full of market traders and
thousands of shoppers. I don’t know who was the most surprised, they or me.

At first the stallholders saw the funny side of it and moved their bags and boxes out of the way. We had gone about fifty yards like this, with every one helping, until we came up to the china stall. The stallholder came out from the back of the stall shouting the unprintable and told me to ****ing back up out of it. I could see his point, but I was not allowed to reverse with passengers on board.

Just then the first tomatoes arrived and landed smack in the centre of the windscreen. There was a great cheer, which was followed by a bombardment of every kind of rotten fruit and veg they could get their hands on.

Poor Zac and the passengers on the lower deck retreated to the upper deck, while I just sat there, not knowing what to do next. I couldn’t see through the windscreen or side window, but I could hear the yelling and laughing.

Then came a knocking at the cab door that I could hear over the noise outside. I gingerly opened the cab window. Much to my relief I saw a Bobby’s helmet. I opened the door.

He said, ‘How did you get into this mess?’ He was laughing his head off so I said, ‘All you have to do is take the wrong turning!’ and we both had a laugh.

‘Well, let’s see if we can get you out of this mess,’ he said smiling.

At this point two London Transport inspectors arrived. One of them was a gold badge and he was in a foul mood and started to have a go at poor old Zac.

I butted in, and said, ‘Hold on there, mate. Don’t have a go at him. It was me that took the wrong turning.’

He was in a mood all right. He took a step back and said, ‘Don’t call me ‘mate’. I happen to be the Area Chief Inspector.’

I just said, ‘So be it.’

Then the policeman said, ‘If you don’t mind, I think the first thing is to get this bus out of here.’

I was back up into the cab when the bad fruit and veg started to rain down again, and I’m very pleased to say the first tomato
hit Gold Badge on the left ear, bringing forth a great cheer from the crowd.

The policeman had been doing his part and managed to get stallholders to move their produce back so that I could proceed, but first I had to clean the windscreen.

One of the women traders came over with a wooden box and said, ‘Here darling, let me give you a bunk-up. You’ve given me the best morning I’ve had in years!’

It wasn’t long before I was back on route. Gold Badge could not be seen, but the other inspector transferred the passengers and said, ‘Report back to the garage. I’m coming with you. I wouldn’t miss this for anything!’

The whole garage turned out to greet us, whistling and shouting. They picked Zac up and carried him shoulder high. I kept out of the way - he was one them.

I made my way back to Sutton, but they had already been told of my day at Clapham. With a great big grin on their faces they all said in harmony, ‘Report to CLAPHAM tomorrow.’

But that’s another story…

Ron Chilvers
How strange life can be when something occurs that alters one's conception of life almost instantly. What was it that led me to try my utmost to help a desperate man from Australia to find his mother?

It all began with a film on television by Barnardo’s, the well-known childcare agency. They showed a film from the past with many of the young children they had cared for in one of their largest village cottage-style homes. Barkingside was famous and in the film some of those former residents visited their childhood village cottage, which naturally brought back many memories for them. This film triggered an enormous worldwide response from others who had been in Barnardo’s care - but also from those who had spent time in the care system with other organisations such as ‘Waifs and Strays’, now known as ‘The Children’s Society’. Barnardo’s were inundated with enquiries, especially from those former child migrants or their descendants who had been sent to Canada, Australia and elsewhere.

Like many others, I wondered if The Children’s Society would have any records about me. I had spent many years in Care including early childhood, and later from ages twelve to eighteen. I was fortunate when I contacted the Society to be told that yes, indeed, they did have records. Eagerly I awaited the day I met a Counsellor who took me through those microfiched documents. This proved to be very traumatic for me but it led to me being asked to help edit a brand new ‘Post Care’ newsletter, a venture that had me quaking inwardly as I had no previous experience of editing anything at all. My involvement with that project brought me into contact with many other care leavers, some of whom used to ring me simply to talk. I started to do research and invested in a computer, which really made such a difference to how one could help people. It is doubtful that without the internet that I could have discovered so much about so many children in care, and especially former child migrants. I was shocked at so much that I learned about the child migrants, and when there was an Australian newsletter printed by the Careleavers of Australia
Network, I registered with them and placed a message in their newsletter with my contact details.

One day I received a cassette recording from one of those former child migrants. Listening to this sixty-year-old man, 'J', had me crying buckets for him. He was desperate to know where his former adoptive mother had been buried and if his natural mother was still alive. I wrote to the childcare agency that had sent him to Australia after he had been placed into their care when his adoptive mother had died when he was eight. I rang around trying to find out about his adoptive mother’s last remains – he had older adoptive brothers and sisters whom I managed to locate, but strangely not one of them seemed to know what had happened to their own mother. After contacting various cemeteries and crematoria it was established where she had been buried. This knowledge helped this poor man a lot. Next item on the agenda was to establish if his real mother was still alive. By this time it was likely that she would be at least eighty years old.

I wonder if any of you have heard of the Child Migrant Trust? There was a social worker named Margaret Humphreys who was contacted by a lady from Australia who wanted to know if her mother was still alive. From that initial enquiry M. Humphrey’s investigated and travelled to Australia and learned about many people who had been sent there as young children. Everything changed: the British government became aware and had to get involved in order to help these migrants. A trust was set up of £3 million, which was to pay for searching for surviving parents, if any, plus a return trip from Australia and two weeks’ accommodation in the UK. There was a timeline of three years for applications from the migrants.

The CMT in Australia had been involved in trying to help ‘J’, but after two years they had not found his real mother. One day he sent me a FAX including letters and certificates and this told me his original birth name. So began my own search. His birth certificate gave his place of birth. Magically this led me to his natural mother’s home. I decided to go and photograph his first home; amazingly it was still there. I took photographs of the school that he used to attend but the next thing that happened was remarkable.
Because nobody was at the house of his birth, we knocked next door and the elderly lady who answered was pure gold dust. She was in her nineties and knew J’s family right back to the nineteen twenties. I had several certificates with the name of grandparents and great-grandparents and this lady remembered them all. She told me so much that confirmed everything and she knew where other relations were living; most were local. She told me that J’s mother was alive although very frail. J’s family was large, and most of his siblings were still alive too. We called at the house of one of his aunts and uncles and as soon as I mentioned J they told me that they had known about him; that they had never seen him since he was handed over by his mother for adoption. They confirmed who his mother was, but of course it all had to be kept quiet until official confirmation of her identity. I looked through the family birth, marriage and death certificates they showed me and they all confirmed that the woman I was searching for was J’s mother.

As I later walked up to his mother’s home, my feelings were of excitement, but also I knew that I could never knock on her door to tell her about her son. It was the hardest thing in the world just to stand outside her home but not be allowed to contact her. I could hear running water and see shadows across the curtains but just had to walk away.

It took the CMT a few months before they would go to the house and speak to his elderly mother, but it was her all right. I had rung J when I found his mother, but he was told off by the CMT because it was they who should have found her. They almost refused to help him, but the day that I went to a local hotel, where J and his wife were staying after flying over and meeting his mother and brothers and sisters, was a wonderful day. At last J knew he had his own family. Sadly he could only come over twice from Australia to see his mother before she died, but he is still in touch with the rest of his family and is a much happier man. If I do nothing else in this life at least I helped unite this man with his family.

Subsequently I became involved with others, and also care leavers in general, with the help of the internet groups where all can talk about their childhood experiences. For those who would
like to know more, I recommend the book ‘Empty Cradles’ by Margaret Humphreys, that tells a little about the child migrant scheme. ‘Forgotten Children’ by David Hill is a story about the migrant children at Fairbridge Farm in Pinjarra, Australia, well worth reading if it is available in this country.

Anonymous
LIFE TRANSFORMATIONS

Writing Exercise: Think about the tests you have faced in your life and how you coped with them. Then write your story as though it was a fairytale, using fairytale language and characters. Try to focus on the big themes of your life rather than on specific details. Or, imagine living in a different historical period – your grandparents’ or your grandchildren’s time. How might your life have been different? Or, write the life you would like to have had. Let your imagination range. This is your chance to fulfill all your fantasies. Have fun.
I met the faerie King of Summer as I was coming home from work one day. He was a winged fairy with a golden complexion. He asked me if I would like to go with him to a heavenly kingdom overseas.

‘Oh yes please. That does sound heavenly.’

The weather where I lived was cold and dull. No sunshine at all. Also the King of Summer was good fun. Or so I thought.

As the thunderstorms cleared, we made our way to Summerland, where life is pretty smart and busy, with market stalls where you can buy lots of cakes. I loved the pipe music - it made me want to sing and dance.

We settled in the heavenly Kingdom, and while out walking one day the King asked me to marry him. I said, ‘That sounds exciting.’ I knew the King of Summer loved me very much.

He whispered in my ear, ‘What’s your answer then? Don’t keep the King waiting!’

I said, ‘Well sir, it’s a faery’s privilege to answer when she is ready!’

A moment passed. ‘Well then?’ the King urged.

‘Yes, Yes!’ I smiled. I was so excited I jumped up and down shouting with glee. He held my hand and said, ‘You truly are my special faery of spring flowers.’

The wedding day came quickly and everybody arrived dressed to perfection. The butterfly-winged faeries were flying around gracefully, showing off their pretty colours. My side of the family arrived. Called the flower faerie family, they were all dressed in different flowers; some of them had tulip dresses on, with golden daisies in their hair. The Queen of Autumn arrived with garlands of glistening berries and leaves that shone in the summer sunshine. The beautiful Queen of Winter arrived too. She wore a snowflake necklace.

The King’s family arrived. They were what I call a meddlesome fairy family: a bit argumentative. You blew caution
to the wind as you could see they were always looking down on you. The King’s brother was a very mischievous creature; he ended up with a green beard and he did not know how to get it back to his real ginger colour. Well that would teach him not to say, ‘I can wish for anything.’ The idea is to say what you want, not what you don’t want.

The guests were arriving. I met Robin, Wren, Raven, Owl, Mice and Hedgehog. They all came to congratulate us and provided cross-country transport for the insects, beetles, bees, dragonflies and butterflies, not forgetting the birds and the bats. Dragonflies and eagles are my favourites: the dragonflies for their beauty and the eagles for their power and coloured wings.

I walked down the aisle in my beautiful snowdrop dress. It was pure white, with green leaves going down the back of the dress, with three snowdrops on my headdress. My bouquet was bluebells and primroses, snowdrops with tulips; the scented blooms smelled delightful.

I thought on our special day the kings and queens and all the faerie people looked beautiful; more beautiful than any mortal person.

Mum was sitting on a toad tool crying; Dad said they were having a wonderful time. Mum said she and Dad would miss me when I went to Summerland.

‘Don’t worry, Mum. I’ll keep in touch by sending faerie letters.’

It was getting late and it was time for the faerie kings and queens to go home to their palaces, castles and exotic crystals halls that glowed with light. They were all still singing and dancing, still enjoying themselves so much they’d forgotten that they lived in beautiful palaces.

Two years went by and we lived happily with our children. We called our daughter the faerie Nymph of Dance, as she just loved to dance with her winged family. She is fair in complexion and beautiful in heart and mind. Our son we called Siren, as he was always singing; his voice could melt away your worries and problems. He was tall dark and handsome.
But even in fairyland, trouble was brewing. The King of Summer became awkward and difficult and darker times came, bringing betrayal and death, but with the help of my fairy helpers I overcame them after many years of struggle.

Time here moves at a different pace from time in the human world. Some of us live for hundreds of years. We have greenish complexions and wear green of all possible shades in order to remain hidden within nature. Faeries can and do bless in the most magical and ironical ways. Some say if mortals squint their eyes they might just see us at the bottom of the garden, blending in with the flowers.

If you do make a wish, you might fly away with the faeries. So be careful what you wish for!

**Maggie Glen**
My name is Peter and I am a pebble. Fortunately or unfortunately I am the only male pebble in my group.

Females are fickle. At times they are all over me and at other times I am totally ignored. Patricia Pebble is the kindest and the most sensitive, so usually the first to think of me. I don’t think she is in love with me but I am not sure. I won’t ask her because I am not in love with her and wouldn’t want to hurt her. Petula is always messing about. She has got her friends, Poppy, Pansy and Penelope together and they have slipped down to the water’s edge where they are sliding under paddling people’s feet and dragging them into the water. I can hear them giggling from here, at the top of the beach.

Patricia and I are sitting near the café, chatting. We were talking about the day a chap fell asleep near the shore line and Wendy Wave was worried he would get burnt in the sun so she washed gently up to cool his feet in an effort to wake him up. The third wash reached right up to his knees before he woke, and by then his shoes were floating on the edge. We helped him retrieve them by gripping on to them and stopping them washing back too far. Not a thank you, though. We were pleased he awoke when he did, because if William Wave had seen what was happening he might have come crashing in, possibly dragging the poor man out for a bit before throwing him back. William can be a bad boy sometimes.

Patricia and I will have to go down to the water’s edge again now as a child has just dropped its ice cream on our heads. The child is crying but we are sticky. Kids can be so clumsy. Oh come on Patricia, let’s get away from this kid. Its parents are buying it another ice cream!

Sheila Roberts
The Camera

My owner was born with sand in her hair and fire in her belly. Her quest for adventure took us some pretty wild places. I’m old now, but still remember the day she found me and changed both our lives forever. True, my previous owner had taken some fine pictures with me for the Mississauga Messenger, but after all I’m a twin lens reflex, Yashica by name and romantic by nature.

I was sitting in the window with a For Sale notice: $20.00, when along she came, straight off the boat, as they say. It was love at first sight. I just knew she had it – that eye for the unusual. Oh yes it’s a gift; anyway as she slung me round her neck I knew that life would take me to exotic destinations.

It wasn’t all a piece of cake, you know. We went to the coldest of places and froze; we went to the hottest, the highest, the wettest, the worst and the best. Being an old manual workhorse, I never let her down: no batteries to fail, no electronics to go wrong, you see. We worked hard, she and me, and recorded some pretty amazing things. Mostly in black and white - her preferred medium - but colour too, where appropriate.

We caught the train to Hudson Bay and visited a gruesome whaling station. That was the worst: Indians were flensing a whale carcass and great sheets of blubber and pools of blood were everywhere. You do seem to find some strange things when you travel: the mink bikini in a closed shop at The Pas, an Inuit with his kayak under his arm stopping the train in the tundra just as you might stop a bus, polar bears at Hudson Bay, wolves at Wa Wa. That one of the fog coming from the frozen lake at forty below, and the old Bailey Bridge and the snow cat just before it plunged through the ice on the lake. Well, that was iconic. I remember her hand sticking to the camera when she pulled her
mitten off to take the picture, and her eyebrows thick with frost from her breath. She would risk anything for that shot.

Do you know we danced under the Northern Lights at Thompson – we both went kind of crazy, I think. Even now my shutter shakes remembering that night. Nothing can do them justice – you just have to be there and enjoy the experience. Blinding majesty. We took a lot of pictures but the best was a self-portrait. She placed me on a rock and went and stood like a penguin in her great Inuit furs, under those lights – great bands of dancing glowing reds and green and yellows illuminating and reflecting the snow. Aurora Borealis is one of our favourites.

Another time we did the deserts; the Namib, the Kalahari, the Sahara, and the Sonora. Good job I didn’t get sand in my works. Sometimes I’d worry about us getting lost but she told me ‘A bushwoman never gets lost,’ and so it was.

After climbing the Sossus Vlei, the highest sand dunes in the world in the Great Namib, I reckoned we could get anywhere. We loved the solitude of these wild places and the spectacular wildlife. One and on we went: the old ghost diamond mining town of Kolmanskop, to Hotazel, and it was Orangemund where we saw more diamonds than you can imagine, including the coloured ‘fancies’ which never get onto the market. On to Okahandja, Omaruru, Otjiwarongo, Grootfontein and into the Etosha Pans – the greatest salt pans and game reserve on earth. To Skeleton Coast and the ghostly shipwrecks marooned far inland in the sands, the seal colony at Cape Cross and many other wonders.

We went to the world’s biggest scrapyard, where tanks from World War II stood majestically alongside all the detritus from the old mine’s workings. They would be preserved forever in that dry climate. We visited the Magkadikadi Pans, the Okavango Swamps in Botswana, the Kalahari Bushmen, and saw every kind of wild animal. Have you ever been up so close to a black mamba you could feel its tongue flick? I didn’t like that at all but like I said she had no fear.
Can you imagine, we got arrested in Nigeria for taking pictures of a so-called military installation. We were on a rickety old wooden bridge looking at the memorial to Mungo Park when a horrible soldier came and knocked my lens cap into the river. He took us away and it was touch and go for a while but he let us go after she protested he had ruined her camera.

Another time in Romania she wanted some pictures of the gypsies and it all got rather nasty, with them drawing a knife on her. They were a picture - not very nice to be sure - with silver teeth and hands like old gnarled tree roots, but with their flowing scarves and gold jewellery quite photogenic. But it was forbidden to take pictures and so they understandably got annoyed. She didn’t know, but she did take risks. I was afraid of being confiscated had we got caught.

We got some stunning pictures of the great green and blue icebergs and whales blowing all around the ship off Newfoundland. Those pictures were in a rather smart travel magazine.

The strangest shot we ever took was driving along in a blizzard and sitting out on the main highway all by itself was a white porcelain toilet bowl. The more you get around the stranger the sights. That sure was weird.

We have photographed famous people too. The Queen looking very pretty – at 86 prettier than ever, and Princess Di who was very jolly and didn’t mind the cameras at all then. Mandela, Blair, Brown, Kinnock, Ustinov, oh lots of them.

It’s all been great fun but I’ve retired now, a relic of the past with lots of wonderful memories.

Jill Hazel
THE PROMOTION

I had been offered a post at £500 pa with the Ministry. It was a very good wage for those days, especially with the men being demobbed.

Some women were willing to give up their work for the returning men-folk but those who no longer had a man in the family were very reluctant to stop. How else, they reasoned, were they to pay the rent and feed and clothe themselves and their children? And then there were those whose men could no longer work; their womenfolk would have to carry on being the breadwinners now. The war had changed many lives and the way that people lived. But this was not my dilemma.

The offer had left me quite stunned. I sat in my tiny office of the sprawling complex that had been built purposely to resemble a small village, staring blindly at the Remington typewriter and neat piles of letters and memos awaiting signature. Dazedly, I dragged my eyes up to the window and gazed at the recently harvested field, bereft of all but half a dozen wheat-sheaves that had been left in apparent random abandonment on the land. I could suddenly relate to the solitude of that field.

Had I not been female I could have made sense of it, but to be offered promotion, and with such a rise in income, over the men in the same department - well, I had certainly not seen that coming. Some of them had been here since the complex had opened in August 1939, and had worked their way up to senior positions. I fell to analysing the whys and wherefores of this surprising turn of events.

Maybe I should have been considering the benefits of promotion: a better lifestyle; maybe a new bicycle or even a motorised one. Maybe slip Mrs Brown a coin or two for the pie that I sometimes found on my doorstep. I wrote it in pencil on my notepad: five hundred pounds. It seemed like a fortune and so much more than the standard rate for a secretary. My reply was required at 9 a.m. the next morning, but I just couldn’t help thinking, ‘Why me?’
It was now that I began to think of the questions that I should have asked. Apparently I would ‘fit in well’, but with what, and with whom? Just what did my knowledge of French and German languages have to do with it? They had been very evasive, just asking if I were happy being an interpreter’s secretary. Had I ever considered travel? Did I have a boyfriend, or someone special in my life? Now why that question? Had I ever thought of moving to one of the cities, London, for example?

Now the war was over it was tempting, but what about jobs there? It did seem odd. Then slowly, oh so very slowly, light dawned in my uncomprehending mind.

I had made my decision. My answer would be on the desk at 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

Jayne Marshall
PARTING REFLECTIONS
FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY

Faith leaps off a cliff and lands on a buttercup.  
Faith turns you back to front. Inside out. Until black is white.

Hope is a dark tunnel with a faint glimmer at the end.  
Hope wants to believe, but has read too many fairy tales.

Charity loves all. Black, white, yellow and green.  
Charity is love. All creation and in between.

Faith encourages birds to leave their nests, 
just to wish me – ‘Good morning’.  
Faith is what you know. Not what you think.

Hope is a goal post that’s forever shifting.  
Hope is the dream of a swallow as it flies South.

Charity is the refuge of those that give.  
Charity is a mirage to those who give what they can afford.

Faith is the baby left on a door step waiting for mother to come.  
Faith lets us sleep at night knowing tomorrow the sun will shine.

Hope is a longing that never materialises. Fantasy for the lazy.  
Hope propels the strong on.

Charity saves the dying. Lifts the sinking. Feeds the hungry.  
Charity loves with overwhelming strength,  
yet is soft as a snow drop.

Faith stops me crying at funerals though it hurts.  
Faith emerges at Baptism. Believes in Eternity.

Hope is the last resort of mankind.  
Hope wants to go to heaven, yet lacks charity.
Charity is not a refuge but an active force.
Love is the King, Queen, Master, Mistress of all creation.

Love is silent. For when did love ever answer a question?
So there is a time for Faith: waiting.
There is a time for Hope: focusing.
But for Love there is always: Eternity.

If I were able to write the perfect poem
I would write nothing.
Sacrifice myself to nothing.
Then would I gain Eternity?

All life is change. We own nothing.
A poem, a story, a fable is dead.
Until you have read it, heard it.
Then, in the passing on, it lives.

David Boxall
WRITER’S EPILOGUE

Though dubious at first,
Like some of my peers,
I accepted the challenge
And searched for ideas.

Having racked my brains; then
I sharpened my pen
And polished the wit –
Though I stumbled a bit.

Having crossed all the ‘t’s
And dotted the ‘i’s,
Now it’s time to descry
With a critical eye
The content and style:
Then flaunt it, or bin it.

If it’s all been worthwhile
Time only will tell. . . .

Reuben Lanham
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