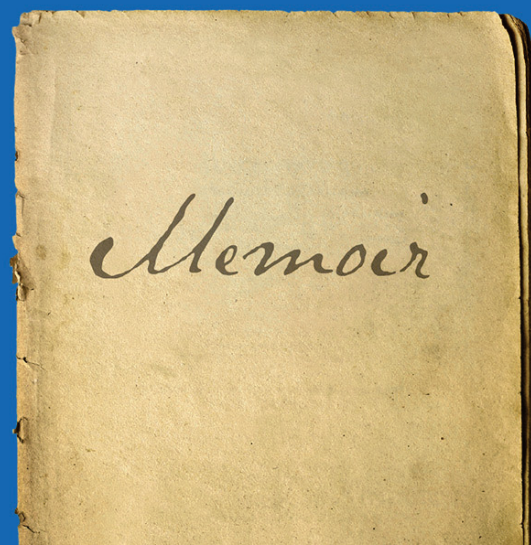


THE BEST OF 25
YEARS OF
**THE SCOTTISH
REVIEW**
ISSUE 1

HOGMANAY
MEMOIRS
PHILOSOPHY



ICS BOOKS



The Best of 25 Years of the Scottish Review

Issue 1

Hogmanay
Memoirs
Philosophy

Edited by
Islay McLeod

ICS Books

To

*Kenneth Roy, founder of the Scottish Review, mentor and friend,
and to all the other contributors who are no longer with us.*

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HOGMANAY

The morning after

Ian Mackenzie

1995

I hate Hogmanay. Aware that this makes me a traitor to my country, I have worked at liking it. But failed. Part of this is facilely attributable to the fact that I am not one of nature's drinkers. I have worked at this, too, in the second part of my life with some diligence, and sometimes thought I might make a reasonable fist of it, but no, I've failed there as well. I was born 21 units of sobriety above par and one learns, as the shades lengthen, to accept these things. My lifelong companion, a periodically restive duodenum, is one factor. After a certain amount of heart-warming he pulls the wire which signals, 'Hey, could you give me a breather from that stuff'. But the real reason is psychological.

Drink, like any drug – LSD, tobacco, religion – manipulates one's emotions, and that I resist. Obviously I'm an insecure fellow who is nervous of losing his feet, specially in public. So I never smoked, and never tried any drugs hard or soft. And though I became religious at an early age – it was the family business – I always went easy on the praying. You can have too much of a good thing, and I found that praying, like drinking, was best done in private, where you can control it, do it your way, enjoy it, and stop as soon as you sense it ceasing to be effective. Does this make me a control freak? I daresay. I prefer to control than be controlled. Is that so weird?

When I started learning to ride a bike, I got happier when I found it was possible not to fall off. The best bit of the New Year is like that for me: the time when the frenzy stops and I am allowed to be me: I just love the morning after. Such a dislocation of an otherwise decently Scots psyche clearly must have its roots in a disturbing experience or three. Shall I relate a couple?

In the beginning was *Le Premier Pied*. Nowadays, of course, beating the parish bounds has lost its bottle in more than one sense. But even when it was still in full flood, I was never committed. The syndrome of dark stranger, hip flask, black bun and chunk of coal was a cult manifested in imagination only. The reality was otherwise, and, as a metabolic lark, not owl, I failed to grasp the attractions of flushed blonde, beer can, egg sandwich and chuck of vomit. I just didn't have the resilience. It all seems a very long time ago.

I was the baby of the family, and in my early teens lay in bed like a holed-up badger as the front door banged open and shut till dawn and the adults roistered in the other rooms. My lovely, now dead, sister and my other lovely, still living, sister were then by general acceptance mega-lovely and, without knowing much about mature gender interfacing, I did register that men with a robust attitude to relationships were not conspicuous by their absence. Later, my London brother-in-law and my elder brother, a

long-term London resident, made the annual Hogmanay pilgrimage to Edinburgh with the desperate commitment of paraplegics to Lourdes, but it wasn't holy water they were after.

And yet it wasn't the drink either, though a degree of sanctioned unbuttoning was reckoned therapeutic enough to justify the 400-mile trip. What they were holy trailing for was the companionship ritual. For the discovery that people could be friends despite being strangers. For the even stranger discovery that people could be friends despite being family. And for the discovery which now sounds strangest of all, that people could be friends without sex. It was the Christmas message of goodwill and peace to all, without the fairy tales; and that is no idle connection to make, for across these several centuries, the New Year was the Scot's Christmas.

We are a sad people. We can be merry, we can be funny, we can celebrate, but, there's no doubt what we really like doing, and that's being sad. So it was in a way natural that while other races welcomed Christmas as the festival for children, we embraced New Year as the time for ghosts: the ghosts of the dead and the ghosts of the absent and the ghosts of the people we would be the next day. New Year it may have been in name, but it was the old year that conjured up the magic. The past was wrung out before the future was rung in, and the overwhelming sense was backward looking, into the abyss of time, an abyss echoing in the hour glass, the glass of Bells and the tolling of the bell.

I was at one time assistant organist at St Giles Cathedral. This was the old St Giles. The very old St Giles. The geriatric St Giles. It was pre-Harry Whitley. It was pre-Gilleasbuig Macmillan. It was pre-BT Scottish Ensemble playing by candlelight. It was the dog-eared, fag-end time of that wily wee rascal, the Very Rev Charles L Warr. Warr, once the pink-cheeked minister of Rosneath on the Clyde, was summoned to the highest pulpit in the land at so early an age that he was known as the Boy Dean. He became not only minister of St Giles (honour enough, you might think, to inherit the mantle of John Knox), but Dean of the Thistle and Chapel Royal, a flunkie-starring role which entitled him to wrap around his vertically-challenged figure the iridescent robes of the Knights of the Thistle, and to become a kind of Scottish fairy godfather to the Royal Family. In his latter years, he cut a mournful figure in his paranoid resistance to the radical ministry which succeeded him, but in the years when as a young music student I played the St Giles organ at services, Warr still presided over a sombrely elegiac liturgy (worshipspeak for God is nice but dead).

And I recall, as if it was yesteryear, one particular Hogmanay. The watchnight service in St Giles was being broadcast live on World Service radio. The psalms, the prayers, the midnight bell, would echo in the ears of Scots exiles across almost every continent. I was playing the organ, and in that role I had to respect Warr's professionalism, his impeccable timing, his imperturbable authority. There was, too, a lyrical melancholy in his prayers that seemed appropriate to the scattering of elderly ladies and pinstriped surgeons and lawyers sitting with bowed heads in the guttering candlelighting while

outside in the High Street heaving crowds shouted cheerful obscenities. In summary, the service was 'chust sublime.' But wrong. Spiritually, it was a goddamn horror.

It wasn't that Warr lacked brains. He was sharp as a ferret. In Edinburgh society sharpness is all, but watch the way you cut. Cut the wood against the grain or the grapefruit the wrong way, and what you get is mess. I seemed at that time in my life to be constantly having my ego spattered by botched Christian grapefruit. I was asked to tea in the New Town by an English preacher who in the course of practising his Baptist arts in Edinburgh had spotted me during a university mission and decided my soul needed saving. I decided equally firmly that whether it did or not, I did not wish it saved by him. After a spiritually abortive tea, this mordant north countryman kept up a flow of Dear Ian letters for months. He kept saying I wasn't taking God seriously. It was thus almost a relief to be asked to tea by the civilised Charles Warr. The location: a dark St Giles manse in the shadowy precincts of that narrow vein of New Town establishment, Northumberland Street. Ruby, Charles Warr's wife, produced an immaculate tea: china teapot, china tea service, silver cutlery, muffins. She poured the tea. It was water. 'My dear,' cried the enthistled dean, 'you forgot the leaves'.

A year later, I was summoned to tea near St Mary's Cathedral (what is it about tea? And what is it about clerical redoubts in the New Town?) by the new Episcopal bishop of Edinburgh, Kenneth Carey. This kindly Englishman was having problems grasping the fact that in Scotland he was bishop of Episcopalians in Edinburgh, not of Edinburgh itself, and this failure of perception was creating strains between him and the equally new minister of St Giles, the turbulent Harry Whitley of Port Glasgow and Partick. In the bishop's tea there were leaves. Also, there was butter on his muffins. But on his tongue there were sharp words. And they cut the wrong way. He tried to suborn me.

The Episcopal bishop, egged on by the reluctantly retiring Charles Warr, had identified me as a spiritual loose cannon and therefore a potential ally of the dangerous Harry Whitley. He tried to charm me into becoming his ally. When it didn't work, the smile faded. 'You're a clever fellow,' he said, 'but to you everything is a joke. You're not taking God seriously'. What he meant was: you're not taking me seriously. What he meant was: you're not sufficiently obedient to bishops. I now realise that what he (like the others) meant was: I'm lonely. But that hardly entitled the bishop to team up with Charles Warr (who retained the Thistleship Dean thingy) in an establishment campaign to undermine Whitley, and if possible, ease him out of St Giles into outer darkness (defined as anywhere west of Corstorphine, south of Colinton, or north of Cramond).

In later years, some of my best friends were baptists, bishops and ministers of St Giles. So I don't think I have an attitude problem. Every basket has its ratio of less than pristine apples and time and circumstance do odd things to all of us. I've indicated that Dr Warr, friend of the royals, and manipulator of the Edinburgh establishment, was by no means all sweetness and light, so that you may be more inclined to accept my testimony that when in the 1950s he presided over that broadcast watchnight Hogmanay service, he

produced a sort of magic. How? Because, despite the disability of creeping liturgical fungus, he did have one thing going for him: he really did believe in ghosts. And because he believed, they came to life. He served shadows, and in symbiotic response, the shadows delivered. That broadcast, like many of his quiet evening services, was insidiously seductive. 'O God our help,' 'O God of Bethel,' 'I to the hills'. The bells. The sad prayers. The dead remembered. The old St Giles regimental flags quivering. Spirits abroad. Tears flowing.

It was whisky with lemonade. It was sex with rubber dolls. It was the heart of darkness in a linen cupboard. It was Glencoe, perceived in a swirling mist by a 19th-century colourist, with a stag, a collie, a waterfall, a bagpiper, and a Bible. If you've been in Glencoe in the right atmospheric conditions, you know that the picture is on the cusp of credibility, give or take a stag or two, but it is still a caricature of the real thing, because like drink and religiosity, it is trying to manipulate you into a response. It's tricking you to take a cheap ticket to nowhere.

It's easy to mock the tartan stereotype. The lonely but and ben at the end of the winding path up the hill by Loch Ness, the pious crofter in his kilt leading in prayer his kenspeckle wife in tartan skirt, the young nephew up from the city, plus (if this is a neo-Buchan novel) his ex-Nazi Youth German friend. The family Bible is opened and read, midnight clunks on the old grandfather clock, Uncle Jim rises to lead the wee group in singing *I to the hills will lift mine eyes*, before a dram is poured into every glass to greet the year turning on its axis in the cycle of time, history and raw unedited faith.

Go on, Mackenzie, mock away! Oh no, I cannot, for that description is not legend or myth, let alone caricature. It's an historic event, set down in very correct detail. I was the student from the city, my friend Gerhardt was the ex-Nazi Youth German theology student whose mother was killed by British bombs on Dusseldorf, and my Uncle Jim was the once atheist manager of an Indian railway who, having lost his wife and only son in a tragic fire in India, pilgrimaged at length back to Scotland to jump off the Euston sleeper at dawn and lift the phone at Aviemore as the train drew breath beneath the Cairngorms. The woman he phoned was my Aunt Margaret, aged 60, spinster since her sweetheart flyer died in the First World War. There and then Jim asked Margaret to marry him. She said yes, they did it, and in their 60s, they began to tame a wild hill by Drumnadrochit, turning scrub, swamp and heather into a productive croft. The once atheist man about India, leaning in his tanned 70s on a shovel or a porridge spoon, had one comment on the cosmos: 'All that matters is God and the soil'.

In my 18th summer I earned my uncle's approbation not by intellect or charm, but by hoeing turnips for three months in extremely straight lines. And here I was, seven years later, on Hogmanay, as, singing to the hills among the hills, he faced backwards into the abyss of India and his lost son while my German friend sang the psalm facing across the Alps to Ruth, his desperately missed fiancée in Switzerland. My Auntie Margaret was seeing the lost boy pilot of her youth, and I was seeing not only my dead father and

grandfather, who had led family prayers when I was small, but the person I had hoped to become in honour of them, and by my mid-20s had signally failed to. Ghosts, all. Time turning on its aching axis. O God, how lovely it was to be so sad! But how welcome the single malt, to dissolve all that and lead, step by step, to a plateau of oblivion.

Well, of these two liturgies, the St Giles one and the Drumnadrochit one, which was the more real? No prizes for guessing. The latter was so vivid that by lightly pressing a memory button I can be there right now, bearing nearly the whole weight of the occasion. For me, at least, the Edinburgh one was claustrophobic, the one on the hill croft liberating; and yet I have to say, both were manipulative. In both cases, emotions were being directed by a strong spiritual ego just as, in the more modest context of Edinburgh tea parties, my clerical hosts had sought to take over and direct my young soul. All of which enables me to understand how perfectly ordinary young people can, on joining a cultic community, lose their mental independence under religious pressure. And my further thought is this, that what Scotland sank into, after the sunburst of Columba and the firestorm of the Reformation, was an ever-squelchier swamp of religious tristesse, a national cult of self-regard, fuelled by nostalgic religiosity, and finding its most focussed expression at Hogmanay. And that's the grand and lofty reason I don't much go for Hogmanay.

Lest, however, I should be judged entirely bereft of positive feelings, let me balance the record by recalling two other New Year rituals.

For 16 years, while I served my time as the gaffer in charge (well that was the story) of BBC Scotland's religious programmes, I was mandated to record a TV lemon at Hogmanay (literally: the head of programmes said, 'Ian, we need a lemon sorbet after the Scotch trifle'). You know the scene – or if you don't, I can't believe you have stayed with me thus far in this story. On TV there was Rikki Fulton. Much commended for his Rev I M Jolly, he didn't, I thought, achieve there his masterwork. (One year, he did. As a Free Kirk minister doing the Epilogue while requiring, with increasing urgency, the loo, he had me on the floor.) His regular splitting of my comic atom occurred when as the motor-biked polis he released his goggles so they could flee back over his helmet. The point was the sheer bloody cheek of it. Year after year, Scotland pilgrimaged *en masse*, not to mass, or any surviving watchnight psalm sandwich but to this ritualistic imploding of icons. Rikki became the anti-icon, the comic saint – and eventually through the ironic cycle of the years an icon himself, a convert to one of the most respectable churches in Scotland.

Next came the TV pain: the Hogmanay party. No comment. And then the nadir: me. A 10-minute monologue recorded in the wee-est studio. No budget. No set. I called it *Prologue*. I was, to put it mildly, aware of the futility of the exercise. At 12.30am, 1am, even 1.30am, who in loud convivial rooms would be listening? Not a lot. So I don't speak to them. I didn't speak to anybody. I spoke, as well as I could, *for* someone: I tried to say, with whatever accuracy I could command, what I believed an intelligent deity might

wish to say. Not charming. Not charismatic. Not authoritative. Not, oh God, please not, manipulative. Just truthful, so far as I could be. To help me to focus, I thought of my Uncle Jim, my Aunt Margaret, and my German friend Gerhardt, on the hill, quiet, alert, bonded in companionship, but each solitary in aching. Then a real surprise: it worked. The many-paged letters that came, year by year, from lonely people in glens, hilltops, farms, townships and city tower blocks who had listened, cogitated, pondered and responded, demonstrated that hidden away in all these nooks and crannies are 'ordinary' people of such depth and brilliance as normally God only knows of; which is why it is such a sin that they are patronised by churchmen, politicians and broadcasters who so profoundly insult them by not understanding the depth of experience in every human life.

'A bird, a legend, a myth.' Keats? Shelley? No, even Shelley didn't get that far. He said, 'Bird thou never wert'. A Celtic morning prayer, then, floating from the mouth of the Abbey and drifting over the Sound to Bunessan in celebration of Iona's blithe spirit? No, the phrase was barked by a French politician behind his desk in a Paris office, in a recent TV documentary about 'Concorde'. Laying on one side a spasm of regret that one wasn't a Frenchman – even Tony Benn, master articulator, and a great fighter for Concorde, doesn't lyricise that concisely – I thought: we've lost this. Except for the *Last Night of the Proms* (or the Glenlivet Fireworks), or a rare good day at Ibrox, or Murrayfield – and ever rarer these are – we no longer admit in public life to what the French call '*la gloire*'. That is, outside the public arts, in music and theatre. And even then, as often as not, we sit on our hands. What's wrong with us?

The spirit is surely a bird. It flies high still, over the Cairngorms, over the Torridon Hills, out over Suilven to the Hebrides. God and the Scots are legends in our lifetime. Axe the Fort William sleeper, go on, we can't stop you. But you won't stop us. My great cousins ran the mailboxes from Garve and Lairg to the far northwest by Loch Maree. My great grandfather, who ran the mail from Achnasheen, refused horses to Queen Victoria on the Sabbath. The Scots spirit will survive in its regenerative melancholy. It is not gratuitously sad. Its silence is sometimes misunderstood. It is at root a pagan sensibility. But to break free from its shadow, it needed the Christ of Columba and the Reformation, which brings me to my last New Year ritual.

Half a century ago. January 1st. The morning after. An empty grey Lothian Road. Nothing stirs but a rat exploring the detritus. Like a city after an attack of nerve gas. For good measure, add a drizzle. In the distance, footsteps. Two figures walking up from Shandwick Place. Another footstep. A figure walking down from Tollcross. Others follow. In quiet confluence the trickle becomes a flood. Two of the people are my Aunt Jean and me. By 12 noon, we have taken over a bulging Usher Hall. Once inside we are a community. No longer walking furtively through deserted streets, guilty that we have no hangover, here we can share our unabashed anticipation of two things. First, the interval consumption of our picnic – mutton pie, sandwich, cake, flask of coffee. Second, that for

which, year after year we have gathered. That which gives meaning at last to all the manipulative mess of the festive season in shop, church, and home.

The long retreating roar of autumn is over. A new year is actually under our feet. Now we're ready. We're open to transparent and unmanipulative beauty: the Messiah.

False dawns

George Chalmers

2011

Hogmanay – a time for jolly japes; time to assist a friend, deep in his cups, onto the last train to anywhere when he should be heading for Edinburgh. Funnier still, forget to phone the pal's wife to mark her card. A wrong time to exit bleary from a station into an alien ice world having left an overcoat on the train. Snowflakes the size of shortbread triangles coalesced into razor-tumbleweed.

'Edinburgh's quiet this year,' I thought. Alcohol wearing off meant half-realities creeping in, unfamiliar buildings swirled as pavements loomed at shifting angles. A lone taxi idled at traffic lights. I approached the driver's window. (The whole sorry tale is not something I've been permitted to forget, so this is it, in a nutcase.)

'Aye son?' asked the man, looking at the two-tone Oxfords. (It was the 80s.)

'Where am ah pal?'

He laughed a long rush of smoke and coughed a while.

'Ah've got 70 quid here – get me tae Edinburgh before the Bells an' it's yours.'

I climbed in the back. The taxi wrapped me in nicotine-stained leatherette – it felt good. It didn't move.

'This is Inverness laddie and almost 10.30 – pm – nothing moves here for days.'

That's why the ticket guy asked for money, I recalled, before a far off land called 'Inverness' registered. 'Inver -fuckin'-ness!' I moaned and sank onto the cool windowsill of self-pity.

'You're not supposed to be here – in Inverness – you want to be – in Edinburgh – perhaps.' A slow delivery that translates as, 'You're chust a daft, lowlander wearing inappropriate footwear'.

He told me he'd finished for the evening but would take me to a 'hesitant' B&B – '£15 a night, clean, fried breakfast'. I opened the back door to be very, very ill. 'Everyone's a critic,' he quipped, like a stable Travis Bickle. 'You need a bed son – I'll take you round.'

Snow enveloped the cab like steam from a vent. We crossed a bridge, turned a street or two and pulled up outside a villa that could've been out on bail, windows glowing warm like a womb with a bar.

The driver spoke to a man who ducked to look in the taxi. 'Help me,' said my face. He guided me to a small back room with a tennis racquet propped in one corner. Moments later he brought a jug of water – I drained it straight off and gave him 50 quid.

He fetched another jug and a cup of sweet tea and placed two gelatine-coated capsules on a chair beside a bed. 'Take one with yir cup o' tea, the other one when you wake up with a bit of a head.' Ignoring his advice I swallowed both and came to shivering

on the 2nd of January, still wearing the suit. The tennis racquet was a stringless banjo.

Ten years or so later, on the eve of '91, me and a co-accused are secreted in greenery at the back of an asylum. Dungavel prison, at that time, was a semi-open nick and felons nearing the end of a long-term sentence could wander (for 30 minutes) around the inner perimeter. On the free side, stretching as far as a bat could see, was an area termed a 'Nature Trail'. During our wait, I spied a greater crested grebe or maybe a drookit doo – hard to tell when you're inside a bush.

The plan was simple; a con allowed outdoors on a placement in the community would collect a cargo stashed earlier by friends. Then, on a signal from us, he would creep close to the fence and throw the bottles over. We would smuggle them past Slow Boab (the security screw that night) and into the dorm in time for lock-up.

At the sound of the secret whistle (from *The Vikings* movie), a Visigoth smeared in woad charged from the undergrowth. He tossed three bottles of spirits over the fence that smashed on the gymnasium roof – then galloped back into the bushes. All was quiet, except for a grebe laughing in the dark.

'Is there anythin' left ya headcase?' asked my buddy. Sounds of carrier bags being searched carry on the still air.

'There's a sliced loaf and a bottle o' Buckie,' whispered the pagan con. 'Jist bring the loaf or you'll get done for rustlin,' sighed my pal, 'we'll toast the Bells in'.

At the death we paid 20 quid, on tick, for a bottle of vodka swung on a line from another dorm. In fact, outside or inside, that was one of the best New Year's parties ever.

Mostly, for long-term prisoners, you're in a single cell, perhaps out of your nut, banging the door with a shoe for five minutes at Big Ben's first bong. It's traditional. Although, by the seventh Hogmanay you just want the banging to stop.

In many ways I blame The Broons and their ilk for perpetuating an idealised notion of a Scottish Hogmanay. Table laden with shortbread, black bun (still don't know what that is) and 'Mad IRA cake', as granny named it. Tidy and still sober, upright Maws and Paws raising a sensible measure to the future.

Was New Year really like that – or did Oor Wullie spike the cordial?

Hogmanay's a pure get-up. 'Next year must be better' – and all that nonsense. Propping ourselves up for the next sucker punch. It's like the last night in prison waiting for liberation; the only time you're actually free. Dawn comes round and there you are – still wearing the suit.

MEMOIRS

Going home?

Ian Jack

1995

Until I was seven I lived with two people who talked about 'going home'. I can remember how they spoke the words with fondness, perhaps even a certain amount of pining. I think they may even – this was more than 40 years ago and a childhood memory is a tricky thing – have used the word 'hame' for home, when they were not among English friends and the language needed no clarification for outsiders. These two people were my mother and father, and they stopped talking about going home when I was seven because in that year, 1952, we all went back to this place called home. As a topic of conversation, as a desire, it had ended. We no longer lived in Lancashire, we lived in Fife. The desire had been satisfied.

Or had it? My parents left Fife in 1930. A world war had intervened. Fife had changed, and as I grew up it went on changing, and slowly the sentiment in my parents' conversation (as it does now sometimes in mine) became more focused on a time in a place rather than simply the place itself. With departed time went departed people: Big Aggie's Man, Auld Jimmy the Blacksmith, Tam the Foreman. And with the departed people had gone a great range of associated places of work and pleasure: Dunfermline's theatre, the Opera House, where my mother and father as a courting couple had seen touring versions of Shakespeare; most of Dunfermline's linen mills, including the one where my parents had worked and met; the trams that stretched out from Dunfermline to Lochgelly and Rosyth; several – though at that time by no means all – of the coal pits. Some disappearances were extreme. Hill O'Beath, the mining village where my mother grew up, had been demolished and replaced with a council estate. Lassodie, another mining village and one that had once housed my great-grandfather's family for a while, had been evacuated around the same time as St Kilda, and almost as completely.

Home then, even in the middle 1950s, was not the place it had been. Nor were we quite precisely in it. In Lancashire, home had meant Scotland. In Scotland, it meant Fife. In Fife, it meant Dunfermline. We had not settled in Dunfermline, however, but in a village six miles away, and even when we went to Dunfermline on the bus, home meant something quite specific again. For my mother, it meant Dickson Street, near the old railway goods yard. For my father, it meant Bothwell Street, just across the road from the linen mill of Erskine Beveridge. My father would point out the spot where as a child before the First World War he had been knocked down by one of Dunfermline's first motor cars (owned by a doctor; my father had the name, but I forget) and broken his leg. That had been a big event at his home – the plaster, the itching, the days off school – and the description of it 50 years later became an interesting event in my home, when my

parents remembered the time and the place and the people that had nurtured them.

I left that home in Fife when I was 18 in 1963 and moved to the first of a series of bed-sitters in Glasgow, a world of metered gas fires and Baby Belling cookers where tins of soup were opened into battered saucepans and the first meal of the day was a cheese roll purchased from the corner dairy on the way to college, or work. This was clearly not home in the domestic sense, even when the bed-sitters became flats, even when (at what seemed then the early age of 22) I began to live with a woman who knew how to roast meat and cook spaghetti bolognese. Glasgow, however, was where I wanted to be. I didn't miss Fife. Even as a child, I had hankered after Glasgow. I was 'daft' (my father's word) about ships. I joined the Clyde River Steamer Club at the age of 13 and when relatives and friends came to see us from the west coast I was always agog for news of refits for the Duchess of Montrose or memories of the Columba. Glasgow also had, if this isn't too grand a word for a few books, a literature, and (unlike Edinburgh) a modern literature: *No Mean City*, *Dancing In The Streets*. Comedians and catchphrases came from there: *Sausages is the boys*.

Glasgow destroyed none of this romance when I went to live in it. As the years went by during the rest of the 1960s, the more I knew the city the more I liked it. It may be that in those years, when I was between the ages of 18 and 25, I would have liked anywhere: first love, first drink, first adult friendships, an ambition to become a journalist realised after several rebuffs, the feeling that life was beginning to shape up. Glasgow, however, was more than just a setting for this process of personal discovery and fulfilment. I was enthusiastic for the place itself, its completeness and variety, the feeling that its streets and territories could be endlessly explored – on foot, or by train, trolley and subway to strange placenames. Yoker, the Necropolis, Dalmarnock, Anniesland, Cowcaddens, Rouken Glen. The surprises in those years came regularly, at two in the morning on the Finnieston ferry, or when the lights came down in the Cosmo and we saw a Japanese film for the first time.

Glasgow offered me a sense of belonging that I had never felt before and perhaps have never quite felt again. When I got a job in London, I left reluctantly. The deputy editor of the newspaper I was leaving, the old Scottish Daily Express in Albion Street, took me to the North British Hotel and bought a bottle of champagne. This was an unprecedented experience for me, but typical of the deputy editor, a vivid and generous man called Clive Sandground who had given me opportunity and enlivened many late nights and early mornings. 'Here's to The Smoke and the Sunday Times,' Clive said. I expressed misgivings. London seemed to me friendless and forbidding. 'Nonsense,' Clive said. 'It's the only place to be in newspapers. Here's to Fleet Street and the Great Wen.' I said I would be back, I'd give it five years. Clive said that by then I'd be living in a nice little mock-Tudor semi in Orpington, which was handy for the late trains from Blackfriars. He quoted Dr Johnson: The man who is tired of London is tired of life.

That was nearly a quarter of a century ago. In the years since, I've often been asked if I

would like to go back and live and work in Scotland. Once or twice, lunch being offered and jobs proposed, I have thought about it. The attractions are obvious: a smaller mortgage, access to better state schools and medicine, a countryside that contains fewer cars and people (though I am tired of those people, often English migrants to Glasgow or Edinburgh, who tell me they 'can be in the Highlands in 45 minutes'). London is not the city it was, no more than Glasgow is. Declining economic fortune has affected both, despite the temporary disguise of money – public in Glasgow's case, private in London's – that was spent in the late 1980s. Still, the satisfactions of a middle-class life can probably be gained more easily in Scotland than the south, and certainly more cheaply. That is an eminently sensible reason to want to live there, but that is not the reason that others ask the questions of me: 'Do you not fancy it? Scotland? Going home?'

In fact I do go home, or what was once home, several times a year. I see my mother, who still lives in the same flat in the same village where I grew up. The furniture I once lived with is still there, the sofa, the pictures, the bookcase and the sideboard. There are rolls still for breakfast, and (if the fish van from Pittenweem has called) fresh haddock done in egg and breadcrumbs with chips and a dash of HP sauce on the side. I suppose this sounds folksy, what the Germans would call *gemütlich*, but if domestic intimacy and domestic memory do not mean 'home' then nothing else does. And yet home in this sense will not last. Most of us (to quote Alan Clark) look like people who buy our own furniture. Outside the world of fiction and guided tours, the 'ancestral home' had vanished as a reality for most people by the end of the 18th century. We move, and with luck we improve. My mother's flat and the flats around it, built by Fife County Council in 1929, are a testament to the last idea, because they gave their original tenants, shifted from slums, their first experience of bathrooms, inside lavatories, gas cooking and electric light.

I like this flat, but when I go there I like to take my mother out. She is 87 now; independent travel is getting more difficult. Often, we drive around Fife and my mother remembers her childhood and youth. Here, somewhere on the road between Crossgates and Aberdour, is the place they stopped walking and danced to an accordion on the way home from the seaside. Here, just off the old North Road, is where they gathered bluebells. Here, on the hill at Hill O'Beath, they had picnics on a Sunday, and here, just down the hill, is the pond where a manager in the Fife Coal Company was ducked in 1921. A lot of the landscape has changed beyond recognition, most of it in the last 30 years. Is that where the Lindsay pit used to be? What became of the kippering works at Burntisland? Motorways and near-motorways smash through a more various past.

Sometimes we reach Kirkcaldy, where my mother was born in a house near the shore, in the days before a bleak concrete promenade was built to shield the town from the sea. Her family left here for Hill O'Beath when she was a child, and when her father exchanged an early career selling Singer sewing machines (he hated wearing a bowler hat) for a labourer's job at the pit. On holidays they would go and stay with her Kirkcaldy

granny, who lived in one of the last houses on the coast road going west and south. My mother remembers that people walking to and from the next settlement, Kinghorn, would often knock on the door and ask for a glass of water. And there is the source of another story. My grandparents, my mother and her brothers and sisters were sitting on the sand one holiday when they overheard the conversation of a Kirkcaldy couple, with its distinctive tight vowels and querulous notes. 'My God,' said my grandfather, who was a Kirkcaldy man and had only moved 10 miles away, 'tae think we used to speak like that'.

He never went back – coincidence rather than accent-hatred – but he never went far away either, apart from his years in Flanders and the Royal Scots. After Hill O'Beath came Dunfermline, and after Dunfermline, Burntisland. There he worked in the shipyard – a riveter's labourer I think – and lived in an old house lit by gas and up an outside stair. When we lived in Lancashire, we sometimes went on holiday there, 'up home' to Scotland and Burntisland's fine beach and the noise of rivet drilling that filled the High Street.

This summer I took my own children there to play on the sand, where they unearthed a great many fag-ends as the rest of us shivered in the wind. The bridges that led underneath the railway, connecting the links to the beach, used to smell of sea and whitewash. Now a whiff of urine hung about them and graffiti covered their walls. I had paid the penalty of going back.

So will I return to live in Scotland? Probably not, but not because the under-bridges in Burntisland stink or the fact that a way of living has gone. Nowhere in the world is immune to these changes, small or large. My reasons have more to do with the larger ideas of home – home as in homeland, home as in sailing up the Clyde to where the old folks bide, home as in it's oh that I'm longing for my ain folk (for they are but couthy, kind and plain folk). In short, home is the idea that because you have been born and raised somewhere, you are naturally inclined to return and live in it, and more fitted to its society than the complete outsider. That idea forms an undercurrent in most nationalism, including Scottish nationalism, and I have to struggle against it, because a part of me grieves when (for example) I try to book a hotel or a holiday cottage on the west coast of Scotland and find that every telephone call has an English accent on the other end. Foolish to grieve, because of all the economic tides that increasingly sweep people around the world, this must be one of the smallest and least interesting. Wrong to grieve, because I do not live there, and also because nationalism outside its strictly political context and aspiration – the other stuff, what one might call spiritual nationalism – seems to me an absurdly simple construction and categorisation of the human character.

More and more lives are being remade by the social and geographic journey between classes, between country and city, between nations and continents. There is for these lives, much less than in mine, no question of 'going home'. They adjust, in the famous

phrase of V S Naipaul, to the enigma of arrival. It may sometimes be a painful condition, but it exists in the present and should concern us more. London is where I live. Home is the house and the family that I return to every night. All that may change, but for the moment other homes are history and fantasy.

Not many cuddles

Ena Lamont Stewart

1995

Although I was born in Glasgow, my earliest recollections are of the Manse of Oa, Islay. It was there that I became aware that I was Ena, Beana, Biddy, and, horror of horrors, Ina-May which was papa's name for me.

Ina is often pronounced Ena; this is an adaptation of male Scottish names. If one Ina is introduced to another Ina, one – if not both – will quickly say 'Ha ha! What are you hiding?' There's Angusina, Davina, Donaldina, Hughina *ad infinitum*. My papa's name was Murdoch, so I was christened (in February 1912) Murdina in St Columba's Church, Glasgow, where papa was minister.

I suspect it was my big sister Kitty who did away with Ina-May, and called me Ena. She had for years been hiding Katy-Belle, which, she vowed, sounded like the name you might give to a favourite cow. Murdina didn't sound like a cow; it just didn't sound like *me*. It now survives solely on the pale, yellow book I slide across Prestwick Post Office counter once a week.

Incidentally, I have only once met another Murdina outside the pages of a book. She was a cross-eyed servant. The Scottish Highlands, I suspect, will be the last bastion of male dominance.

As I say, my earliest memory is of the Manse of Oa. David, the youngest of my brothers, would be getting on for five, and already aware of his male superiority. We were in a long, narrow room off the kitchen, intended for a maid. The walls had been prepared for papering, and papa had just come back from Port Ellen on his bicycle – five miles or so from Oa, with a load that contained a box of watercolour paints for David, complete with brushes. A supply of papa's sermon paper was rushed in and David set to work with a look that said: 'Ha ha! I've got something *you* haven't got!'

When I demanded to know why I had not got paints, papa gave me a gentle sigh and foolishly tried to fob me off with the painter's colour card. The difference between colours that could, when laid on with a loaded brush, become a bright red box-like house with brown smoke coming from a squint chimney, and a mere piece of coloured card, was an unbelievable insult. I let out my first remembered scream of rage and scorn.

But, of course, papa had brought something for me. My present was a little brown cardboard case with a handle and two locks that clicked when opened and shut. I trotted happily about the manse with my little bag containing all my treasures, and politely asked God to look after them while I slept.

Outside the window of this room there was a fuchsia bush. I called it 'the dancing ladies tree'; I have loved fuchsia ever since. I remember children running noisily through

the house, climbing in and out of this window; I was too small to climb out of windows; I couldn't run like they could. I was always left, far behind, wailing: 'Wait for me! Wait for me!'

We went for walks. The older ones took me along with them (reluctantly, I dare say) to give mama a rest. We walked past a stretch of peat water, black and possibly dangerous; David told me that if I fell in there I would never, ever get out. I would be pulled down and down until there was nothing to be seen of me but a little bit of hair. I believed every word of whatever David said. He knew *everything*. This black, black water carried little white, fluttering flames, as if they were real candles; but they carried them nowhere. *So what?* a modern child would say; but I held on to things that puzzled me, and those candle-flames are still vivid and menacing. We passed ditches bright with pink flowers that were called *ragged robin*.

Another memory: I was sitting on the hearth-rug before the cosy, crackling fire. I was wearing my best white frilly frock, enchanted by pictures in a new story-book. Suddenly I became aware of a huge pair of feet in highly-polished black shoes. I saw socks and trouser-legs; up, up, up went my eyes until I got to a face I had never seen before; this giant had a collar just like the one papa wore. I let out a scream of terror and fled to mama who was busy as usual preparing food for hungry men. Comforting cuddles were rare: they made a child *soft*. This Victorian dictum deprived me when still very young of the feeling that I was loved. I pressed my kisses on the china cheeks of my dolls.

I sat on papa's knees a lot. He sang to me in Gaelic. Mama would say, 'Oh, leave papa in peace!' Papa would rebuke her. She wasn't pleased. Was she jealous, I wonder?

Mama was always busy; when she sat down it wasn't to relax. She took up her knitting; the needles flashed as she listened happily while papa read to her from the *British Weekly* or the *Glasgow Herald*, stopping now and again to raise his eyes to the ceiling and say 'St.st.st.st.st! *Scandalous!* Shocking!' Papa was a man of infinite patience with children, but not, I think, with something called *parliament* – whatever that could be.

I didn't like sitting on men's knees. (Nobody thought to tell me that in time, that would change). I particularly disliked clerical knees, but mama would frown and shake her head.

I was a very timid child. This was a time when the word 'love' was seldom heard except from the pulpit. Strange, because they deeply loved one another and their children.

In general, my memories are happy; but fear loomed large for me, a nervous, highly-strung child. There were the turkeys at a nearby house owned by an old man called Sinclair. It was by no means a farm, but they owned what we called turkey gobblers. It wasn't what they gobbled; it was the noise they made as they walked about the yard, talking to themselves.

When we boarded the steamer to take us back to Glasgow the older members of the family went steerage; mama, papa, David and I went cabin. Oh, how I loved that big,

pink room with its pink curtains edged with little bobbles and the pink seats. Against one wall there was a neat writing-desk. I didn't know it was a *real* desk until David lifted the lid and showed me writing paper you could draw on if only mama would let you. 'And *that*,' he pointed, 'is an ink well. You dip your pen in it and write. *You* can't write yet, but *I* can'.

But mama, ever watchful, summoned us back with a quiet but severe, 'Don't touch!' When mama smiled she was quite a different mama; two dimples appeared, one in each cheek. One of the boys – I don't remember which one – told me that mama's dimples were little holes made by mice bites when she was asleep. And, of course, I believed him.

My very earliest memory of Islay, I think, was being put to bed in the schoolhouse. I was popped in under a down quilt, blue with small white flowers. This turned out to be the school-mistress's house. The manse was by no means ready to receive us. I think we stayed in the schoolhouse while the manse was being made habitable. But that's another story.

Everyone's playing away

Donny O'Rourke

1995

It's a Glasgow Saturday in November. I'm at home and so are Celtic. Except we're not: the hoops are at Hampden and this bhoys as existentially cosy as a maraschino cherry in a pint of heavy, My home address is in the west end but I have box numbers of the soul all over the place and somewhere farther and dimmer I can't remember how to get back to.

In the meantime there's a wide-windowed, high-ceilinged tenement flat with more rooms in it than I need, decorated in the colours of my moods. The paintings I've picked lower from the bare plaster walls, books and CDs teeter in cairns raised up to the memory of simpler, less all-consuming times. This morning it's Poulenc, followed by Miceal O'Domhail. San Francisco. Paris. Donegal. The restless sound track of my solipsism until there's only the carburettor surf of Woodlands and Great Western Roads, rushing to and from, to buy things for home.

The irises I bought gangle in their Venetian vase, Yves Klein blue and satiny, celery crisp from the shop, lambent in the yellow morning autumn's rustled up. I could sally, but bide. Baby boomer. Back to the womber. Typical Cancerian. Domestic animal. Perfect timing microwaver. Sunday supplement recipe saver. Home loving type. Comfortable, obviously.

Sure, if all we're talking about's surroundings, the dog's canny circlings in readiness for sleep, turning off the lights in rooms that are yours. But what if it's an internal matter? And what if inside there's an echoing emptiness insusceptible to interior decoration?

Home for me was essentially my parents; and since they are dead, and because perhaps they died within a short space of time and not so very long ago (or so, three years on, it seems), I can't go home, or feel at home, even in a figurative sense. My brothers and sisters and I cleared out their little council house and someone else now lives there. Over our heads are roofs more comfortable than mum and dad could have imagined, but without wishing to sound precious or to diminish by wordplay the predicament of those who must swaddle themselves in cardboard or sell magazines just to keep warm and dry, I am adrift in spirit, exiled, banished, *homeless*.

I was born at home, on 5 July 1959 in Port Glasgow – the first weekend of the 'Fair' when that still mattered, when people still worked. It's Sunday now and my home town is in the *Independent* with a photograph and all. In fact, the picture was taken very near my exact place of birth. The snap's well up to the *Indie*'s usual high standard – a bricked-up Fort Apache style corner shop in Woodhall whose demoralised owner is considering going back to Birmingham, so persistently and violently larcenous are the hopped up

locals. The 'Gates of India' wasn't there when I was born up the hill from Woodhall, in Broadfield. This bucolic name for a 'scheme' of post-war tenements was reinforced by a colour scheme which would have looked dandy in Los Angeles or Nice, but in its sorbet-shaded jauntiness, seemed ill at ease in the Clydeside rain.

As was my mother, who had come to the mainland from Ballymena, and who wanted to out a mile or 12 of river between her husband's family and herself. It's easier to be close if you're distant, she'd say, and smile. So, since it suited my father to be nearer his work at the Royal Ordnance Factory, we moved the three of us when I was months old to Bishopton, a village of no particular character but green and serene and a treat to grow up in. So how come it isn't home?

Sentiment partly. I did after all bawl my first on the lower Clyde. It was there that my father grew up, served his time in the yards. Port Glasgow afforded the lore and yore that he so vividly recycled in his stories. And what stories. Born into the last generation to see Clydeside at full tilt, I needed to claim that birthright. Besides dad never really left, pouring over the *Greenock Telegraph* and taking me to see Morton in the halcyon 60s of Arentoft, Jensen, Sorensen – Hal Stewart's longship full of Vikings. Soon I was seeking kinship with W S Graham, Alan Sharp, Peter McDougall, Bill Bryden, James Thompson and other local writers. To Portonians, their town is distinct from, and superior to, the bigger burgh that abuts it. Venture furth of there, of course, and Greenock, the Port, and Glasgow 'proper' all meld into a drizzled, drenched, sectarian, wise-cracking Clydeside composite. It doesn't exist. But it's one of the places I'm from.

Being 'from' Bishopton wasn't an option. There's not a thing there solid enough to bear the weight of the preposition – a hoeing, mowing, grand to be bland, half-pint, semi-detached, pebbledashed, excellent local schools, kind of place. Compost to grow kids in. I loved it.

Especially the Scouts. Originally dad wanted me to join in the hope that British Bulldogs would make me less of a solitary bookworming mummy's boy. Mummy thought her boy got quite enough Catholic indoctrination at school and so was happy to see me become a non-denominational Cub in Bishopton rather than attend the St James Renfrew Catholic Cubs. It changed my life. The first middle-class people I ever met, I encountered there. I learned to cook. I travelled even (eventually) overseas. And I slept in tents.

These canvas homes from home strengthened my growing conviction that a Scotsman's home isn't his castle or indeed anything tangible at all. Through my boyhood's seasons, I was a Black of Greenock's Bedouin guy, ropes taut, centre pole erect (oo er Akela!).

In a deeper, darker connection, Louis MacNeice described himself and the people of Northern Ireland as being 'Nomads who have lost our tent'. I'd hoped to be counted in that diaspora and counted twice; as a Leitrim O'Rourke and again by way of my mother's people in County Antrim. I align myself and not only after whisky (or Whiskey

Bushmills for preference) with the Irish 'Scots' who were the first to settle and later convert 'Scotland'. Sentiment again, I know. But my mother's 'Ulster' was to the wee Scottish boy she bore and reared, proudly and precisely home with a mythologising and romantic force even more potent than my father's 'Clydeside'. Port Glasgow was tangible and proximate. Red buses took me to the tail of the bank two or three times a week. Dad's home place is smirry in my memory. It was grey and wet then. In my sun-haloed *Tir nan Og* (which I didn't visit until my 20s for fear, I fear of disillusionment) the Glens of Antrim glinted always.

Although I recognise some of this 'Irishness' for the crass and craven broth of boyery that it doubtless is, I remain as rootedly from over there as I am from over here. Intricately and I hope not naively so, however. My mother's father was a Protestant Quigg. Their Ireland (and mine) is no Catholic country impure and simple. Still the doctrine of *Ne Temere* meant that my mother was brought up in 'the one true faith' and she raised me in like fashion. Rome famously needs just seven years to make a child for life (and eternity). I am as identifiably a member of my tribe as any Arapahoe was of his. I am pleased to see Rangers beaten. I grue at Orange walks. Would that Calvinism had failed in trying to wipe that smile off Scotland's face. And yet I loathe bigotry, despair of the Pope's complacent authoritarianism, wish (devoutly) for an end to segregated schooling. My faith is residual, emotional, fitfully practised. But acknowledging my fondness for sacred music and rituals; for incense and nonsense; for candle-lit certainties ticked off on beads – another Home in Rome in part, and sometimes, at least.

You don't have to be Jean Baudrillard to jalousie that the world as complexly apprehended at the century's end is unlikely to permit the construction of a single, simple identity. Our idea of home won't fit onto a doormat any longer. The lights may well be on but there's nobody there. E T's forgotten the number. Everyone's playing away.

Setting aside metaphysics for a nano-second, people do of course leave home in the ordinary way. I did, twice I suppose, first, at 17, to go to university in Glasgow and live in a flat there (in the same close, one down, as the flat I live in now and have these last nine years); and the second time, after university, to move to London. I was running the British Youth Council and living in various bits of East and then, more contentedly, North London. The year I spent in the last of those flats – a handsome townhouse in Crouch End – was one of the happiest of my life largely because my flat mates Pete and Hugh were sweet, generous chaps and natural co-habitees (in a non-sexual way). It was agreeably and emphatically 'home'. And when I was offered a job at London Weekend Television, it was only finally my mother's ill-health that decided me to take the other job in prospect at BBC Scotland in Glasgow. Ach, and I think the desire to come back and do my bit, however paltry. Anyhow it was a highly conscious, not to say self-conscious, avowal of what, and where, home was.

Wednesday

We're cruising at three thousand feet. That's Donegal Bay down there. That'd be Sligo if you had binoculars and no cloud and weren't busy with the Jameson's and this article which is patience-tryingly late and intractable. Appropriate right enough mind to be flying to New York, Aer Lingus at that, hundreds of vapour trail miles from, but perfectly at, home.

The roll call of passengers reads like my primary school football team – McMahon, Callaghan, O'Connor, Lynch – the separated sons and daughters of Erin in a Renfrewshire town. Do I belong more securely at Dublin Airport than in Glasgow because everyone has a name like mine? Those who live where I'm going love it there but never think of belonging. That they reserve for Gdansk or Ballyboffin or Emilia Romagna. Up here and in-between, neither here, nor there, I can shuffle passports real and imagined, slip on identities with my in flight bootees. What would have happened if dad had lit out for New York like he briefly once intended. Or if mum had nursed in Belfast instead of taking the boat for London. (Her whole family came with her after her father died, made their home first in Stepney, following Mum from her next post from Whitechapel to the Port). They disappear, the ancestors, just four generations back, or do if you're working class. How did dad's side end up in Greenock? Come up short for the passage from Derry to Manhattan? *Choose* Scotland like those earlier Gaels? Home could otherwise have been a walk up on the Bowery. Wasn't Diamond Dan O'Rourke's the saloon that hit the spot right up until the 50s? Where did that other Dan call home? Which is what it comes down to, that choice of who to be and where to come from beyond and in addition to what your passport proclaims.

'There is no passport to this country/It exists as a quality of the language.' When I chose that as the informing rubric for an anthology of work by young Scots poets I was editing, W N Herbert's lines were given extra work to do. Which they did stoically enough. I'd rather Scotland had her exit visa from the Union, the dignity of her own parliament, mature status as a European republic, friend to, not lackey of, England. Growing up in a stateless nation leaves one in a state, so to speak, worked up and let down by history and its panoply. Not fully at home.

Above the Atlantic, with home (or homes) now a smudge of horizon to the East, Scotland's easier to see (in transit and – Jameson's – *veritas*). Is it a great place to come from but not to stay in? Could the nation's demographic destiny be that one of the Hebrides writ large? The point of Bishopton in my own upbringing was to enable one to grow up and away. No Cartesian objectivity enters into my feelings about what I cannot with a straight face call my native land. It's just home and contains much that is odious, much I am missing already. When I long, as I often do, in the midst of some enervating task to be on a terrace in Antibes (how middle class and middle aged these fantasies become) or sipping anchor steam ale in San Francisco, I know that I could leave but never forsake, a place I'd have to return to, come *home* to.

Another Saturday. Celtic are away. I'm at home, back from New York. Unwillingly. Longing to be back *there* with a tremor in my tripe that's deceptively like homesickness for a city no-one calls home. Solitary, self-sufficient, adaptable, educated into softened, classless discourse with one small shrewdly packed bag and the right cards and currency. I can unpack and amuse myself most places I reckon. Fit right in. Make myself at home. It's because we expect so little, have trained our hearts to travel light, have been everywhere (or *virtually* everywhere) without spilling the merest drop of cocoa, that any old place will do. For a time. At the century's doup end, amidst our millenarian malaise, people long to belong, to go and at last be welcomed, home.

Certainly home for my brothers and sisters is the family they each bring up. Maureen's three girls, Stephen's two boys – more substantial emotional dwellings than mine. There's only so much you can do with Chinese rugs and pot pourri. Dan O'Nan, homebody and loner. That round black damson of a stone on the scuffed Arts and Crafts table there, I harvested from a sunset-flushed beach in Tiree. And I was at home there in that moment and mood as ever I have been anywhere.

All the ghosts

Donald Macleod

1995

Seven times this past year I've booked the ferry, packed the car, pushed the hopeless correspondence into the drawer and headed for Lewis. It's expensive, time-consuming and hazardous (sheep in Lochalsh and police patrols on the A9). Eventually, after six hours' driving and two hours' sailing, one arrives: sometimes to the accompaniment of rain, sometimes to the accompaniment of wind, and usually to the accompaniment of both. Part of me knows that the average winter temperature in the Hebrides is higher than that of London. But part of me also knows that the smart answer to the question 'Does it always rain here?' is 'No! Sometimes it snows!'

In a curious way one has already reached before one arrives. In the ferry queues you are conscious of being among your own people. The impression is even stronger once you board. Not all the talking, sadly, is in Gaelic, but the English itself has Gaelic rhythms and intonations. The physiognomies strike you as reassuringly Hebridean. The crew are reminiscent of the well-known sailors of youth and many of the passengers are vaguely familiar (although you cannot be sure whether it's Somebody's daughter or Somebody herself).

Disembarking carries the process a stage further. Tension ebbs away as you realise that if you broke down now it wouldn't matter because you are no longer in enemy territory (generally known as 'Away'). Friendly help would soon be at hand; and if the worst came to the worst, you could walk. Even in the dark, you would be safe.

And at last, journey's end. Parents, long keeping vigil at the window, rush to the door. For the moment, you don't bother with the luggage. That can wait. It's time for greetings; time to walk round the house and see what's changed; time to check that Muirneag, Broad Bay and the church at Back (five or six miles across the moor) are still where they used to be; time to breathe the air (every place has its own air and every Lewis village its own peat smoke); and time to listen to the silence.

Feelings? I'm home. I have crossed from Eastern Europe to West, landed at Dover from Calais and flown into Prestwick from New York. But none of these can match arriving at Tarbert from Skye. The predominant feeling, I suppose, is confidence. Here is an environment I understand. I know where the road leads to. I know the distance to the hills. I know where the bogs are. I know which lochs are free and which are 'watched' by bailiffs. I know the people; or, at least, I knew their parents, and without too much trouble I could identify who they came from. I could predict their reactions because (do I flatter myself here?) I share their assumptions. I live by their rules and understand their aspirations. They would not allow me to move beyond them,

forgetting who I am ('Donald, son of Donald, the son of Murdo, the son of the Piper').

And beneath it all, something deeper, as if at this place (and nowhere else on earth) I can say, 'I have a right to be here!' A right? 'Yes, because I'm from here.' I'm from this ground, and one day I shall return to it. The centre of the universe, the only place I can really handle, is a spot outside the cellar-door at the back of my father's house.

But there is something else. The Gaels call it *cianalas*: a homesickness for an irrecoverable past. Home is a time as well as a place. I am old enough and dented enough to know the futility of the death wish. We cannot go back to the womb or escape into the idyllic support systems of childhood. But does time have to change everything? It is all very well to talk of the durability of this ancient landscape, gouged out of Lewisian gneiss. But as a child (in those days before technology had annihilated distance) I knew its every inch. The end of the world was only as far as I could walk before teatime. In the circumstances, you got to know the world very well. Every clump of rushes was a landmark.

Now, after 40 years, I return only to see the treachery of the landscape. The clay-hole is no more. The pitch is a bog. The green is overrun with heather. The wells are filled in and the ditches where we sailed our boats have left not a trace of their existence. Even the little, tarry braes on the road (our childhood ice rinks) are no more. And the fences. In 1950, every croft and garden, to be sure, had its fence. But in-between you could sledge and wander and play cricket or football. Today, thanks to some European grant, even the vacant ground is enclosed. The children never sledge and sport never happens (except on television). It is easier to find a playground in Drumchapel than in Laxdale.

But there is a deeper *cianalas*. You expect death to work its ravages anywhere over 40 years. Here is no exception. My father and his whole generation of over-worked and under-paid veterans of war have gone. Not one lived to be 80. My brother, Angus, too, is gone, a victim of alcoholism at the age of 28. Young Calum Murdo died in Glasgow; Murdo next door even younger; and Willie, a brilliant footballer, drowned in Malta. All that, I suppose, is natural, and to be expected. What devastates is the total lack of continuity. Not only have the old gone; their children have gone. There's literally no-one here who was here 40 years ago; not Jeannie, nor her son, Mondy; not Paddy, nor his daughter Jane Anne; not Peggy from the Gorbals nor one of her six children. No-one. The village is still full and the houses still occupied. But they're not 'from here'. I couldn't visit them.

I feel it equally keenly when I think of school. In those pre-comprehensive days final-year pupils consisted only of those aspiring to higher education. In my year there were some 80 or 90 of us; and we were all being educated for emigration. Three of us, I know, are still in Lewis. Jessie is in Paris, Magga in Alberta and Bobby in Sri Lanka. The rest of us are sprinkled in between. Our children will not be 'from here'.

There is an exclusiveness, then. I think I know what I'm looking for, but I cannot catch it. The landscape mocks me. The neighbours are ghosts, as if they'd been there

before the people I knew, and come back after they'd left. The companionships of youth have been sundered and even though they're alive and well I shall never speak again to Deedo or Norrie or Peevie or Agnes or Catriona. They've left my time and my place and if I saw them today I should feel shy and awkward because I would never have met them before. I met only what they used to be.

There is still the religion, of course. The level of church attendance remains higher than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. The clergy, of all denominations, are well known to me. The folk in the pew are, many of them, my friends. The liturgy is unaltered and the cadences of the Gaelic prayers and the cascades of Gaelic psalmody still touch me as nothing else can. The latter, indeed, is an art-form without liturgical parallel, the underlying melody so embellished that there may be as many as 16 grace-notes on a single syllable. The precentor, by the variations he introduces in putting out the line, can express and affect emotion in a way that no instrument ever could. And, within the discipline of the melody, each singer enjoys a remarkable freedom. In the very act of singing, she becomes a composer. No slave singing her old spirituals, and no modern Pentecostal singing her choruses, ever sang with more spontaneity than the Highland woman lost in the wonders of her Psalter. Yet she is not only expressing her own mood. She is contributing to a harmony so deep and complex as to tempt you to listen rather than participate. The result is baffling. How can 1,000 people, no two of them on the same note at the same time, produce a melody which un-mans me?

Why, then, do I no longer feel at home? A religious movement, like any energy system, is subject to entropy. The charismatic gives way to the professional; the personal to the institutional; the evangelistic to the administrative; spontaneity to formalism. The only way this can be halted is by 'revival': the constant imparting of new energy and new enthusiasm. This is precisely what kept religion in Lewis alive. Every so often, there came a sudden transfusion of new disciples. Twenty years have passed since the last such transfusion and the old, unpredictable vitality is giving way to a new, regimented Moderatism. The orthodoxy is still there; and the discipline; and the psalmody. But not the gaiety or the laughter or the other-worldliness or the bonding.

There is a marked change, too, in the sociology of the church. Today, it is for those who can afford fashionable Sunday clothes. In my youth it was a church of the poor. The upwardly mobile never wanted to be part of it. Its leading men were crofters and fishermen, usually of little, and sometimes of no, education. I have little memory of the clergy. To a child they were irrelevant. What I remember is the Men: veterans of the Great War and of the Second War, who came, twice a year, to the Communion Services in Stornoway and passed a night (or nights) in our home. Preparations were made for them as if they were royalty (which they were).

What I remember most vividly is the cutlery. We children had to polish it, including the fish-knives and the butter-knives. I still look back in wonder. Men who usually ate fish with their fingers and wouldn't have known a fish-knife from a paper-knife were

given five-star treatment. And they were worth it: men with bright, twinkling eyes who had come to enjoy themselves in a controlled orgy of laughter, camaraderie and theological discussion. They had no education. One (my favourite) was illiterate. But when they prayed or spoke in public (as was expected of them) they did so with confidence and elegance. There was no hesitating search for the right word. Instead, there was such fluency and such exalted sentiment as would have disgraced neither a theologian nor a poet. Today, there is vastly more education and professionalism, but less talent. An oral culture has been overwhelmed by a literary one and the mental energy that used to go into religious meditation and the honing of aphorisms now goes into designing kitchens and choosing cars. I am myself, of course, part of that syndrome of decadence.

But maybe I avoid the real reason for feeling ill at ease. Here, at home, and at the very centre of the home, is where I sense the most profound rejection. Why? At first it was a matter of style. I refused to wear clerical dress because I believed that the emergence of a special priestly caste is the greatest calamity ever to befall Christianity. Then it became a matter of heresy. Now, as a Prodigal who went off to a theological Far Country, home affords me no welcome.

And the discovery is only part of a deeper disillusionment which has brought me to the threshold of concluding that all the lies told about Calvinism are true. Lewis itself still reflects a Calvinism which has Christ for its centre and love for its heartbeat, but it is under increasing pressure from something which was never there in my youth; a neo-Puritanism totally devoid of social conscience, more reminiscent of the Inquisition than of Jesus, obsessed with purifying the church (whatever the human cost) and congenitally uncomfortable in the presence of good news. Am I suddenly waking up to discover that for 30 years I have belonged to a movement that burns witches?

But enough of the melancholy! I go home with anticipation, and because I love to. I long to see my mother, prisoner of her Parkinson's and almost unreachable behind her deafness. Already, she is almost as elusive as her ancestors. But she still has a living smile; and she still has the preoccupation of the poor. When I last saw her, two months ago, she recalled her first journey to Stornoway. The year was 1916, and she was four. Her mother had recently died, her father was 'in the war' and the wider family were fully stretched coping with two other children. She was temporarily fostered to a relatively well-off couple in Stornoway. She well remembers the 30-mile journey over rough roads in the back of the postman's lorry. But she remembers more vividly still the first words she heard from her new parent: 'Doesn't she smell of smoke!' It was a long, long journey from a blackhouse in Ness to a but 'n' ben in Stornoway.

And I long for the fishing. Let me say at once that I am a very incomplete angler. I have never mastered the art of fly-fishing. The purist may be horrified by my crudity, but I hasten to assure him that the fish are in much greater danger from his fly than from my worm. Rumour has it that time stands still in the Western Isles; and slander has it that

we have no word with the urgency of the Spanish *manana*, beloved of Latin Americans when they wish to defer an action to 'later'. I cannot pronounce on such issues. All I know is that when you stand at a loch, watching a bubble-float and catching nothing, time becomes compressed. You cast, you watch and suddenly it's midnight.

If I'm fortunate, someone will take me to the Shiants, three miles south of Tarbert (Harris) to fish for lithe; or to Bayble, where we can chase the herring. But my deepest urge (how much longer can I control it?) is to organise a poach-in. I want to go to a river owned by a London syndicate (the Grimersta would do nicely), taking with me Calum MacDonald, MP, Brian Wilson, MP, Nicholas Fairbairn, MP, the Convenor of Comhairle nan Eilean, the Free Presbyterian minister of Stornoway and a TV crew containing at least Anna Ford and Peter Snow (on second thoughts, no, not him. He would be good as a grouse-beater but no use at the fishing). We should fish in broad daylight, the bailiffs would come and we would all be imprisoned (except the Free Presbyterian minister, a former friend of the Lord Chancellor). I would die of claustrophobia, the whole world would be heart-broken and the UN would pass a resolution repealing all anti-poaching laws.

And I shall go to Ness at the Butt of Lewis, the place of my birth and the place which contains the bones of my forebears. I shall go, partly, to see my uncle, and to play, through him, the part I should have played in the Russian convoys. But the land itself, totally different from the rest of Lewis, is the strongest pull. There is real soil (*machair*), a long history of intense cultivation and a topography reminiscent of Buchan and Aberdeenshire. At the Butt itself, the Atlantic breakers meet the currents of the Pentland Firth and the land takes a fearful battering. Ominous gaps open up in the fragile earth and at any moment huge chunks of my native island may collapse into the Atlantic cauldron. Above me towers the lighthouse. It is no higher than any other, but I still see it through the eyes of a little boy who has never looked at anything higher than a telegraph pole. Nearby stand two greenhouses, just to prove they can do it.

A little to the south is Traigh Shannaidh, the beach of my summer holidays, where we used to watch, terrified, as my grandfather moved among the rocks, further and further among the breakers, in search of whelks and limpets. On a summer's day, it could be the Bahamas. Any other day, even in summer, it is simply awesome. In-between the rocks lie the swimming pools of my father's generation (one youngster is reputed to have refused to venture, protesting that if he drowned his father would kill him).

I don't know why I find it all so elemental. Those I've tried to share it with don't find it that way at all. It's partly the link with a past from which I am separated not merely by 50 years but by a chasm of a vanished civilisation. But it's also the sense of infinitude. To the imagination, the beach stretches as far as the eye can see. The sea keeps rolling in, the murmur of the waves is incessant and there is nothing between me and Newfoundland. I am very small.

I clamber back up the sand-dunes. The *machair* is only 20 feet above the sea, but I can

see almost the whole parish: a broad, four-mile sweep, the houses packed together on the skyline of what is said to be the most densely populated rural area in Europe. I come, inevitably, to the cemeteries: the old, where my grandparents and great-grandparents lie; the new, where we buried my father and where he buried my sister. Here, almost every headstone is a face (and a story). Until recently, I thought, 'This is where I want to wait until the final home-call!' It's a grand place to lie and a grand place to rise (provided I can hear the trumpet above the noise of the sea). But now I am not so sure. I'm not even sure it matters. Is home where one belongs? Or where one is accepted? But that doesn't matter either. Lewis? Morningside? They're only ante-rooms.

Top boys

Roderick Macdonald

1995

The Second World War changed many things. Among these was Fettes. David Bryce's Chateau-au-Loire still intimidates the landscape high over Comely Bank. Gargoyles may have dived, but the red railings, painted as we thought with leftovers from the Forth Bridge, still march defiantly round the splendid arboretum and playing fields. I, a pre-war relic, peering through the wrong end of the telescope, can see my old school as it once was – Sparta, redolent of linament and rugby football, suspended in a time-warp between two World Wars, and not a cloud on the horizon. Judging by Robert Bruce Lockhart, Ian Fleming's model for James Bond, nothing had changed since 1900.

The building influenced the school. The same could not be said of the uniform. Sixty years ago a stranger, negotiating Stockbridge on a Sunday morning, might have been surprised to run into a convention of funeral directors (youth section) advancing in loose order – lum hats aslant, claw-hammer coats flying, with brollies in various degrees of furl, decrepitude and lethal posture. Here and there, dusty trousers indicated prefects' studies had already been cleaned. Jolly as if homeward bound from a funeral, Fettesians in all shapes and sizes were returning from the Rev 'Tombstone's' kirk of St Stephen. 'Piskies' went to Holy Trinity across the Dean Bridge. There were no Catholics, no Free Presbyterians, no Muslims, no Buddhists, no foreigners – and no girls.

Individual birds in a skein of wild geese change place yet maintain order and hierarchical precedence for reasons not obvious to the casual observer. Adolescents, who so recently behaved not too differently from Richmal Crompton's *Outlaws*, had been transmuted willy nilly into 'men' – Fettes style. Like the geese, they now conformed instinctively to a variety of rules of behaviour, precedence and social contact. Unwritten, together with associated jargon, this took a week for fledglings to absorb.

A taboo on mixing with others of a different age dictated pecking order. Surnames were de rigueur. Ahead strode elders and betters – swans not geese. The nearly 19-year-old extrovert head of Glencorse, reputedly the most philistine of the six boarding houses, would return later that day from exeat at the last minute, double declutching his shagged-out Fraser Nash in a shower of College gravel in a turn that would have impressed a Neapolitan taxi driver. Of the others, one was about to commission his artistic fag to paint a '45 rebel complete with claymore for his girlfriend. Another, his reputation enhanced by having picked up a tart in Jermyn Street SW1, was planning to coach 'volunteers' for the dreaded boxing competition. The fourth, built like a tank and an unlikely looking poet, worried about the house junior rugger XV, his baby. They ignored the riff-raff that followed in descending order of importance.

Along the pavements of soot black (pre-Clean Air Bill) Stockbridge, a top hat proclaimed snob, but generated no comment, being a weekly spectacle. In other venues the uniform (its ultimate demise Hitler's single contribution to civilisation) triggered reaction ranging from astonishment to abuse – returned with interest subject to parity in numbers. Unlike the Blue Coat School, passage of time had deprived the Fettes Sunday outfit of any glamour that it presumably enjoyed in the eyes of founding fathers. The hat did have one advantage. It could accommodate three eggs to scramble surreptitiously on the study fire. What quantity of beta blockers, LSD, cannabis or Temazepam can be concealed in a top hat is now only of hypothetical interest, but the veto placed on an organic pre-battery hen's egg suggests more innocent times. On meeting a superior, lifting one's hat clearly called for considerable legerdemain to avoid doubly egg-on-face.

To be caught smoking earned the cane. But, apart from the discomfort of lying on backs to puff up chimneys, the habit was not fashionable due to the Fettes fetish of fitness at all cost. We knew that smoking was bad for 'training' – like whisky and masturbation (tut, tut) or an excessive diet of tuckshop tinned cream and Mars bars.

Among this raggle taggle a group of six or seven followed well astern. 'Old hands' now with a year at Glencorse, they had been promoted to educate new arrivals in the important skills of beating carpets, cleaning rugger boots, cricket pads, Cadet Corps uniforms, and other arcane duties on behalf of house prefects. Reward was an end-of-term feast, the 'Fags Groise', funded by prefects after which several 'new men' would show their appreciation by being sick. Central heating did not figure among the delights of an Edinburgh winter. A fag rapidly learned how to light his prefect's coal fire with three sticks for kindling. Failure was supposed to earn a beating. Nobody failed in this now probably lost art.

Beating by cane on the bottom was a punishment applied by prefects, supposedly by permission of the housemaster, who ran affairs with a loose rein. It hurt; was in the main fair; and was certainly a deterrent, which provided prefects with authority to control bolshie or noisy juniors. 'Flogging' was considered more acceptable by the recipient than having to write 'lines'. These were labour-intensive and time-consuming. Besides, special paper had to be bought from the bursar's office. Once when, called upon to provide hot buttered toast at the rush, I failed to observe that the commodity kept by the houseman in Coopers Oxford marmalade jars was actually soft soap. The consequence was quick and well deserved.

The school was in effect an exclusive club, which confidently provided fairly top people in the professions, civil service, industry, and administrators in far off places, the Scottish XV, and now and again a promising politician. He would have sharpened his oratory in the school debating society, usually advocating a motion with which he disagreed. Empire and Commonwealth dominated the world – or so we thought. The curriculum was determined by the Scottish leaving certificate, yet curiously the Highland Clearances did not figure, while the Tolpuddle Martyrs did. The Boer War was the end of history in spite of Sarajevo and Archduke Ferdinand.

A Fettesians' background was not often smart or luxurious. Massive school fees could indicate either a comfortably off family or much scrape and hold back by hard-pressed parents. Scholarships were there for the exceptionally clever; bursaries for those described as 'victims of innocent misfortune' – interpreted often with some irony as sons of the manse, and their winners (but not scholars) housed separately. This segregation was a mistake, giving rise to the unkind nickname, 'free feeder', fortunately rarely heard after the first year. Even though most of us would know how to wield a fish knife, this equipment was not available at table.

It was an egalitarian community. No-one cared a hoot about caste, status or what each other's fathers did, or did not do, for a living. For instance the boys already mentioned totted up a farmer; a miller; a Scots law lord; a doctor; a retired industrialist, who had played rugby for Scotland; a struggling cotton broker based in Egypt; and mine whose Scottish company grew rubber, tea and coffee in Java and elsewhere. My parents travelled back every three years – the passage one way (before air travel) taking five weeks. Many others were similarly placed. Our fathers and uncles had fought in the First World War and our mothers had nursed. They did not talk about it.

Attitudes to working class and the very poor varied with individual experience, but was not a subject we discussed. I had happily worked as a farm boy in the holidays from the age of nine; fed with the hands and knew how to shift muck. The poverty-stricken tenements to which we sold skimmed milk were appalling. At Glencorse, a shilling pocket money (approximately £1, today's prices) was doled out personally by the housemaster each week. A contemporary whose sad school clothes resembled cast-offs I later discovered to be a millionaire, having followed in his father's footsteps.

The teaching staff seemed strangely aloof outwith their classrooms and specialised subjects. With a few remarkable exceptions they did not appear to exert much personal influence, or even want to. The housemaster of Carrington was an exception. A bachelor, immensely tall, covered from top to toe in an astrakhan collared overcoat, a character with style and humour, yet he failed to interest his pupils in physics, of which he himself was an acknowledged master, unless they happened to be born scientists. Absorbed in the history of his subject rather than its future, his laboratory resembled, with its antique equipment and stained brown panelling, a provincial museum – which indeed it was. Too clever by half to inspire the run-of-mill pupil, the boys daydreamed disillusioned in the back row. His chemistry colleague had no redeeming features and bad breath, which created a scramble for the back row.

Unlike science, classics dominated teaching. The headmaster, an England rugby international and DSO, taught the classical sixth. Fair and kind, it was surprising that with all his other duties he seemed to know who everybody was. The quality of teaching on the classical side attracted the cleverest boys. Results spoke for themselves. But one unwritten rule affected school and athlete alike. Success in anything must seem effortless. It was a gaffe to be seen to be actually trying. This affectation induced ingenious

camouflage along the lines of the proverbial paddling duck. That the Fettes emblem is an active bee, and the motto *Industria*, added a nice touch of irony to a scholastic institution where, unless a pupil was the recipient of a school bursary, attention in class was largely optional. Apart from classics, few masters were inspirational. They filled the trough. It was not their business to make the contents attractive – nor to prepare a pupil for his career. Like most boys, we were idle and only worked at what interested us without much thought of tomorrow.

Insouciance was linked to the importance of modesty in success, a posture carried to Vestal Virginal extremes to avoid what was called 'side' – the ultimate sin of showing off. These beliefs may well have put a cap on high achievement. They were scarcely a preparation for a competitive world. The rugby XV, accustomed to take on senior Edinburgh club A teams, and considered to be one of the best in Scotland, discovered that it was only second class when it came up against a school touring side from Australia.

It might seem to a stranger that it was the senior 'men' who ruled, and not the teaching staff. The captain of rugger picked the three school XVs. He assessed every boy's capability and placed him in the appropriate games. He refereed and nominated referees. He coached juniors and had little time for anything else, even work. On the other hand, it was useful experience in administration and leadership.

For some inexplicable reason, although most boys were Scots, Anglo-Scots, or Northern Irish, the masters were English with a sprinkling from Wales and Ireland. There was indeed one Scot, a raw boned young-old, somewhat serious, but kindly academic, who knew how to put across not only classics, but rugby and English. Freddy Macdonald (no relation) epitomised the best of Fettes. His unworldliness – inevitably subject to schoolboy jest – was forgiven not only because he could thrash the much younger rector of Edinburgh Academy at Fives, or was it squash? Boys treated masters politely, and occasionally even with respect, but each kept the other at arm's length. Teacher's pets were a rarity. One form master was upset not by many Scots accents but by indifferent elocution. Shibboleths were displayed. A jook list recorded those who pronounced words such as dew, duly, duty or duke as if spelled with J.

Senior boys were role models approaching deity, their perceived perfection protected by segregation – except in games and work where capability, not age, determined position. Some became mature students in lower forms. Such a topsy turvy arrangement should have been doomed to failure or ridden with crises. That it worked may have been because all the players – headmaster, masters, prefects, 'dooks' (senior boys but not prefects), fags, even employees – were willing actors in a remarkable example of real-life theatre featuring an endless serial comedy of which Aristophanes might have boasted.

A paradox existed. Ethos demanded conformity, but not clones. Each individual had freedom to write his own script and play the part, provided he kept within the scenario and guidelines established by preceding generations. These were controlled by age,

pecking order and individual capability. To show open enthusiasm was as bad as to try too hard – except for spectators on the touchline. Fettes was undoubtedly Top School in our eyes. It was 'not on' to criticise it outwith the red railings. Conversely, when within, it was considered ultra fashionable to decry everything. We certainly did – the food, the discomfort (this with perverse pride), the teaching, even the performance of the rugger XV and so on. This was no ordinary grumble. Criticism was expected to be larded with wit, while intolerance of each other's many foibles was assumed. There were no thought police or narks. Aldous Huxley – his *Brave New World* then a popular read – would not have thought the set up authoritarian. Saki would have been delighted.

This was an inbred community. Television was unborn. There was no access to cinema. Marconi might not have existed because wireless sets were forbidden. Brave boys built and installed secret crystal apparatus within hollowed-out books – useful training for future spies and POWs. The Glencorse housemaster, a roly poly unmarried senior wrangler, owned no radio and his media input consisted of the Daily Mail sports page. To allow the house to hear Edward VIII's abdication speech – for 24 hours we were either Roundheads or Cavaliers – followed later by Chamberlain's 'Peace in our time', the temporary loan of a boy's illegal equipment was negotiated. Such a matrix bred eccentricity – perhaps its safety valve. In later years, I came across similar, albeit missionary-adjusted, taboos among jungle tribes in Borneo. No wonder Rajah Brooke was such a success.

Just like a Sarawak long house, there was no privacy at Fettes – no locks on any doors, whether of studies or lavatories. Showers were public. Individual cubicles in dormitories were open-ended. This literally 'open door' policy made it impossible to get up to something (if anyone had wanted to), not consistent with what was considered acceptable form. In this, Fettes departed from Sparta. Buggery, which was supposed to be fashionable at Eton, was a non-starter. Segregation of age groups played its part. Spare time was filled by sport or extra-mural activity. Those not selected for an organised game went automatically on a road run whatever the weather. Classroom work began at 7.30am after a cold shower and before breakfast and chapel. The headmaster of my prep school in Moffat had alerted us to 'danger ahead' by reading aloud the pathetic trial of Oscar Wilde and his *Ballad of Reading Gaol*. An 'unnatural' offence at Fettes would have led to a short conversation in the headmaster's study swiftly followed by taxi with luggage to the station.

Two members of staff were suspect on this score because of favouritism shown to good-looking boys. In the heated swimming pool everyone, including masters, swam in the 'all together'. Frequent attendance of a myopic but fully dressed housemaster, taking a special interest in pretty, small boys, known in school jargon as 'cupids', inevitably inspired ribald jokes. One day, on entering his classroom, the poor man found it necessary to turn a blind eye towards a decorative Renaissance print, on which a wag to our delight had clothed every little winged putti with its own paper nappy. The general

distraction this created allowed me to draw undetected a picture of Edinburgh on the modishly high collar of the occupant of the desk in front – prophetic, as the owner was a Festival director to be.

Bullying is sometimes linked with homosexuality. Discounting a flick with a wet towel, wielded by a 'dook' to discourage a junior from sauntering through his changing room, I can recollect no bullying at Fettes. This may surprise some because it differs from the supposed practice at many public schools.

Drama, music and art, together with those so gifted, were respected. Here individual staff did play a significant part. The thriving dramatic society bred its own boy 'actresses'. An agile, but macho, scrum-half would, with grease paint, wig and two judiciously inserted grapefruit, blossom into a bouncy Restoration trollop. Accompanied by the ambitious school orchestra in a homespun operetta, a young Canadian, voice as yet unbroken, sang a comic but upbeat Eurydice to an equally homespun Orpheus from another house. Real life lovelies did not exist. Female school employees were clearly vetted with a view to safety rather than pulchritude. A busty wee lass was once, through an oversight, employed as a house laundry maid. She lasted one day, creating a traffic jam for button replacement. Unclad lady pin-ups such as today's page three did not exist. Erotic literature except in French was rare. This is the reason why, although few Fettesians spoke French fluently, all could sight-read *La Vie Parisienne*. Only one housemaster was married. Most junior staff were bachelors, and the head's elegant wife was seen once a year only – on founders' day wearing gloves up to her elbows, but not for washing-up.

The OTC (Cadet Corps) was, except for the well-tutored pipe band, not taken too seriously. A teenage *Dad's Army* practised parade drill with Lee Enfield rifles which were never fired. Machine guns were represented by a red flag and a wooden rattle. Some masters, too old to be called up even for the war before, appeared in extraordinary uniforms. Others were well-known pacifists. The gifted music master, with the object of demonstrating the importance of rhythm, once required everybody in turn to beat on the seat of a chair any tune and he would identify it. My choice was *Rule Britannia*. I had just completed two bars when there was an explosion. 'Never again,' he shouted, 'do I want to hear that disgusting Jingo in my classroom'. This was at the time of Munich and well before the Henry Wood proms. By contrast, the long-suffering art master, whom I knew to be pacifist, went out of his way to drive me to South Queensferry so that I should see the visiting Home Fleet at anchor.

Domestic politics did not cut any ice, though it was rumoured that behind drawn curtains in college a Marxist cell – almost certainly budding merchant bankers and stockbrokers – had mutilated an effigy of the headmaster to the sound of *The Red Flag* on a wind-up gramophone. International current affairs, in which we were all for obvious personal reasons concerned, attracted no staff guidance – not even Jean Brodie style. If the staff had thoughts on the Spanish Civil War or the storm gathering round

Czechoslovakia they kept these to themselves. No outside lecturer was engaged to illuminate.

We boys read Sunday papers bought on the way back from church. Leaders in the broadsheets seemed as confused as politicians' speeches – except, of course, for Churchill who was 'not to be trusted' according to a friend's important legal father. A long letter that reached me from a 13-year-old German boy, who had been a neighbour in Java, couched in too perfect English, I left unanswered. It was propaganda on behalf of the Hitler Jugend – 'Oh, what a fantastic leader is Herr H'. The *Oban Times* appealed for homes for German Jewish refugee children. Mussolini beat up unarmed Abyssinians – and claimed he made Italian trains run on time. Telegraph poles everywhere were plastered with pamphlets calling on British to disarm – 'Trust the League of Nations and sanctions'. Most of us knew that war would be rough. We felt it inevitable.

My diary entry for 28 September 1938 records that 'Chamberlain seemed absolutely done – the break in his voice hardly an orator's trick'; while Hitler's latest broadcast was 'a hoarse and guttural scream interspersed with cheer leader's Heils'. I mention that the school had started to dig air raid shelters – resembling First World War trenches – illustrated by a photograph from the *Evening Despatch*; and 'in the wrong place – so vulnerable to a collapse of the main building'. I grumble that by giving the shifts to the (inefficient) OTC to organise instead of the captain of rugger (me) every game was disrupted. Reflecting on the Parliamentary news, I remarked that 'the Opposition, notably the advanced (sic) Labour wing, who a few years ago were chastising the Government into a frenzy of disarmament, are now complaining at the inefficiency of our war administration, the inadequacy of the Air Force and the unpreparedness of the Royal Navy – and are drawing up a vote of censure in the House concerning the Government's policy of Peace at Practically any Price'.

The OTC together with other Edinburgh schools travelled at the end of the summer term to the annual camp at Elie by train. On embarking, kilted and in immaculate khaki, brass buttons shining and fares paid, there was noticeably, what is nowadays called, a negative reaction to the unexpectedly derelict and dirty carriages provided by the London & North Eastern Railway Company. All was quiet till the train slowed down to cross the Forth Bridge. As usual, some rolls of lavatory paper were lobbed at a passing merchant ship below. Then, suddenly and spontaneously, without organisation or ringleader, the train was noisily vandalised from one end to the other. Blinds, cushions, lavatory seats, notice boards and lamp shades went whistling out through the passing girders. Boys climbed onto the roof and buffers. Kilts were removed and waved at scandalised old ladies on Inverkeithing station platform. Every school was involved. Apart from a route march by way of punishment, there was no reaction from school, the law, press or railway company to what was, we knew, low grade behaviour. Perhaps the railway company accepted a proportion of blame.

During the Coronation Royal visit to Edinburgh, the Fettes contingent lined one side

of George Street and marched down Princes Street led by the pipe band. During this proud performance, a wee girl lifted my kilt up to see what I had on underneath, which was the regulation nothing. Later at the moment critique, just as we marched past the King and Queen at Holyrood, to our dismay a front rank piper's ornamental horse hair sporran fell off. The two young princesses, visibly enchanted, clapped. It had made their day.

Boy, nervously entering housemaster's study. 'Sir, I sent for the Navy exam syllabus and some former question papers on maths. I cannot answer any of them. Could I have some extra tuition, please?'

Senior wrangler, waving aside syllabus and questions, draws a perfect parabola with ink on a clean sheet of foolscap. 'There now, this is how you calculate the track of a missile in space allowing for the effect of gravity. Just a few easy figures. We can leave air pressure till later.'

Boy spends two holidays at well known Edinburgh crammer, living in digs; learns essential answers to maths, science and physics; also how to palais glide from landlady's butch daughter; much vicarious entertainment enjoyed at all-in wrestling establishment down Leith Walk.

Auld Reekie was firmly out of bounds. Unless his family lived there, Fettesians knew not Edinburgh, nor did Edinburgh know Fettes. Yet classical cribs and a Chinese restaurant were sometimes surreptitiously sampled in Chambers Street – excuse: a visit to the dentist. The first XV lost its privilege of wearing light-coloured trousers through being caught after an away match sampling beer in Rose Street, reputedly a red light district. Seniors were required to wear dinner jackets to see a third-rate *Macbeth* in the Theatre Royal. The Caledonian Railway Hotel offered the best end-of-term breakfast.

Of the boys referred to earlier, two with whom I shared a study were killed in the first year of the Second World War – one in the RAF and the other sunk in an armed merchant cruiser. Of three brothers, two died in action in different regiments, one having won an MC. The third was severely wounded. The head of house, a fighter ace, died in action as a squadron leader with a DSO and DFC. The Fettes war memorial records 118 killed in the Second World War, including one of the best young masters. The school only numbered 275.

Postscript

When invited to speak at Fettes on Founders' Day in 1980, I suggested that one way to improve an already good school would be to correct a deficiency that existed in my day. Why not introduce girls? 'Funny you should say that,' the headmaster remarked afterwards, 'we have just been discussing this at a governors' meeting'. I visited Fettes the other day. I could see for myself that I had for once been right.

The Unbowed head

Peter Murphy

1995

'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive – but to be young was very Heaven!' With that rallying cry, I addressed my new staff when we opened Whitfield High as a purpose-built comprehensive for (what was then, in 1976) a gigantic housing estate of 15,000 people on the north-east periphery of Dundee.

Establishing a school in an area which had already earned nationwide notoriety for its crime rate and social and economic deprivation demanded a degree of commitment, zeal and self-belief on the part of the teaching staff – and the 'Headie' in particular.

After all, just two years before, had not R F MacKenzie lost his job as headteacher of Summerhill Academy in Aberdeen, because he had ostensibly failed to cope with the pressures which overwhelmed him in a similar kind of school? Over the six-year period he was in charge of it, a combination of staff discord and mounting concern about discipline caused such a public outcry that his sacking became just a matter of time.

I was principal teacher of English at Summerhill Academy under MacKenzie from 1968 to 1971, and came to know the man well and to appreciate what he stood for. It is fair to say that I learned more in professional terms about what *not* to do as a headteacher while I was there. He was obviously driven by deeply-held convictions which did not allow him to compromise in a crisis. He had an almost sentimental regard for the sanctity of children which often made him over-react in defence of a child when it came to a straight choice between backing the teacher's version of an incident or the child's. He was in many ways *not* the ideal person to be in charge of a 1,000-strong comprehensive school serving Mastrick, a large Aberdeen council estate, in the late 60s/early 70s, when comprehensive education had yet to prove itself and was still regarded with some suspicion as 'new' and 'experimental'.

For one thing, he made it quite clear that he did not believe in corporal punishment or the exam system, although he had said to the education committee which appointed him that he would not allow these convictions to prevent him conforming to the needs of the day-to-day running of the school. However, in practice, he failed to take his staff along with him when he made fundamental changes – the ending of corporal punishment for girls was imposed without consultation – and the result was a serious weakening of staff support for his actions which ultimately led to the staff dividing into two rival camps: for him, against him.

I had the advantage of starting a school with a clean sheet where I could, after consultation, map out our course and the principles upon which we would base our view of education. MacKenzie took over a going concern and failed to manage it so that at

least some of his views could be put into practice at the expense of compromising on others for the sake of peace and harmony.

MacKenzie, therefore, was not an easy man to work for. It sorely tested your personal views on education and indeed your very soul to teach under the same roof. As someone said – you couldn't *not* react to MacKenzie. You either felt empowered by him as he sought through thick and thin to aspire to an ideal, or you felt infuriated and exasperated by his obstinacy, by his apparent lack of decisiveness in a crisis, and by his inability to enforce order and discipline.

To this day, I do not know how I would have sided in the open conflict which eventually broke out between the two rival factions in the school staff, a conflict which came to a head between 1972 and 1974. As it was, I left in 1971 before the final breakdown in staff relations which was vividly chronicled in MacKenzie's book, *The Unbowed Head*, published two years after he was suspended from duty by Aberdeen education committee.

In the opinion of many classroom teachers who worked at Summerhill and, I have no doubt, in the opinion of many parents whose children attended the school, MacKenzie was a villain. They saw him (as most of the general public probably did) as the man who was fundamentally responsible for the chaotic events which engulfed the school and brought unnecessary controversy and unwelcome media coverage to canny, provincial Aberdeen. But to the loyal faction which supported him, he was absolutely a hero for remaining true to his principles, the loss of his job being the ultimate sacrifice.

Where, then, lies the truth?

We were all far too close to events to be sure of MacKenzie's stature at the time. He had come to Summerhill in 1968 already well-known as a reformer and a rebel. His previous work had been in a small junior secondary school where as headteacher in the unique environment of such schools, experiment was possible. He had broadened the curriculum to incorporate a great deal of outdoor education and had made significant strides towards ending corporal punishment. He had also published four books on the theme of liberalising education by taking to task the Scottish preoccupation with the exam system and the need for corporal punishment.

In his preface to MacKenzie's final book, *A Search for Scotland*, published in 1989, two years after the author's death, Professor T C Smout is right to say that it was too early, even at that stage, to begin to assess MacKenzie's place in Scottish educational history or the impact of his ideas on how we educate our children. But now, as the end of the millennium edges nearer, a proper appraisal of his stature as an educational thinker, his impact on Scottish education, and his influence as a writer on Scottish identity, seems to me of considerable importance in the context of the political decisions facing Scotland.

MacKenzie's radicalism had its roots in the restless search for truth which marks all his writing – going back to the early 30s when he and a friend, Hunter Diack, spent the first six months after graduating from Aberdeen University touring Europe on bicycles,

living off a diet of oatmeal and such fruit as they could lay their hands on, and bashing out an account of their adventures on an old Remington typewriter they lugged around with them. A book, *Road Fortune*, was published in 1935 which contains important archive material about the young men's impressions of Fascist Italy and Hitler's Germany between the wars.

He derived great inspiration during this early period from H G Wells' *Outline of History* (1925), which encapsulated for him in global terms the rise and fall of civilisations and encouraged him to take a panoramic view of history, to acquire a feel for the presence of the past as a key to understanding the present and future. He began, accordingly, to question the established order and to form his own radical view of culture and civilisation. The legacy of H G Wells was central to his radicalism: not to accept the established order, but to question it and see if it stood up to what it claimed to be.

When MacKenzie qualified as a teacher in 1946 (after he was demobbed from the RAF), he taught English at Galashiels Academy before he was appointed as principal teacher in English at Templehall Junior Secondary School, Kirkcaldy, and then headteacher at Braehead School, Buckhaven in 1957. More and more, during this period of his career, he felt out of sympathy with the ethos of Scottish education. To him, it was fatally flawed. Instead of placing the child at the centre, it had as its driving force the dictates of the exam system, closely allied to the control of pupils by the use of corporal punishment. Pupils had to submit to a curriculum which compelled them to cram for exams, within a regime which made them docile and submissive for fear of the belt.

MacKenzie began during the 60s to put together an alternative path for Scottish education, drawing on his world view of history and on the inspiration of other educational reformers such as A S Neill. His books, *A Question of Living*, *Escape from the Classroom*, *The Sins of the Children*, and *State School*, are eloquent testimonies to this new approach. In them, he urges us to concentrate on teaching our children in an atmosphere free from fear and guilt. We must resist our subconscious, Calvinistic prejudices which prevent us from regarding children as essentially good and give children what they need from us most as adults – our love and affection. To do this, we must liberalise and set free our education system.

'Much of the present curriculum will disappear. There will be more activity, less listening. Schools will get a chain of bothies throughout the Highlands and based on some house or shooting lodge, will explore their own country, learning its geology, natural history, and historical background, so that they can take a lively and understanding part in shaping its future. They will build boats and sail them. They will take part in gliding, the classroom providing them with the background of the theory of flight, map-reading and weather study which they will use in the air... The school will be much more part of the community... The boys will work for a week in local industry so that they can know about the job, and that would be an advantage both for those who might one day work there, and those who will go on to university... There will be far

more travel abroad, not just to see the sights but so they can understand how you look at life if your father is a Burgundy wine-grower or a Swedish lumberman... The prefect system will be replaced by an elected school council where pupils of all abilities will meet to discuss and solve the problems of how a large number of people can get on well together.'

Sadly, MacKenzie's dreams of a cultural revolution, sparked off by his vision for Scottish education, came to an abrupt end with the loss of his job at Summerhill in 1974 – the great experiment ended in personal ignominy. And yet (we did not see it at the time as we were too close to events), 'It was not the beginning of the end... but the end of the beginning'. The loss of his job and the circumstances surrounding it triggered a lot of publicity about him and what he stood for (even in the popular press). The Open University did a series on MacKenzie's views on the curriculum which also brought him to the notice of a wider public and his book, *The Unbowed Head*, was widely read and still is. He continued campaigning in retirement and was widely sought by the press, radio and television for his opinions on educational matters.

Above all, he knew, by the end of his life, that all he had left to say about this land he knew so well and loved so much had been bequeathed to posterity in his final book, *A Search for Scotland*. This is a complex book which not only passionately analyses the near-terminal decline of the Scottish nation in the late 1980s, but uniquely links the historical background of each area of Scotland with its physical characteristics as a place to live. Conveyed to us through the book is MacKenzie's deep and extensive knowledge of Scotland and his considerable powers as a writer. In particular the book has as its core, in language that has almost a Biblical ring and cadence, a dramatic disclosure of how MacKenzie visualises the transformation of Scotland: 'In Rannoch I have seen the vision of Isaiah explode into reality, the mountains and the hills broke forth from them singing and all the trees of the fields clapped their hands...we began to get glimpses of how a Scottish cultural revolution might be set in motion... It would begin in country places...'

Has Scottish education changed for the better since MacKenzie's time? Judging by the recent controversy over the suggested abolition of the Highers, exams still seem to rate highly in Scottish people's estimation. Although corporal punishment has been abolished, teachers still spend an inordinate amount of time trying to devise alternative sanctions, and the increasing rate of pupil exclusions continues to be a matter of national concern. Worse still, education has fallen victim to the market forces of the right, which has led to a mindless preoccupation with getting 'value for money' out of virtually everything. This phobia finds its most pernicious expression in the annual publication of raw exam league tables. These are unparalleled in their lunacy by artificial application of arid 'business speak' to the running of schools, such as accountability (weren't teachers accountable for their actions before Thatcher?), performance indicators, auditing, and customer-care – turning headteachers into a race of gutless automatons.

Where then, you may well ask, can we discern the imprint of MacKenzie's ideas on our present education system? Where indeed?

Not long after I retired as headteacher at Whitfield High, I was in Shetland, visiting my second son who is a teacher there. On a bleak December day, I was trudging along a desolate track leading to a ruined township when it came to me how desolate my life had now become, now that I had cut myself off from the teaching profession after 37 years, and that the time I had spent at Summerhill with MacKenzie had been the most precious of all. For it was he who had focussed my mind on what education was essentially about, particularly in the context of what we mean by comprehensive education. He put it very simply: 'It means running a school where there is an equal concern for every pupil' – no more, no less.

MacKenzie in his moments of deep despair – and he had many – saw schools as essentially a tool of the Establishment (and so they probably still are) but as long as MacKenzie's work is there to be read and his ideas carried forward, there is hope for Scottish education. He may have over-estimated the degree of change that schools in themselves could bring about, but there is no disputing the power and the passion of his belief in young people. 'They have a tenderness towards all natural life and are closer than we are to understanding the terms in which we will be permitted to abide on the Earth'... sentiments that educationalists would do well to reaffirm.

MacKenzie's legacy to Scotland is thus an inspirational one. Although he failed miserably as a headteacher to manage his school in Aberdeen properly and to manage the people in it, and ended up being sacked for incompetence, he was just as much rejected because of his *ideas* – these were too challenging, maybe too dangerous, for the people who were in charge in the early 70s; they were certainly too discomfiting for the great majority of the teaching profession.

A fresh look at MacKenzie and what he stood for might encourage us to re-open the debate about where we are going in education. We are clearly not going in the right direction when we hear stories of teachers queuing to take early retirement, stressed out as they are by excessive workloads, and of schools snowed under by countless initiatives to counteract the ills of our sick society – from Aids prevention to the never-ending campaign against drugs and alcohol abuse.

For me, then, MacKenzie is a hero because he had the courage to stand up for his beliefs even in the midst of personal tragedy. He was a man of destiny: a prophet without honour in his own land. He was a man ahead of his time who, to the last, held on to the passion of his convictions for he knew they were founded on a universal truth. His thesis for educating young people is rooted in the concept of love: 'Though I understand all mysteries, and all knowledge and have not charity, I am nothing'. Here is the kind of hero to whom educators should look for inspiration to take them into the next century in a spirit of renewal.

We were always cold

Bet Low

1996

In September 1942, I travelled to Glasgow to begin my studies at Glasgow School of Art, the first and only known step for me to take in what I saw as a great adventure. Most of the other new students seemed equally nervous and excited, but most knew they were going to be art teachers. It was assumed I would be doing the same, but I had other ideas.

It was a strange time to be in the art school. Wonderful to have the uncrowded Mackintosh building to ourselves, frustrating the shortage of staff and closed departments. Each year, the same wartime canteen food. Worst was the cold. Models sometimes couldn't pose at all. Other times, they posed shivering on their thrones. Students clung to the radiators at each interval. We were always cold. Fit male first year students were in the armed forces by second year. Jokes abounded that those who remained were half blind, deaf or flat footed. I caught glimpses of Ian Hamilton Finlay in army uniform, but didn't get to know him till he came back three years later.

Students were instructed in firefighting up on the roof of the Mackintosh building and volunteers were required for night duty to patrol the entire building. Some of us volunteered to do two nights in a row. Some of us badly needed the three shillings and sixpence paid per night. In the early hours, a few of us would climb through the turret and stand high up on the roof looking over the vast black cityscape in an eerie moonlight. Unspoken was the thought, how would we cope if fire bombs did land on the Mackintosh building.

Head of drawing and painting was Hugh Adam Crawford. Painting was also taught by David Donaldson, later Dr Donaldson, Queen's Limner in Scotland. Head of the sculpture department was Benno Schotz, later a friend, through our mutual friend Josef Herman. I knew Joan Eardley, a year or two ahead, and Cordelia Oliver, later art critic of *The Herald* and *The Guardian*, a friend and associate since through the many exhibitions she organised, researched and selected over the years, including my own large retrospective in 1985 at the Third Eye Centre.

A student friend, Bill Henry, introduced me to two of his friends. One was Stanley Baxter, the other Jack Gerson. The four of us went everywhere together for the next three years, hilarious times. Stanley tested new acts and gags on us. The large oriel window space in his parents' house became a stage, with curtains drawn. On cue, he would leap out to perform his latest wheeze. Other times, it was 'Hollywood, Hollywood', impersonation of all the stars. Jack, still at Hillhead School, pale and thin, smoked cigarettes through a long holder and impersonated Noël Coward. In 1960, I saw his acclaimed play *The Three Ringed Circus* on BBC Television. Later, an exciting three-part

TV dramatisation of Desmond Bagley's thriller *Running Blind*. Many TV scripts followed and 11 published novels up to the present time.

1945, the end of war in Europe. Celebrations, bonfires, fireworks, laughing, singing and dancing at night, with a huge crowd in Kelvingrove Park. The end also of my three years at art school. On a day in June, a small group of students assembled in the Mackintosh library to receive our diplomas from the director. Few staff were present. No parents, no guests, no gowns, just a handshake and tea and buns. How different it is today.

Hospitalfield College of Art, Arbroath, followed, a post-diploma three months' residential course. This was a rare opportunity to meet and study with James Cowie, an outstanding Scottish artist who was warden of Hospitalfield. In his studio I saw and admired his paintings, masterly drawings and intricately planned constructions for still-life paintings, like little models for stage sets. A great experience. Even more stimulating were the talks in his study after supper. Literature, drama, poetry, all the arts, politics – everything discussed from Plato to the present day. Ideas, ideas. Just what I'd been waiting to hear. In art school only artists and their techniques were discussed.

And it was here at Hospitalfield that the Cowie family and students sat round the old wireless and cheered like thousands of others when the election results came through in 1945.

Reluctantly I went on to Jordanhill with no intention of being a teacher. Hating it. Marking time until something turned up. Two days as a student teacher at Hillhead. Free periods and lunch breaks alone, reading in a wee box room. Staff room beyond relief. Relief came at 4pm when I was met by Jack at the school gate among titters. Things got so bad, I'd set off for school (headmaster Dr Merry – ha! ha!), take one long look, swerve off and head for my digs. I started a painting of the view from my window: a lane, middens, bins, bin men and rubbish. It was depressing. And worse, I wrote pages of melancholy poems which were dreadful, more rubbish.

One Saturday in town in early 1946, quite unexpectedly I met Stanley, returned from being a Bevin Boy. He asked me to accompany him to a Unity Theatre rehearsal. Turning into Scott Street, he opened the door and I walked into another world. Magic. This was it. I never returned to the college or school.

Two of the stage crew, who were refugees, took me for coffee to the Refugee Centre, another revelation. The building was the last remaining villa house in Sauchiehall Street standing in its own grounds where the Dental Hospital now stands. There I met three great women of the kitchen, Ailsa, Rosa and Gita, who would help me to survive in the next few years. Peter Kramer, lighting and props man, later to work at the Victoria Palace in London, became a good friend. Fifty years on, we still keep in touch.

Within weeks, Unity took over the villa and it became the Unity Theatre Centre with the sign above the door, but still used by the refugees. I became a member of the Unity Theatre Club. I joined everything. Within a year or two, I was a member of four or five clubs or groups.

From 1943, the Citizens Theatre, founded by James Bridie, George Singleton and Tom Honeyman, played at the old Athenaeum until 1945 when they moved to the Princess Theatre and then Unity, which was an amalgamation of several theatre companies, took over the Athenaeum stage. The first Unity production I saw was Gorki's *The Lower Depths*. After that, I went to everything. At one point Unity invited Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop to the Athenaeum and they performed Ewan McColl's *Uranium 235* and *Johnny Noble*. We were to meet again from time to time, Ewan as folk singer and collector and Joan and company at a great party in London in the 1950s.

A huge mix of people now gathered at the Unity Theatre Centre. Bob Mitchell, director/producer, actors such as Roddy McMillan, Russell Hunter, Andrew Keir, Julia Wallace, Robert McLeish (author of *The Gorbals Story*), Harry Keir, artist, and many others. I first met Hugh MacDiarmid there with Ian Hamilton Finlay. One of the writers I became friendly with and who was very supportive was Eddie Boyd, decades before the highly successful TV play, *The View from Daniel Pyke*, starring Roddy McMillan. Norrie and Janey Buchan were often there and soon I was involved in the folk scene with the Buchans, McColl and later Hamish Henderson.

Poets often in the centre were Maurice Blythman (Thurso Berwick) and Jimmy Singer (Burns Singer). I met the poet John Singer, editor of *Million*, on his frequent visits from London. Jimmy Singer, just back from Cornwall, now staying with his parents in Glasgow, talked often to me about the Scottish painters Colquhoun and McBride and the poets W S Graham and Dylan Thomas. I enjoyed his company, his humour and as a painter, his looks: suntanned, sun bleached hair and air force jacket with big fleecy collar.

Not everyone enjoyed his company. Among the motley groups at the centre were CP members and the Comrades did not like or understand him at all. Jimmy would act, strike a pose, make an entrance, declaiming. The Comrades invariably sat together, discussing seriously, looking solemn. One beautiful summer day, blue skies, sun shining through the wide open window, I was sitting quietly having coffee. A sudden dramatic entrance, Jimmy declaiming swept through the room and leaped straight out of the window. Vanished. Nijinsky – the famous leap. The Comrades were dumbfounded. Here, in a centre for all the arts. Had they never read Mayakovsky, heard of Nijinsky? Or Stanislavsky? Actors milled around, *An Actor Prepares* ostentatiously under their arms. Still, this was Scotland. Jimmy wasn't daft of course. He did things deliberately to provoke them. He also landed three feet below on a flower bed.

Shortly after becoming a member of the Centre, I was getting odd jobs from Unity, publicity work, posters and helping with props for sets. Through Eddie Boyd I got a few illustrations to do for *Scottish Field* and various periodicals of the day. Tim Watson also helped in that way. Tim, soon to be reviewing the Amateur Drama Festival offerings at the old Lyric Theatre, often asked me to come along to help him survive the worst.

On the strength of these assorted jobs, I rented a large front room in a flat in Sauchiehall Street, straight across from the Unity Theatre Centre for 12s 6d a week.

There was nothing in it except a piano, a table, two chairs and a huge mirror between the two wooden shuttered windows. Bare floorboards, no heater. I obtained a pull-out armchair bed, sleeping bag, small rug and electric ring and kettle for making tea. Sparse. Once filled with my easel and all the artist's paraphernalia, it seemed much better, I was 21, had my first studio, and winter was a long way away.

I drew and painted portraits of dozens of the artists and stage crew including Russell Hunter, Peter Kramer, Bob Mitchell and Jimmy Singer in his jacket with the big fleecy collar. Also some of the refugees, friends and a few interesting looking characters like an old man from the Great Eastern doss house. Most of the theatre folk bought their portraits, a few didn't or couldn't. Incredibly, a refugee, one fully employed by Unity, stole his portrait when I wasn't looking or thinking. I couldn't prove it and couldn't get it back. He did well, of course. Heard years ago he was the owner of a large factory in Canada.

Eddie Boyd, Maurice Blythman and John Kinkaid were all members of the Clyde Group of Writers and Artists founded before 1946 when I joined. MacDiarmid supported and associated with the group and was one of the main speakers in 1948 when the Clyde Group held a large exhibition in the McLellan Galleries called the *Art and Peace Festival and Exhibition*. Two of the active artist members were Tom Macdonald, designer and scene painter with Unity, and Willison Taylor, for a time chairman of Unity. The aim of the group, stated in its manifesto, was to take art to the people, decades before the Scottish Arts Council pointedly suggested that art groups hoping to continue receiving grants should start to do just that. We did this missionary work, as we later called it, like everything else, unaided.

We transported, hung and put on art exhibitions for one evening in bleak halls in housing schemes like Househillwood and someone would give a poetry reading when people came in, six on average. An early 'Fringe' event. Nothing could be left in the hall, so at the appointed time we'd take the show down and leave. Two of us walking part of the way back at night, suspicious characters with a large holdall, were stopped by a big Bobby. On opening the bag, he discovered tools. He looked, on hearing our explanation, as if he'd heard the weirdest story yet.

I was asked to come to the aid of The Party by painting large portraits for a May Day parade. Something useful those layabout 'arty' folk could do; artists were never considered necessary except in work for the Cause. I painted two or three larger than life heads in oils on board from blown-up photographs, good experience for me. The only one I remember, my best one, and one I enjoyed painting, was *La Pasionaria*, the famous Spanish woman fighter against Franco in the Spanish Civil War.

From early 1946 and for several more years, I was drawing and painting in my Sauchiehall Street studio preparing for my first solo exhibition to be presented by Unity Theatre at the old Athenaeum in December. I was also out drawing people and places in Glasgow: up at the canal with its busy basin, Port Dundas, with the last coal puffer, grain

mills and timber yards, avoiding the fumes from the huge Tennants stack. My favourite places were Cowcaddens and Gorbals Cross, teeming with life. There was scarcely a car, everyone walking about. People were never more friendly than they were then.

Yet, the real life backdrop to everyone's life was the grim relentless black of the buildings. Black, black, soot black Glasgow. As winter approached and chimneys smoked, fog turned to smog. Awful. People scurried about the streets, eyes streaming, handkerchiefs held over faces. White ones turned dirty umber in a minute.

So far I'd managed, just, with free bowls of soup from Ailsa, Gita and Rosa and I usually could afford bread and liver sausage. Whoever had money bought the coffee, turn about. Late night supper was a coffee and hot dog at Charing Cross coffee stall with Peter. No food could be kept in the studio. At night the mice galloped around the room. I painted in my thick wartime coat, acquired with many coupons, scarf and gloves. January 1947 was one of the coldest recorded.

A day came when I only had a few shillings left and no paid work in sight. At this very time, alterations of some kind were taking place in the Centre's kitchen and there were no cooked meals, no bowls of soup. For four days I existed on nothing but coffees and one or two biscuits. By the fifth day I had absolutely nothing. The door bell rang. Jimmy Singer turned up. He asked and I told him. In the evening, with food from his parents' house, we dined together, well away from mice and freezing cold.

Unbelievably, within days, Bob Mitchell invited me to design and paint a set, my first. Bob was good with young people, he gave them a start. The set was for Ena Lamont Stewart's *Men Should Weep*. With Bob's rough stage plan, description of the play, characters and atmosphere, I hurried over to the Centre to tell Tom, the usual designer, expecting encouragement and help. He was thoroughly put out. Miffed. No help. Never looked near the workshop.

It was miserably cold in the Argyle Street workshop. Just a brazier at one end. From a ladder, I painted and stencilled the 18-foot high flats, learning the meaning of 'the show must go on'. The result was by no means brilliant, but must have been adequate, as I got more sets to design and paint. The play, of course, was highly successful and again, in recent years, in a new production.

The Clyde Group continued until the big exhibition in 1948, but individuals needed to develop. Eddie went his own way, writing and script writing. Artists formed a new group, the Society of Scottish Independent Artists, attracting new members of differing opinions and styles. Through John Gibson, designer in charge of theatre events, we now exhibited regularly at Iona Community House and received favourable reviews.

One great artistic creation, thought by many to be the greatest single cultural achievement in Glasgow, from 1939-1972 was George Singleton's wonderful Cosmo cinema (it continued after a two-year break in 1974 as the Glasgow Film Theatre). Art school students, language students, the young, the elderly, and people of different social classes saw gems of films there and remember it with great affection.

While the Cosmo happily flourished through the war years, the 1950s and into better times, it was very different for young actors, writers and painters. There was a big divide. Them and us. The Establishment and the young unknowns. No assistance, no interest. Nobody wanted to know artists who were influenced by the powerful German Expressionists or other movements from 'abroad'. New ideas were not welcomed as people of the stature of Jankel Adler, Josef Herman, J D Fergusson, Bill Crosbie, Andrew Taylor Elder and others who had studied abroad found out. In a certain well-known establishment, Adler and Herman were contemptuously called 'these queer foreign painter chaps'.

Adler and Herman left Glasgow in 1943, though Herman often returned, and by the early 1950s, following the demise of Unity and the break-up of the Refugee Centre, there was a huge exodus from Glasgow. People left in droves to find work in London. For a brief period, Glasgow was cosmopolitan. It seemed to us that the city was alive. But in the bleak 1950s, it was as if nothing had happened at all.

In 1956, some active Independents, including Bill Rennie, Callum Sinclair (of the Joe Gordon Folk Four) and myself, decided to go for an open air exhibition at weekends on the railings of the Botanic Gardens. We applied to the Parks Department for permission and that was exactly what we got, nothing more. The exhibition was a tremendous success. Hundreds turned out to see us. Queen Margaret Drive at the junction with Great Western Road was so crowded, police were out directing the traffic. People peered from buses. The BBC were filming. Fergusson and Margaret hurried along to support us. The sun shone. Paintings were sold. People were enjoying themselves. *The Weekly Scotsman* gave us a huge spread and large photographs under the heading, 'Paris on the Kelvin'. The second year was also good, but after that it died the usual death.

In 1958, the Glasgow Group, composed of entirely different artists with James Spence, a founder member, as president, held its first exhibition. It continued into its fourth decade, holding highly successful annual exhibitions in the McLellan Galleries. A Glasgow Group Society was established, whose members paid an annual subscription. I was invited to join in the mid-1960s and thereafter took part in most exhibitions. Additional smaller shows developed later. Through membership subscriptions, grants and sponsorships, it was able to carry on financially, but unfortunately the McLellan Galleries ceased to be available to the group.

It took until 1963 to achieve something more than a mere one-off, or an annual exhibition. A new wave of young aspiring artists had sprung up and, as in the 1940s, were taking any kind of part-time job that turned up. I knew two who were grave-diggers. John Taylor and I became certain that a gallery was essential and set about trying to establish one.

Mr Duthie, owner of a print shop in Sauchiehall Street, gave us his unused upper floor rent-free. A small percentage on sales was agreed. With a few pounds between us, John had partitions built and walls painted. I wrote scores of letters to critics, the BBC,

collectors, printers and others. When everything was organised and the gallery a certainty, we invited Cyril Gerber, friend, enthusiast and collector of paintings to join us and, enthusiastic as ever, he did.

From its opening in December 1963, as the New Charing Cross Gallery, it was a huge success. We showed work by new young artists and well-known ones like Fergusson and Eardley. When it had to close in 1968 due to the illness of Mr Duthie, it didn't die the usual death. Within a year, Cyril obtained a suitable property in West Regent Street and in 1969 he opened the Compass Gallery which has gone on from strength to strength to the present day.

Now galleries proliferate. Artists have choice, grants, sponsorships, travelling scholarships, residences, the choice to live and work here or travel to New York, Mexico, Hong Kong and exhibit. In the past, this was possible only through a London gallery. Dealers come looking for Scottish artists. Compared with the 1950s, the scene appears brilliant. One niggling thought: are we considered 'useful', another cause to promote a City of Culture, and now tourism?

A great renaissance in the arts has come about. Wonderful now, all the creativity. Alarming therefore, the position of Scottish Opera, the SNO, Scottish Ballet and certain theatre companies. As one of the thousands who packed theatres and the old St Andrew's Hall half a century ago for opera, ballet, plays, concerts, folk singing, poetry readings and now our own Scottish Opera and Ballet, I feel strongly that all are vital to any City of Culture and must be adequately funded. We cannot afford to lose any, or a single artist again.

Split personality

Bella Bathurst

1996

I keep wondering whether I should declare myself an oppressed minority. It would be good, perhaps; I could apply for a grant and get charitable status. Or a wearily cheerful seen-it all demeanour, a permanent supply of antimaccassars and the occasional coffee-morning weather report. Or I could become one of the beautiful clawing hordes of the feminists, manage a few prejudices and make a fortune in clever marketing. What appeals at the moment isn't that, though; it's the idea of founding the Association for the Unoppressed Anglo-Scot.

The Anglo-Scot isn't always a very distinctive breed. There are the odd, grinning women with the concave chests and that odd cross-dressed look of Perthshire women in dresses, or the ex-pats who return to early retirement, an old library of grudges and a discontented growl at the golf club. Or the resigned hacks, values and livers only a little damaged by the years of cocaine, polenta and London drivers, who come back to find the land, the grudges and the whisky of their forefathers.

Or the university students, on whom you can idly play the Spot-The-Home-County, pointing out in earnest accents that they were born from fine, wild Scottish ancestry, seventh generation Gorbals, and not a brain cell between them. And, I suppose, the ones like me, cringeingly caught between one identity and the other, both and neither, using the occasional Scots phrase once too often in mixed company, blaming the weather on the English and hoping perhaps one day to be included.

Most times, none of this matters. It is just the occasional twinge, somewhere down in Leith or Craigmillar, up beyond Inverness or roundabout Jordanhill, that I start to wonder whether I really do sound like the witless git I sound like to me. Playing myself back on the dictaphone or the telephone message, listening to the unfamiliar caw, I think, I'd probably thump me if I met me in a bar soliciting – very nicely, thank you – for a quote. But then I remember what I worked out years ago; that changing any of this into Edinburgh or Glasgow, West Coast or Isles, would still be wrong. Not so much because of the barmy elocution problems, but just because wherever you are in Scotland, the tone is always wrong. And, if they want to, they'll hate you anyway.

I would, at least, fulfil my own dual-residence membership criteria of this visionary club just now. I'm leading a split life, somewhere between Maida Vale and the New Town. Usually, this makes things feel like a service station on the M6, all cheap meals, panic and pollution. After the first passion of the new flat has dwindled, incomplete and familiar, with not quite enough furniture and splinters between my toes in the room where I ran out of money, I get my first noise complaint. A bemused pair of police

officers appear to find me, alone, typing, and – on one of my self-education kicks – listening to Mozart. It's quite quiet and they look embarrassed. Too many notes, I suppose.

After the Festival, the city exhales, all that hot air and regulated surprise gone for another year's puff. The place lets out its breath and settles down crossly to another winter. Which arrives, as it usually does, with a howl, the Princes Street piper getting his Jenners' tartan lifted suggestively by the breeze, the wind flicking and bullying at your heels. I make a mental note not to buy any more split skirts.

To complicate things a little, my mother decides to have a party. It is, nominally at least, to celebrate one sister's 18th birthday, the other one's 21st, my 26-and-something-months, and mum's new career as a 60-something party chick. Later, we discover the cunning agenda behind this scheme; the house hasn't been cleaned to mum's satisfaction for 20 years. This is a lovely, if slightly expensive, excuse to do so. It is also a sore trial of her iron-cast theory of Just In Case.

There are 40 jars of flageolet beans, dried apricots and various bits of mottled vegetation in the larder. Mum has been hoarding them keenly in the possible, but improbable, event of nuclear fallout, 30 tons of concrete falling on the house, or a really, really bad snowfall that keeps us there, picking at ancient dates for six months or so. And they haven't been dusted in, say, 20 years. She promptly descends on Biggar, breathing intent, like the Four Housewives of the Apocalypse.

I skulk in Edinburgh, pleading deadlines, financial crisis, unwatered potplants – anything. Lucy rings one evening, her voice high with exasperation. Do you know, she says accusingly, what I had to do today? I dusted the ceiling. And then I made bows out of red bits of material, and then I started painting the doll's house. This is too much. Even the cat has got nervous exhaustion. Finally, skimming lightly over three howling arguments, ACAS style diplomatic efforts by my cousin, and a socio-economic crisis in the separates department of Harvey Nichols, the day dawns. Damply.

Three hours before it begins, I am still filling in the windowsills on the doll's house, two of Lucy's university friends have found the sofa, and each other, with dangerous alacrity, and Flora's dress has taken on an independent life of its own, somewhere around her midriff. Three hours into it, one sister has her arm fondly around my cousin's neck, the other has several men examining the contents of her corset no-one has yet admired the doll's house and I have got so nervous that my syntax is wobbling badly. Mum stops worrying about the ceilings, looks happily astonished, and enjoys it.

I retreat back to Edinburgh, and then to London. I start an inane game on my endless get-me-out-of-the-flat-or-I-eat-the-curtains walks: spot *The Scotsman*. London's newsagents are a fine testament to the fondness that the British have for loopy junk and car boot sales. Somewhere between the ageing Bombay mix, the cucumber salsa and the pickled beetroots, you will find every publication under the sun and rain, from obscure German humour to Islamic feminism to *Fancy Fowl* and *Fish Fryer's Gazette*. You can

find *The Herald*, *The Irish Post*, *Oban Times* and *Stornoway Gazette*. But you can search for as long as you will search for gold in the pavements, and you will not find *The Scotsman*. I console myself with the fact that it gives it a certain fine rarity value.

I'm supposed to be thinking about my career position. Which would be easier if I had a career, or a position. I've got used to measuring my weeks out in profiles and little pieces; that week was Thatcher and pigeons, this one was Skegness and landlords, the other one was Mladic and headhunters. I take to going for long walks, peering between the drawn curtains of the Stockbridge of the West End to find the little boxed lives. Inside, I can sometimes see the colours of tea-with-granny; that uniform shade of Edinburgh eau-de-nil, bus-coloured carpet, and glowering dark furniture, covered in gargoyles and creaking to the tick of the grandfather clock.

In London, on the way to one of those ubiquitously chemically-enhanced rave bonding events with a friend, we get on to the subject of Edinburgh. I say something about Scottish politics and she looks at me in bewilderment. What's devolution? she asks. What's the SNP and what's this Assembly thing?

She works on the hem of the media, is usually extremely well-informed, and perhaps she is only franker about her indifference than others. I think, perhaps, that Scotland is just a small cult, and like most cults has its fanatics, its blind faith and its indifferent outsiders. It has its uncharitable status, its helpless divisions, its unoppressed masses and its dangerous exclusivity. Whatever it is, and however ignored and frustrated, it sure as hell beats belonging to Maida Vale.

Perfect fear

Ian Mackenzie

1998

At an all night sitting finishing on the morning of 25 March, the House of Commons agreed the third reading of an education bill which will finally ban corporal punishment in Britain. So the radio informed me, somewhat to my surprise. It was news to me that this was news, but apparently till now beating was still legal in independent schools. No more, however, will the swish of the cane be heard in the land. The cane? Who in Scotland, which for generations belted, strapped, and tawsed like mad, has heard of a cane, let alone used one? Hands up. I have. I experienced a complete cycle of corporal punishment – in plain language, hitting people. I lived with the strap and I lived with the cane.

In the Fraserburgh and Ardersier primary schools, and Strichen Secondary, the strap (I'm sorry if you want to call it a tawse or a belt, but the strap is what it was in my time and place) resided in a drawer in the teacher's desk, like a coiled up snake. You were never unaware of its reptilian presence. Even if the drawer might seem safely shut, at any moment it might be opened just an inch. This was a speciality of some lady teachers. They probably weren't sadists. Some may have been themselves reptilian, but most were sensibly short and stubby, some were eccentrically tall and willowy, and one or two were the Dame Judi Denches of their profession. My recollection is that most were personally kindly, even motherly, out of school. Yet inside the classroom, they were ruled by the technology of the strap. Like the nuclear deterrent, this technology had its rules. You may not like it, one can imagine libertarian teachers being told at their first dawn briefing, none of us does. But holding it in reserve is necessary to avoid the universe sliding into anarchy, entropy, bestiality and chaos. Its efficacy lies in never being used, in which case it's done its job. But if the worst comes to the worst (as it will several times a day) the steps in the escalation of terror are these:

1. Open the drawer an inch.
2. Open it fully.
3. Without comment, lift strap out and place coiled on desk.
4. Uncoil it.
5. Caress strap meaningfully.
6. Call out offender.
7. Hold trembling hand of boy or girl to steady same (a particularly repugnant use of hand clasping hand).
8. Strike.
9. Strike again.

- 10.Strike as often as it takes to get class looking worried.
- 11.Send victim to seat, red faced if big tough boy, even redder if big tough girl.
- 12.Lower strap back into silo.
- 13.Resume lesson.

There was one teacher who couldn't handle this at all. She was a sharp-nosed exponent of arithmetic who should never have been declared fit to fly with the squadron; she missed the target every time. Her unease about the process caused her hand to shake more than the victim's. Obviously no games-player, she drastically lacked style. Even her strap was devoid of charisma. It was neither malevolently long and thin nor brutishly short and thick (we endlessly discussed the arsenal of weaponry). Hers was a scrawny bit of leather, probably picked at random from a cut-price job lot. Instead of the satisfying thwack we expected to echo from a well-delivered overarm strike on a quivering pink palm, Miss B botched it every time, excitedly catching the side of the wrist or a couple of knuckles. Knuckles? Yes, even the macho boys who flaunted their ability to resist withdrawing the hand at the last moment would flinch at Miss B's pride of thongs hurtling unerringly towards the wrong place. So the least aggressive of teachers, through her failure to master the technology, became the most feared.

So much for the technology. Now for the pathology.

At the age of nine, to avoid the Luftwaffe bombs, I was evacuated to stay for a year with a wonderful funny aunt in a huge house overlooking the Beaulieu Firth. I had a mile's walk to Ardersier village school. On these walks I thought about many things, but something I did was take off my belt and beat the hell out of trees, walls, telephone poles and fenceposts. I took much pride in developing my technique till I could be sure of hitting the target with a well-rounded thwack. I loved my aunt, the teachers at this school were friendly, and I had never been strapped. But strapping was such an everyday centrepiece of the discipline culture that I was fascinated by it and hypnotised by dread of the moment when it would be my name that was called. As it turned out, I wasn't belted till three years later, when a French teacher in Strichen mistakenly identified me as the source of a rude noise.

But in Strichen, there really was a sadist: the science teacher. He was a Rolls-Royce of a madman, with a velvety voice which could erupt into a howl. He was a Christian who would talk to us for hours about the Bible, a gentleman who talked to us for hours about good manners, a poet who could wax eloquent about nature, and a man capable of boundless generosity who would at Christmas storm into the science lab in a rage and hurl an extravagant present at each of us. I believe he was twice in court for assault and it doesn't surprise me; nobody was exempt from his salivatingly sarcastic tongue, his open hand hitting the face, his throwing of missiles, and his powerful use of a particularly black thick strap. Absolutely everyone up to and including the headmaster was terrified of him.

At this point, my father's death precipitated me into boarding school. As a prefect at

Fettes, I was required to cane my inferiors, even those who were my own age. The offender's bottom was draped over carefully arranged chairs, then we masters of the universe took a stick, a run, and a swipe. I developed a technique for maximum reverse thrust at the last moment so that the cane merely flicked the trouser bottom, but there was no point in avoiding all contact, as one of the other prefects would have been substituted and hit all the harder.

As compared with the leathery snake which haunted me at an impressionable age, I doubt if the rough and ready ritual of one teenager beating another with a stick made a permanent impression on the psyche, although it usually made a temporary impression on the bottom. What it did to me was implant an intellectual conviction that hurting people (or animals, or plants, or any other thing to whom the universe has granted vulnerable life) is unworthy of our species.

But, though unworthy, it struck me (*sic*) then, and still does, as basically irrelevant. At this point I want to introduce a category which I think is germane: love. In view of the editor's nervousness about God intruding on the last issue, I hesitate.

On the other hand:

- A. When the Bible says 'perfect love casts out fear', it is not necessarily quoting God. It is a matter of dispute whether the Bible has a direct line to God.
- B. A belief that love is better than fear is not confined to Christians in particular or religious people in general. Love is fairly generally regarded as a Good Thing.
- C. Fear, although a universal experience, is regarded by most nice people as a bad thing, at any rate when perpetrated to excess by not very nice people.

Having, I hope, got God out of the way, I would quite like to get on with my argument.

My first point is obvious: physical pain is not a reliable index of suffering. To get a child in a classroom to cry, a political prisoner in a torture chamber to scream, or an employee in a department to depart, is no doubt reasonably satisfactory if your career security depends on maintaining whichever law and order regime you're signed up to. But if you're a real sadist, you can do better than that. I mean worse.

Recently, I had the honour of interviewing for a Good Friday programme that preternaturally gracious man, Professor Donald Macleod. He identified the kernel of his nightmarish ordeals at the hands of Free Kirk tormentors as entering into a realm of chaos. The essence of 'sur-darkness' is chaos, disorder, pandemonium, he said.

Picking that up, I would interpret the bedrock of ultimate spiritual torture as lying in that force-field of pandemonium. Auschwitz and Belsen weren't mainly about physical pain – the gas chambers were, one supposes, physically relatively painless. The essence of the horror was fundamental moral disorder: mortality mocked by chaos.

When I look back at my schooldays, I distinguish at once the regime that was loving. At Fettes, my first year or two were relatively tense, not because I was bullied – I never was – but because I was absolutely hopeless at rugby, hockey and cricket, and that was a huge part of the school culture. But these activities were not morally chaotic. *Au contraire*, they were highly orderly and my unhappiness was self-generated. I just disliked what most other boys liked. But as an attractive range of other activities gradually widened out, I became very happy indeed, so that my last three years at Fettes were among the most harmoniously radiant and ordered in my life.

Yet, when I started at Fettes in 1945, the school was being maintained by old school masters kept beyond retirement or brought back from retirement while the young men were away fighting Hitler. These old retainers were to a degree eccentric. Being then innocent, I did not suspect that our vast hulk of a housemaster shared our morning shower for reasons other than hygienic; or that our brilliantly funny and inspirational form-master was called 'Gents' for reasons other than feudal; or that 'PB' ('Pocket Billiards') was a nickname other than affectionately sporty. This is where love came in. These guys loved us and they loved their jobs. And we loved them doing their job. There was no fear.

Am I being politically incorrect? Oh, good.

Now. To the present. Let me put it this way. I am the father of two children who have just come through the state school system. I have no complaints on that score. But I am also the husband of the woman who runs the Dyslexia Institute in Scotland and deals with the damaged human results of scores of people who have emerged from the state school system. And I am a trustee of a couple of charitable trusts which seek in their own way to support children, many of whom have suffered at the hands of our various Scottish systems including state schools. And never a strap or cane among them.

God help us, we haven't *begun* to cast out fear by love.

A couple of postscripts. The first, about the snake. You may have regarded that as a rather precious image of a leather strap. Well, then, hear this. I've told you my wife teaches dyslexics. A few years ago, a dyslexic man produced a winning logo. The pen in his hand had turned into a snake. This vivid image is still quoted by the Dyslexic Institute as a powerful expression of the quality of fear engendered in the 5–10% of the population who, while sometimes very gifted, have their brains wired in a way which is incompatible with traditional learning methods.

There are more ways of intimidating the vulnerable than by physical force. It can be done by sheer indifference. For years, the Scottish educational establishment routinely denied to dyslexic children the opportunity to salvage their careers and lives. That is institutional torment without benefit of cane or strap.

The other postscript. The indefensible sadist, the science master at Strichen. Quite often in the late afternoon, as I walked to my bus stop, I would meet him cycling out into the country to his dwelling at the foot of bleak Mormond Hill. He often had this look. A

face of yearning. A vision on it, beatific or bestial I know not. But rapt. I was a Buchanan of 12. He was a flawed man of 50. Without fail, from the height of his bicycle saddle he would with infinite courtesy, salute me with a warm, sad smile. *Ecce homo*.

Now we would imprison him. How efficiently our society has learned that perfect fear casts out love.

Something rich and strange

Catherine Czerkawska

1999

Several times, over the past few months, people have said to me, 'Where do you come from? What accent is that?' It seems to have happened more this past year than ever before. They were, of course, people who didn't know me very well and maybe they were just curious. I do have an oddly hybrid accent, but on a couple of occasions the interrogation was vaguely hostile and I found myself being apologetic in reply. 'I'm very sorry, but I do seem to be English. There is not, so far as I know, a single drip of Scottish blood flowing through these veins.'

Still, the fact is that I have lived in Scotland on and off since the age of 12, and I have worked here as a writer for a very long time. Besides that, I married here and my son was born here, which means that I have spent far more years in Scotland than anywhere else, including my birthplace, which is Leeds, Yorkshire. So, if I am to call anywhere home, it has to be Scotland. Although I have lived in various parts of Scotland, including Edinburgh and Fife, the West of Scotland is the place where, more than anywhere else, my heart lies. But like all close and essentially loving relationships, my feelings about my adopted country are ambivalent. Sometimes I find myself loving the place more when I'm not in it, but because I am in it more often than not these days, sometimes I find myself wanting to be somewhere else – preferably somewhere a bit warmer and a lot drier.

But if I am not Scottish, what am I? Well, I was born in England, but that doesn't necessarily make me English. I am half-Polish, with, on the English side, an Irish grandmother (a genuine Celt there at least) and a Yorkshire grandfather (mostly Viking, apparently). And there's a wee bit of Hungarian thrown in for good measure – on the Polish side. A thread of something rich and strange and very foreign ran through my childhood.

I was a shy only child when we arrived in Scotland, but I had grown up with my own company and liked it well enough. For a while, though, nothing could console me for the trauma of the move. I hadn't wanted to come at all. Half my early years had been spent grappling with bouts of asthma. But I had never been allowed the indulgence of looking frail, and I was always robust. Now, I suddenly found that I needed to be.

Of all my memories of that early time – Scotland in the 1960s – two come back with huge clarity. One is the extraordinary sight of all those brown papery roller blinds that people used to have in their windows. They are largely a thing of the past now, but then they reminded me of my granny's fly papers – they were much the same colour. Our first landlady in Ayr had them. She was painfully genteel and lived off boiled fish and pale

stovies; we knew because we had to share her kitchen. They transformed the house windows into blank eyes and kept out the sunlight, just in case it should find its way in and fade her furnishings. I had never come across them before. In Leeds it was always nets, rinsed in Dolly Blue or Dolly Cream to keep them nice.

The other memory – in striking contrast – is of my first view of the Clyde, and the Head of Ayr drenched in golden, early evening sunlight, as we drove towards Ayr from the station in Kilmarnock. Perhaps things weren't going to be as bad as I had feared.

However, my new school was a bombshell. It was a tough Catholic comprehensive; not perhaps very rough by today's standards, but I came straight from an acutely civilised convent grammar where girls called Penelope and Deborah pattered down highly polished corridors in smart blue uniforms and all had crushes on the (female) drama teacher. Now, here I was with my broad vowels and my different vocabulary. I didn't know what a *piece* was. I didn't know what a *cludgie* was. I didn't know what *winching* was either. (And I certainly hadn't done any).

My fellow pupils' suspicion of me was palpable. The only other incomer in the school was Canadian, and she came in for similar treatment, though she had a certain transatlantic glamour and got off more lightly. Anyway, my own tongue-tied inadequacy in the face of all that hostility formed a vicious circle which made my first few years at school in Scotland a torment. Settling down was a long and painful process and for a time my life assumed a dual character along a school/home axis. School spelt misery, home was happiness.

Interestingly enough, however, it was at this time that I began to write in earnest – partly to escape from uncongenial surroundings into fantasy, but more urgently out of a desperate need to communicate. I needed somehow to externalise the half-formed feelings and ideas which I was far too shy to discuss openly. The writer, no matter how amateur, is always greedy for love. But it seems to me that my experience at school divided my perception of Scotland itself into two distinct parts.

One part is associated with all those things that meant school and school meant the everyday and all too 'real' Scotland of scruffy anoraks and haggis suppers, football songs and the Gaiety Whirl, fried dumpling and graffiti, Saturday afternoon trips to the old ice rink in Ayr where the boys and girls could slide past each other and eye each other up and down, plain cookies and crumpets and those oddly anaemic looking Scotch pies with congealed beans on top. (Fried Mars Bars were but a gleam in somebody's eye at that time – and, anyway, *he* was probably Italian.)

That was how I saw it then and that is how I remember it now – usually with the kind of familiarity which amounts to deep affection, but occasionally with a pang of irritation. The thing I most disliked at the time was the excessive use of corporal punishment – 'the belt', that archaic strip of leather which did nothing but harden hands and hearts. There was an element of sadism in it, which I recognised even then, a peculiar fascination and a terrible savagery, the memory of which is still distasteful. It was a dreary and pointless

ritual. In all my years at school, I can never remember anybody being really deterred from doing anything by the threat of a belting.

To be fair, the school suited me well enough. At my old convent school, the competitive academic pressure had been tremendous. Once that pressure was lifted I felt free to explore in my own sweet way and my learning certainly didn't suffer.

Religion loomed large, however. We read books about the Bible (we were supposed to read the Bible itself on our own initiative) and had daring discussions. It was still a mortal sin to miss mass on Sunday, meaning that if you didn't go and then you died, you went straight to hell. My dad, who had been through the war, used to laugh out loud at this concept. At my second Scottish school (the first one didn't go beyond fourth year), a mixed convent comprehensive, one of the sisters explained to the class of 16- and 17-year-olds how we mustn't indulge in kissing until we were engaged to be married because 'it might lead to other things'. We knew, we knew.

But in our early teenage years it was not our classmates who appealed to us: not the 'clever' boys who seemed to be so emotionally and physically immature. It was the 'C' classes who attracted us enormously: big tough boys, desperate to get away from school and into a job. They scorned uniform and slouched around in jeans. Their hands were horny from frequent strappings and they were afraid of nobody.

In my fourth year I was a prefect. Leon was a big, blue-eyed, black-haired (I nearly wrote 'raven-haired' there, because that is how I remember him) Irish-Scots ruffian who led a gang of boys on forays every lunchtime. It was a primitive and enchanting game. They pestered us and we, the girls, threw them out. But they were bigger and stronger than us. Particularly Leon. The encounters frequently erupted into delicious physical contact. Leon never let things get out of hand. Nobody got hurt. He was a clever troublemaker who infuriated his male teachers and left them frustrated and angry. He left us frustrated and delighted. I suspect that he has probably gone far.

Later, we went to parties where we drank cheap wine and cider and played Postman's Knock, fixing the numbers, giving and receiving chaste wet passionless kisses in the dark outside the door, or danced smoochily to Jim Reeves and the Beatles. Official dances were held in the school hall under the gaze of the big statue of Christ on the Crucifix, which managed to be both gory and vapid at the same time. The nuns came to watch us enjoy ourselves and to monitor the pointedness of our heels. 'That dress doesn't really suit you, Catherine,' said little Sister Dominic sweetly. I have never found it in me to forgive her. Some of the boys had been drinking. The smell of peppermints was overpowering as we stumbled around the polished parquet floors.

It was still, however, a foreign place to me. Home was simply another and more familiar country. But I had always possessed the ability to hedge myself in with fantasy, so at home I read indiscriminately and avidly. Books had always been an important part of my childhood. Now I graduated to D H Lawrence, Tolkien, the Brontes and Dylan Thomas.

And then, from reluctantly reciting *To a Mountain Daisy* at school, I discovered Robert Burns's love poetry and began to be really interested. I went on Saturday pilgrimages to the cottage and lurked there waiting for a ghost which stubbornly refused to materialise. Even in winter, when the place was empty of tourists, I didn't hear so much as a hollow moan. However, I never lost heart, but wandered along ye banks and braes of various bonnie burns, trying in vain to conjure up the original. Seances with a tumbler and bits of paper were a dismal failure.

Even so, this total absorption in a landscape, and a body of literature, gave me a vivid sense of place which I have tried to recapture ever since. I think that it is largely a thing of adolescence, and is later glimpsed only briefly and for short spaces of time – never with that first heartbreaking clarity. But its effects remain, and in many ways it helped to form my perception of, and growing love for, Scotland the country.

The Ayrshire landscape had taken a fierce hold on me. Late summer was the best time with its sharp shadows, sloping golden fields, house martens clustering on wires, and melodramatic sunsets behind the Isle of Arran, but all seasons had their peculiar charm. Never before or since has a landscape seethed with so many conjured phantoms for me. The hills and moorlands were full of Celts in gold and leather. The place was enchanted.

The years passed and it was time for university. Most of my friends – they were my friends now because we had adjusted to each other – were planning to go to Glasgow and commute. I wanted to go further afield. To a 17-year-old, Edinburgh seemed to possess the required measure of glamour.

It certainly lived up to expectations, and if my move there didn't exactly signify the end of childhood, it was the beginning of the end – and the end of that intense time when Scotland had been my all in all. Edinburgh, even then, was a peculiarly cosmopolitan place, full of intimations of another, wider world which I badly wanted to see.

And yet, and yet. Maybe the crush did turn into something deeper. I travelled about a lot, but I have been back here for years now. And I find that it is not the romantic Scotland, the historical Scotland, the thunder of long lost hooves that I want to write about, but that other Scotland, of anaemic pies and paper blinds, of football songs and haggis suppers. Perhaps the real Scotland, the Scotland of now, is different from either of these.

All the same I wonder if I will ever feel Scottish, as I feel like a real Yorkshire lass in York or as I feel passionately Polish in Warsaw, or as I have occasionally felt a sense of complete belonging in Ireland? I think probably not, because that kind of feeling isn't in the head, but in the blood. And, of course, I don't have any. Not the Scottish stuff, anyway.

Then I remember all the things I like about this place and how we were made very welcome here, how even the few people who had made fun of me became close friends in later years, and how much kindness and tolerance and encouragement I have

encountered in Scotland. What could there possibly be to feel uneasy about in a devolving and evolving Scotland? *Is there anything to feel uneasy about for those of us who don't have a drop of Scottish blood in our veins?*

We used to have quiet friends from Lancashire, who lived in a row of quiet houses in Kirkmichael. One Hogmanay, the village reprobates got hot-headed on whisky and went round and hammered on the door of this quiet couple from Lancashire, in no very friendly manner, and summoned the f***ing English out to answer for their past misdemeanours such as Flodden and Culloden.

Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, they had had so much whisky that they got the wrong house, and were met by the Lancastrians' large, very fierce, far from quiet but undeniably Scottish next-door neighbour, who told them in no uncertain terms that they had better go home before he knocked their f***ing blocks off. 'Besides,' came Rab's parting shot, 'I come from f***ing Mossblown'.

Long may all fierce Scottish neighbours react so decisively. But it does make you think...

I once started doing family history research in the hope of finding the odd drop of Scottish blood. I haven't come across any yet, but on the Polish side I found Ukrainian connections as well, and while following my Yorkshire grandad's Viking trail up into the fastnesses of Swaledale I also found that great great great granny had actually come all the way from London. She had probably been a servant in one of the big houses, who had married a local lead miner and stayed on in Yorkshire.

But then all of us, if we looked into our lineage, would probably find it more mixed than we thought and not pure bred f***ing anything. It would be nice to believe that a devolved Scotland will begin to celebrate this melting pot and not simply pigeonhole people.

For things have changed here since I went to school. My son began secondary school this year, and although chauvinism ebbs and flows, is crushed and rears its ugly head again, I sense an air of tolerance, a certain sophistication among these young people. Nobody is belted. Chaos does not reign. The corridors are quiet, the classrooms reasonably industrious. There are still teachers who can keep order and teachers who can't, with or without the belt. These kids are more confident, more forthcoming, more at ease in speaking to adults than we ever were.

My son, like many of his friends, is an avid ice hockey supporter and we all go to matches, not in that old ice rink at the 'top of the town', where we used to go on Saturday afternoons to eye up the talent, but in a new, brashly bright arena called the Centrum, which has a European ring to it. The local team is called the Ayr Scottish Eagles. It consists entirely of Canadians, only a few of whom might – perhaps – be of Scottish descent. The rest have names like Catenaro and Montenari. Oh, and there is one Lithuanian. My son, my Scottish, Polish, English, Irish, Hungarian son, is passionate about the Eagles. Maybe in future years there will be Scottish players in the team, but for

now there is a richly cosmopolitan air about each game that seems nothing if not healthy. Something rich and strange again. And you know what? This time it really feels... Scottish.

As for myself, I have had not just a teenage crush, but something that has become a very long love affair with this country. True, we have the occasional tiff, sometimes we fall out, but still we remain the best of friends. Divorce is out of the question. St Andrew – now there's a cosmopolitan saint if ever there was one – probably has the same relationship with the country of his patronage. Perhaps he is a peculiarly fitting saint for today's Scotland: a welcome stranger. Forget attachments of head and heart and blood. Like Andrew, I suspect I love it in my bones.

To Bridget, with love

Bridget McConnell

1999

When asked to nominate my greatest Scot of the 20th century, it seemed clear that I should nominate the person whose ideas and values inspire me most, the person whom I thought about when faced with a dilemma and of whom I would ask myself: 'What would she/he do, say or advise?' It did not take me long to identify that person – my grandmother, Bridget Airlie – who is probably the greatest single influence on my life, personally, politically, morally, and professionally.

Bridget Airlie, daughter of Catherine Boyle and Patrick McMahon, granddaughter of Bridget Winn and Timothy Boyle, Irish immigrants, was born in Midlothian on 21 April 1899 – the same decade which saw the last trial for witchcraft in Ireland – and died on 30 April 1998 – the year legislation was passed to establish Scotland's first democratically-elected parliament. My grandmother was the most remarkable woman I have ever known, and for me, is the greatest Scot of the century – both for who she was and what she represented.

All my life I have felt a living connection with a century's history, a century's progress and a century's struggle for social justice – all embodied in the life of my grandmother. As a child, I spent many days living with her in Twechar – between the ages of 12 and 18 I spent every weekend with her, as I played the organ at the village chapel every Sunday.

I felt we had a special relationship. I later discovered that all her other 20 grandchildren felt the same – but this never diminished my sense of a special relationship. We had a mutual understanding: we shared the same name, she had been the eldest of a family of eight, I the eldest of seven; she felt the conflict of responsibility for her siblings and her need to be self-fulfilled intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally, and she articulated this conflict for me. She would often say to me, 'I know what it is like to be the eldest daughter,' and the silences filled with charged emotion that followed that statement said more to me than words.

For me, landmarks in history were not merely words in a book – I heard them first hand from my grandmother and from her seven brothers and sisters and they were all more than stories or facts. Somehow or other, through my grandmother, I *felt* the century's history – she transmitted its meanings and somehow I absorbed it all and it became part of who I was, of what I thought, and what I feel.

Born into poverty and hard labour, my grandmother's outrage at the indignity and injustice of poverty burned throughout her life and I felt it from my very first memory of her. It was palpable and I could feel it hard inside me long before I found any words to describe the sensation; and I still carry it.

She was clever at school, she told me, so much so that her teachers pleaded with her father to let her stay on. But no, she was the eldest child and had to work and so she left school at 14. I remember not so much the words but the deep regret with which they were said and the desperate sense of opportunities lost and of an intellect thirsty for fulfilment. As a result, she had a passion for education I have never seen equalled anywhere – and I have studied at three different universities and colleges. Remarkably, her passion ensured that all of her grandchildren benefited from further and higher education, yet at the end of her life when she could still recite verse upon verse of Wordsworth – *Jenny Gray* being her favourite – there was still that wistfulness and regret of a great mind not challenged enough or satisfied, denied its chance of development through family commitments, poverty and hard physical work.

As young women, my grandmother Bridget and her sisters worked in service in a grand house in Dalkeith. But this was not the sentimental world of *Upstairs, Downstairs*. She spoke of the meanness of the lady of the household; chastising her for taking leftover food from the kitchen for her and her sisters; she spoke of the coldness of the servants' quarters, the drudgery and physical demands of the work, the long hours and – probably the part she hated most – being regarded as 'lesser', of a lower class and certainly not equal. Again, I can remember not so much the words, but her outrage, her enormous dignity and sense of human fairness and equality. She never said it, but even as a child, I knew that these people may have been rich and had great social advantage, but they were barely her equals.

She told a beautiful story about a visit to the house she was working in by Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the future Queen Mother, not long after her engagement to the future King George in January 1923. The servants were lined up outside the house to meet Lady Elizabeth. My grandmother, who was attending millinery classes in the little spare time she had, eyed with envy Lady Elizabeth's hat and noted its design in great detail. As soon as she was free from duty, she went into town and purchased various feathers, ribbons and other bits and bobs and then looked out the hat she had recently made for herself and worked late to create a masterpiece of a hat, grander and finer but similar nonetheless to Lady Elizabeth's. In telling the story, she always beamed with pleasure as she described how, crowned with the most glorious of hats, she strutted down the drive into town to gasps of astonishment and admiration from everyone who met her. Throughout her life, she spoke of the Queen Mother with affection as if she knew her personally – yet she never tried to hide a sense of competition with this woman who was the same age as her and who, for all her privilege and position, was outdone by my grandmother – in my mind at least – in the hat fashion stakes!

An enduring feature of my grandmother's character was the way in which she was totally unimpressed by status and position. She was always more impressed by people's abilities, hard work, generosity and kindness. Cardinal Thomas Winning had direct experience of this over the 30 years he knew her – on the occasions I saw her with him he

seemed to love her company, her honesty, and her humour; qualities he shared with her. She respected his human qualities and his achievements, yet despite her great devotion to her religion I was always aware as a teenager that even archbishops and cardinals were, in her eyes, no greater than ordinary working men and women. When she died, Cardinal Winning along with five other priests conducted her requiem mass – a fitting tribute to an extraordinary woman by a prince of her church.

A year before she died, shortly after Labour's victory in the 1997 General Election, I received an invitation by the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, to attend a reception at 11 Downing Street for a number of people working in the film industry and the arts. I remember taking the invitation to show my gran, thinking she would be impressed that one of her granddaughters – the granddaughter of a poor mining family – had been invited to Downing Street. She turned to my son and said, 'I hope you are not impressed with that – you stick in at school and do well. That's what's impressive!' Needless to say, I didn't go to the reception!

My grandmother and her brothers and sisters made real for me through their stories the horrors of young men – boys of 13 – being sent down the mines to work or rather crawl in tunnels sometimes only two-feet high with 10 inches of water. She and her sisters also made me very aware of the drudgery of women bringing up large families, having to wash pit clothes in the days when there were no washing facilities, and of the strikes during the Second World War when women themselves had to work at the pit heads.

My gran was the first person to make me aware of the inequalities between men and women and long before women's history was being written, she talked about the often unrecognised role of women in the family, the community, and the workplace. Whilst never explicitly a feminist, she nonetheless, through her actions, fervently believed women were indeed equal (indeed I expect she thought they were the more able of the sexes!) and throughout my young life it never once crossed my mind that as a woman there were certain things I could not do. My grandmother believed that education was as important for girls as it was for boys.

As a child, listening to my gran and my great uncles with their grey, drawn faces and wheezing lungs filled with coal dust, I could taste the claustrophobia of the pits, the fear, the exhaustion and the total unfairness of their life circumstances. My gran's views were all the more marked by her experiences of the mines. Her husband died at a relatively young age, in his 50s, having been injured in the pits, and one day in my young life I will never forget was when her only son (she had one son and six daughters) was killed in a mining accident. He was 38. I was five at the time and it was my first conscious experience of grief – not my grief, but my grandmother's. I couldn't understand it, but I felt it as it overwhelmed the whole house and everyone in it. Part of her changed forever – in many senses it softened her and made her all the more compassionate. She shared people's suffering – people she knew and people she heard about in the news,

recognising she often couldn't help much, other than stand next to them, shoulder to shoulder, just being there, praying for them, reaching out to them.

Since 1928, when she was first allowed to vote at the age of 29, my gran never failed to vote in an election. She voted for the Labour Party all her life – not because the individual candidates necessarily impressed her, but because she believed it was the only party which genuinely stood for social justice, access to education and health care and equal opportunities for people like her – the majority. These phrases were not rhetoric to her – they represented everything she valued in life and aspired to for her family.

On a personal level, my grandmother clearly influenced all who knew her. In terms of her contribution to Scotland, she represents to me the large numbers of people, especially women, who are unknown and whose lives are unrecorded, but are actually the ones who collectively, and through the ways they lived their lives, brought about the great social changes of our times. It seems to me that in this century it was not rhetoric or people in high places who changed the world – it was the passion, the anger, the humour, the intelligence, the integrity, the dignity and human decency of real lives lived which ensured progress. It is a fact of history that political parties in a democracy only succeed if they reflect society's will and interests. The Scottish Parliament is the result of the people's will – people like Bridget Airrie; and it will only succeed if it reflects their aspirations and their humanity.

The day before my grandmother was buried, her body was taken from her home to the church. The tradition in Twechar is for the mourners to follow the hearse through the village on its last journey. My gran's family, all four generations, as well as friends and neighbours, walked, not mournfully, but jauntily behind her coffin, which was covered in lilies, carnations and roses. I felt like she must have felt that day in 1923 when she paraded her hat to all of Dalkeith, triumphant in having outdone the future Queen. Local children joined us on their bikes and such was the atmosphere they asked if it was a wedding, and would there be a scatter.

I was acutely aware that I would probably never be party to an occasion such as this again – tradition and lives were moving on. As I walked behind the hearse, I looked at two of the floral wreaths and condolence cards. One was from me and the other was from my mother Patricia, my grandmother's sixth child. I had tried to write the equivalent of a novel on a three inch by two inch card and still didn't manage to convey the depth of my feelings. My mother had written two words on her card and they said everything: 'Cheerio, Mammy'.

Once a Pole

John Millar

1999

I must have been about six years of age when I rushed into our house one day and breathlessly asked my father, 'Daddy, what's a Polish bastard?' I had no knowledge what the phrase meant, although from an even earlier age, I had known that I was 'different'. Different from the majority of the boys I came in contact with because the language spoken in our house was not Scots English, nor were the food we ate and the customs we observed.

The reason for this was that, although I was Scottish born, my parents were Lithuanian immigrants who had settled in Scotland around the turn of the century. They had retained their language and customs, rearing their children in the fashion of their native land, which meant that I was bilingual and English was actually my second language.

I have never forgotten what my father told me after he had asked why I had posed that particular question and I said that two older boys had repeatedly taunted me with those words. 'You are neither Polish nor illegitimate,' he said, 'You are of Lithuanian parentage and that is something to be proud of, not ashamed. If ignorant people do not know the difference between Poland and Lithuania that's their misfortune. It's best you ignore the stupid names they call you. Always remember: *Visada ir visur buk Lietuvis*'.

Everything my father said was, of course, in the Lithuanian tongue and translated the final phrase means: 'Always and everywhere be Lithuanian'. In other words, I was always to be proud of my ancestry and the heritage of the far away land I had never seen. An extremely difficult task in the West of Scotland because everything the Scots said and did only emphasised the dichotomy of Us and Them, the native and the foreigner, the local and the interloper.

Nevertheless, later I was to become even more proud when I found that my father had been a *knygnesis* (literally a 'book-carrier'), one of the dedicated band of ordinary Lithuanian people who became heroes of their country by smuggling literature printed in their own language from east Prussia in defiance of the ban imposed by the Russian Government. My father's presence in Scotland was the result of having to flee from the wrath of the Imperial Russian Authorities.

Not only were the Lithuanians foreigners but they were also Roman Catholic in belief. The religious bigotry of the West of Scotland, a peculiar phenomenon which is not perhaps as deep-rooted anywhere else, was concentrated now on the Lithuanians – the Irish had earlier had their turn. But the Lithuanians were twice-cursed: in addition to being Catholic they were also foreign.

An example from 1953 illustrates the religious bias in Ayrshire. I had brought my family back to Scotland from Birmingham. At the end of our first week in Ayrshire my son, then aged five, came running into the house. In the same manner as I had done so many years before, he asked me, 'Daddy, what's a Proddy and a Catholic?'

On inquiring why he wanted to know, he said, 'The boys out there want to know if I'm a Proddy or a Catholic'. The 'boys out there' were all roughly his own age. In all our years in Birmingham, never once had anyone asked any member of my family about their religion. Fewer than seven days domicile in Scotland, and a pre-school child had been demanded to profess his faith.

I was born in 1923 at number 9, Ardeer Square, Stevenston, in Ayrshire. The Square was a collection of rows built around 1853 to house employees of Merry and Cunningham's nearby pits and ironworks. They housed a typical Scots mining and ironworking community with a sprinkling of Irish and, during my early years, some 22 or 23 Lithuanian families. Although the number of Lithuanians could not in truth be called a community or colony, it was sufficiently large for them to gather together to talk in their own tongue and observe their own functions and holy days.

In retrospect, I think the day I asked my father for an explanation of a possible Polish illegitimacy was my introduction to the deep prejudice and bigotry which is apparently endemic to Ayrshire and the west coast of Scotland. Our religion, our food and customs were a source of scorn, derision and sarcastic epithets.

The large Lithuanian community of Lanarkshire had established their own delicatessen in Glasgow with branches in other nearby towns. Once a week, a van carrying provisions visited Stevenson to supply the Lithuanians living there. When purchases were being made by my parents or their countrymen, a band of locals always gathered – and they were not all children – making loud comments about the 'black breid' (rye bread), the pickled cabbage, beetroot, cucumber, and the Lithuanian sausage. Little did they know the tasty meals made from this foreign food.

Today, I doubt if there is a Scots household that does not own or know about continental quilts. Over 70 years ago, my bed covering was a goosefeather quilt about nine inches thick. This was the usual bedcover for all Lithuanian families who were accustomed to making their own quilts in their native land and had brought the custom with them to Scotland where this wonderful, warm, comfortable bedding became a source of derisory mirth. 'Hey, d'ye ken they Poles sleep oan wan feather bed wi' another wan oan tap o' them?'

The fact that we celebrated Christmas with lighted candles and a dinner on Christmas Eve when Christmas Day was just another working day to the Scots, and we more or less ignored the drunken rabble of New Year, was another sign of our foreignness. How could Christmas possibly be of greater importance than Hogmanay?

As I grew and my schooldays progressed, I discovered how difficult it was to follow my father's instructions and ignore the jeers, taunts, and verbal abuse I was subjected to.

A failure to disregard the catcalls and the possession of a quick temper constantly found me in hot water and having to use my fists. This resulted in many a split lip and bloody nose for most of my antagonists were older and stronger. I remember my time at primary school as a continuing battle against being called 'Pole' and 'Polish', almost always with an Anglo-Saxon epithet.

For some peculiar reason, which even now after years of research I cannot fathom, the Scots never used the word 'Lithuanian'. Even adults called us 'Poles'.

Because of a serious illness, I had been about six months late starting school and my older siblings had taught me during my convalescence, so that by the time I enrolled, I was already able to read and write. In the next year, I was probably more advanced than my classmates and one day I overheard my teacher telling her colleagues about the 'clever little Polish boy' she had in her class. The educated Scots were guilty of changing our nationality in the same manner as the supposedly ignorant, uneducated ones.

The contemporary press also used the erroneous description of 'Pole' or 'Polish' when reporting any event involving the Lithuanians. Whatever the story was, be it at a dance, death, court appearance or an industrial accident, the report always stated that the subject of the news was not a Scot, particularly if names had been Anglicised. For instance:

Joe Smith, a Pole, died as a result of an accident at the ironworks.

Any court case involving a Lithuanian was always highlighted as if getting drunk and committing a breach of the peace was a trait peculiar to these foreigners, and native Scots would never behave in this fashion.

My secondary schooldays were perhaps somewhat less of a battle. As my parents were Roman Catholic, I had naturally gone to the Catholic primary school in Stevenston. Catholic secondary education meant I had to travel to St Michael's College in Irvine whose catchment area was North Ayrshire primary schools. Consequently my first year class was a mixture of children who were strangers to each other. There were only about half-a-dozen of my former classmates included in my class. However, it was not long before those who knew me and my antecedents had informed the rest and the sniping began again.

Envy may have been a contributory factor. For the three terms of my first year, I was first in the class with honours and as a 12-year-old I had, of course, taken a terrific pride in being better, more clever, than those who tormented me.

Naturally, I suppose, my achievement and attitude caused feelings of envy and resentment among the other pupils and resulted in even more expressions of abuse. Between the ages of 12 and 14, I think I lost my naivete and a considerable amount of my quick temper. I began to realise that my father's advice was a sound principle. Ignoring and treating the verbal abuse with contempt was probably the best thing to do. No amount of battling was going to change the Scots' attitude to anyone they thought was a foreigner.

They say that children can be exceptionally cruel to one another and I had certainly experienced this at first hand. My teenage years, however, after I left school and started working, proved that adults were no strangers to cruelty to, and abuse of, their fellow man. Workmates would take out their frustration on the nearest whipping boy – the foreigner, the weak, the one who was different from them in colour, creed or culture.

Conscription into the British army when I reached the age of 19 during the 1939–45 war was actually a God-send, a period of relief for me, although military service during a global war was not something I would have chosen voluntarily. I remember thinking, as I held the official OHMS letter which ordered me to report to Inverness for enlistment in my hand: What if I say No? This letter is addressed to John Millar but my birth certificate says I am Jonas Stepsis, therefore I am not the person to whom this letter is addressed, and I have been told countless times to 'Go back tae yer ain country', so why should I fight for a people who disown me?

These thoughts were also prompted by the fact that my father, aged 69 in 1939, had to register as an alien immediately on the outbreak of war, just as he had been obliged to do in August 1914. An old-age pensioner with 39 years domicile in Scotland, he was still an alien but his son was required for service in the army. I could not help but smile wryly, particularly when our next door neighbour commented, 'You'll be joining up. We're fighting for your country – Poland'.

My service in the army was the only time I was completely free from prejudice, bigotry and abuse. I was treated exactly the same as all the others in khaki uniform. Not because my army colleagues were any different from the Scots I grew up with, but because they were ignorant of my parentage and I did not enlighten them. I kept my mouth shut and my temper in check when my fellow soldiers spoke derogatorily about wogs, eyties and other foreigners. I had learned my lesson, matured, and put aside the childish quick retort. No longer would I rise to the bait.

The cessation of the world war and eventual demobilisation brought an end to my 'Pole free' years. Perhaps post-war prejudice was not quite so blatant or vociferous as pre-1939. It manifested itself in more subtle ways.

The pursuance of a career, the earning of a large enough salary to provide for a burgeoning family, was littered with obstacles. Applications for jobs, for promotion, entry to superannuation schemes, all required the production of a birth certificate. The non-Scots name on mine, and those of my parents brought peculiar looks to the faces of those scanning it, who then began a series of questions as to the why and wherefore of the difference between the name on the certificate and the one by which I was known. There were always grossly mispronounced efforts to read the Lithuanian names as if they were something comical. Perhaps it was not the foreign name that decided a firm's hierarchy in their choice, but when a Scot with lesser qualifications and experience got the job or the promotion, it was extremely difficult to think otherwise.

My father died in January 1954, in his 84th year, having spent more than half-a-

century in Scotland. This man, who certainly had no schooling, could speak Lithuanian, Polish, Russian and German, but because he was not fluent in English – or the Scots version of English – he was looked upon by the citizens of his adopted country as unintelligent. After almost 54 years living in Scotland, almost twice as many as he had spent in his homeland, he was still 'Wullie, the Pole'.

Despite the passage of time and today's supposedly modern enlightened days, scratch the surface and the old, ingrained prejudice and bigotry are still there. As an example, in 1992, to further my research into the Lithuanians in Scotland, I submitted a letter to the local newspaper, asking for anyone who had been resident in or had any knowledge of Ardeer Square and would like to help in a historical project to contact me. While I was away from home, a person called at my house asking on what subject I specially needed help. On being told by my son-in-law that I was researching for a book on Scottish Lithuanians, the reply was, 'Oh! He's wan o' they Poles, then'.

Perhaps now, with the break up of the Soviet Union and the Baltic States having achieved self-government, the resultant publicity in the media may have shown anyone interested where exactly Lithuania and Poland are geographically and that they are two entirely different and separate nations.

However, it is a true saying that you can only educate those who are willing to be educated and it seems to me that, even if I live to be 100, when I die my epitaph will be: 'He wis wan o' they Poles!'

Fathers of the Nation: in Autumn 2000, seven contributors were asked to describe their fathers...

Always impossible

Marista Leishman on John Reith

2000

John Reith was a man who was perfectly cast as himself and able to put on as splendid a performance as ever, even posthumously: nearly 80 years on, the tall ghost of the BBC's creator seems still to stalk the corridors of Broadcasting House, a spectator at his own entries, brooding dolefully on its daily outpourings. His name, meantime, has passed into the language, and 'Reithian standards' have become a benchmark for today.

In Broadcasting House, his actor's set is the playing field scale of his desktop, curiously devoid of papers and of the paraphernalia of process. The pens and inkwells are arranged with geometrical precision – he is pathologically afraid of disorder – and he quaintly believes that to get to heaven your affairs must be in perfect order. He has a gold fountain pen which lies across his desk like a telegraph pole (only the best and the biggest will do for John Reith) and as he strides quickly to and fro, his audience – because that is the form that meetings with Reith take – has to follow his movements back and forth uneasily and feel vaguely disadvantaged, knowing that he could dispense kindness, vision, misery and small mindedness in equal measure.

For his secretaries, however, whose absolute loyalty is his, he is the man who, when the pressure is on, does little or nothing towards familiarising himself with the forthcoming procedures but sets about rearranging the furniture in his office, so that instead of typing up preparatory papers, secretaries find themselves, two apiece, at one end of a desk, a table, a bookcase, and he sweating at the other, heaving and straining to impose a new order on things.

Ever the conformist, John had got himself a wife, a baby and a large country house. For the latter, he made sure that its servants' wing was fully occupied; to the young child and his infant sister, an entourage of nannies and chambermaids, he allowed something like a wing of the house to preserve a safe distance; and for his wife, gales of criticism alternated with gusts of loud and guilty affection. He had, after all, married her to prevent the other fellow's intentions.

Grand people come to stay; but neither he nor Muriel entertain with the fluency available to their hereditary neighbours; he disconcerts his guests by appearing very late to take his place at the head of the dinner table. Muriel agitates at the opposite end and the head parlour maid must explain – with blushes – that his lordship is clearing the coal

cellar. He sits down covered in coal dust and engages in his favourite game of outstaring his children, now old enough to join the adult company. Before we can reach the haven of a chair, we must stand about like chess persons on a board, from time to time propelled by the hand on the shoulder onto another square.

We sit silently minding our manners hoping that no well-intentioned soul will feel that they should try to get us to talk; this, we have learned, is what you must never do. While my mother offers frail conversational nothings at her end of the table and anxiously watches to see that there are no caterpillars in the garden peas, my father delivers famous sayings from his end about 'The Brute Force of Monopoly' – which I think must be a very large dog on the end of a chain biting at a very small one called Monopoly.

Those were pre-war days and a huge Buick is drawn up before the portico leading to the front door: Burness the chauffeur is in a stand-at-ease pose beside it until the front door opens, his lordship emerges, and Burness flings open the rear door and salutes as he stares into the depth of the privet hedge behind. Together, they grandly crunch and swing out through the great gates into the lane.

At home, a second huge car arrives to take me up long driveways sweeping to porticoed entries with menacing doors, ending in pink and tinsel-covered miseries called children's parties. Christopher goes cheerlessly to Mrs Solomon's school and governesses for me pursue one another in and out of the house like a speeded-up movie. The garden offers a welcome escape from their attentions.

With the war, the servants leave for more contributive work; instead of the enormous cars, a thin little Austin, like a sparrow perched on an eagle's eyrie, is positioned at the portico. Burness escapes the call-up (I am delighted as he is a funny man who makes marvellous toys in his woodwork shop) and still stands meticulously positioned looking hard, as before, into the privet. Now, however, he flings open the passenger door: anything larger than a stick insect would be unable to climb in behind. A large lordship must now negotiate a huge black coat, himself and many expletives into a hopeless space. Thus, wedged tight together, it takes the exertions of all seven horsepower of the Austin to wobble and hop down the drive and on spindly wheels out through the disdainful gateposts.

By this time, I've had enough piano lessons to keep a large part of the piano teaching profession in expensive dinners. As a child, I was supposed to be good – and yes – I got a bang out of playing the small grand piano which sat in the drawing room. In the garden, happily sailing boats in the pond, I'd feel that pull and run for the house leaving boats behind becalmed mid-pond nodding in desultory and sub-nautical fashion up against the pond's hard edge.

In the house, some disagreeable imprints across carpets produce shrieks. The ivory piano keys are muddled but sing to me still, and my parents begin to think that there is something going on here which they should notice. My dear mama, like Mrs Tabitha

Twitchett, has fine company to tea. She sends for me upstairs. Poured into a frilly dress, I am nannied to the drawing room door and then boosted into the room prettily to meet the guests. By now, the ladies are well sat into the rose chintz armchairs. They lean beckoningly forward, each wanting to be so sweet with children. It seems to me that these ladies wear their chairs like clothes, tight about the hips this season. The men are just resigned; one looks as though he's swallowed the east wind.

From the hearth-rug, my father speaks as though to a boardroom meeting: 'This is Marista. They tell us she plays the piano well these days'. He looks meaningfully towards it, and abandoning all hope, I swim to the keyboard and make some kind of strangled response. My father stands behind the sofa (I associate his ferocious look with Ben Macdhui in a thunderstorm) and my mother shelters behind the silver teapot, as my fingers work with the alacrity of 10 slugs on a wet day. Everyone studies the carpet.

Upstairs at last, I fling off the frills and run to the garden, to my den in the yew hedge to nurse my wounded pride. I sit there long enough to feel deliciously hidden when they start to look for me, and I hear the voice of the nanny calling, her starched bosom and stupid apron going satisfactorily in the wrong direction.

Later, more and more of the 78rpm records which I bought were of organ music. I started to learn on the parish church instrument, where, at the button's press, I heard the slow creak of expanding bellows. I slid along the organ stool and, centred, saw the console climb in cliffs before me, the ivory draw-stops clustered around and the pedal board fanned out at my feet. I felt like a ladybird on the bridge of an ocean-going liner about to cast-off. My father, for whom music was either 'magnificent' or nothing, decided that it was now time for me to excel, and for this he would intervene. Anyone in his family – his children that is – were cluttered with the assumption that the only place for them was at the top. It didn't matter which top; chief of the Women's Royal Navy was a favourite for me. Some footholds on the path to musical summitry would kindly be provided, in my case, however, by the simple device of arranging for me to meet some of the distinguished souls already there, whereupon, as in broadcasting, some amazing form of transmission would occur.

Sir Thomas Beecham was disliked by my father because the conductor was unalarmed by outsized egos and liked to tweak them with his wit. And so I met Sir Adrian Boult. As a young man, new to his task in the BBC, he had been sent for by Sir John. 'They tell me,' said the director to the man he was about to appoint first permanent conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, 'that you can produce better sounds from the orchestra than anyone else'. These two men of comparable height understood one another; Boult had far too great a sense of humour to see himself and his boss in anything other than sub-heroic terms.

And then I met Sir William MacKay. High up in the organ loft of Westminster Abbey, suspended, as it were, in a cocoon of light, this gracious man waved me into his position at the organ and gave some outline directions. He waited by – smiling. My father stood

behind, adding to the number of the gathered gargoyles. But I had only one need, and that was for all the nine centuries of masonry, wood, and glass to fall, directly and immediately, upon me.

After that, I was trundled (or rather chauffeured) to the workshops of the greatest (he had to be the greatest) of our organ builders, Father Henry Willis III. He was an ancient, tiny man with a young person's cheer and the alacrity of a humming bird, flitting from blossom to blossom as he moved through the intricacies of the rebuild of a cathedral organ, spread out on his workshop floor. Again my father stood by, nonplussed except in regard to this further confirmation of his continuing ability to command the co-operation of the top person in any field, a capacity which pleased him but served further to incapacitate the recipient.

'You were,' said Malcolm Muggeridge in a televised interview, 'one of the top three people in Britain at the time'. In his appointment in 1922 to manage the British Broadcasting Company, he had in his view been singled out for special attention. 'I would say that the Almighty was there in my appointment to the job and was there in the execution of it.' The way in which the Lord endorsed his worldly aspiration was a privilege not apparently granted to Haley, Jacob, Greene or Curran, his ferocious egotism propelling him nearly to the top of the tree before abandoning him to the inevitable downfall. With Milton he could have said:

and in my choice

To reign is worth ambition though in hell:

Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.

Other forces were also at work. One was Winston Churchill, whose singular processes during crises Reith curiously understood and whose warlike spirit his own resembled. There could not be room for them both, and he wrote to Churchill as from 'someone whom you broke and whose life you ruined'. 'Old Wuthering Heights' Churchill called him, this capturing the rugged ferocious look of a prophet of doom; a 'horrid fellow' who kept him off the air for eight years.

Thus, as war loomed and then burst, he reluctantly accepted government appointments which were unappealing; shunted finally out of the last one he sat at home waiting for the telephone to ring. It didn't. My mother moved into the kitchen and I swept the stairs. At last, he got himself a job in the RNVR overseeing the movement of supplies for the invasion. In Normandy the next day, he stayed overnight in an unoccupied farmhouse and returned cheerfully with its blue checked bathroom curtain as a memento, and I made it into an apron for my mother.

My long-suffering mother all this time, was supposed not to notice all the bright young things he trailed to Ascot and Henley, he oblivious to wagging tongues. His children, he informed his listeners, disappointed him, and his response to my

engagement was a single ticket for a Bermuda cruise, and a high line in vitriol for Murray. The only reason he came to our wedding – with as fast a getaway as possible – was because he was afraid of George MacLeod (Lord MacLeod of Fuinary), and his remark that for John Reith only the fourth person of the Trinity would be good enough for his daughter. 'Never mind Reith,' said his tenacious friend Jack Loudon to Murray, 'he was always impossible'.

When eventually he was appointed Her Majesty's Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland with residence in the Palace of Holyroodhouse, he had a retinue which enabled him to feel 'adequately circumstanced' for once. 'Extraordinary,' he wrote, 'how completely I slipped vice-regality'. Their Graces received a visit from their grandchildren. In full regalia he bent down towards his grandson of seven years. 'Well, Mark,' he said ominously, 'what have you got to say to me?' The boy looked steadily up at him. 'Well, grandfather,' he said, 'how can I have anything to say until you have asked me a question?' At this robust response, a sudden engagement called His Grace elsewhere, his entourage hurrying along behind him.

It was James Naughtie who remarked that 'only an eccentric and a very strange man could have invented the BBC'. The background from which Reith came was as turbulent as his own career. It was from a Glasgow manse with a smooth and godly appearance under which seethed the many hates of the siblings. This new brother came after a 10-year gap: an interloper and a further drain on the rare commodity which was their parents' attention. The brothers talked their father, perplexed by the commotion which was his youngest son, into sending him away to boarding school 'to knock some sense into him' and then engaging him in a five-year engineering apprenticeship. John experienced the many faces of rejection and decided somewhere within himself that if they didn't love him as he was, he would re-launch himself, finding achievement in his own terms. He cultivated a war-like exterior, helped by his height and pronounced features and practised 'the language of vituperation'.

But a role model for John also emerged from out of this inferno and which in part responded to the question which some were asking: 'How can an awful man nevertheless be hung about with greatness?' George Reith, John's grandfather, was a man whose pioneering mission to open up the River Clyde to navigation, shipbuilding and commerce was the inspiration and the source of greatness with which he, John, unlocked the ether to communication, education and entertainment.

A dissenter at heart

Ian Hamilton on Harris Hamilton

2000

My father was old, prejudiced, conventional, obscurantic, religiously maniac, tee-total, respectable, clean of mouth and neat of person, and nearly everything else I've forever held in despite. Yet, when I look back, I'm overwhelmed with affection. I can still see his half-hurt, half-sardonic expression should he read these words. There are more to come. Let's start with religious mania.

Those who think hell is hot should take a time warp back to Paisley in the 1930s. Hell is boredom. Hell is the terrible, timeless torture of a small boy sitting in the family pew in St Andrews Church where my father was session clerk. The Church of Scotland was not quite to dad's theological taste. He had been of the United Free Church, and he never got over the betrayal of 1929 when the two churches united. Schism was in his blood, but he lived in unschismatic times.

The minister was the Rev T M A MacNab, called Tam by us vulgarians, but never in my father's hearing. Together, they ran that church as a satellite of Buchenwald. Both church and doctrine were grey, austere and cold. The only heating was the fires of hell. They were so real that in 1935 when I saw the trailer to William Wilder's *Dante's Inferno* I threw a fit and had to be taken home in a taxi. Maybe it wasn't dad's fault that I took it all so seriously. I know now that he and Tam had a pact with God. They looked after God's business on the Sabbath, and left Him to His own mischief for the rest of the week. I enjoyed writing that sentence. It sums up Scottish Calvinism. I turned to atheism in protest, and I've stayed with it ever since. The Lord loveth a cheerful sinner.

All the victories didn't go to the Presbyterians. Philip Larkin may be right about mums and dads, but children get their own back in adolescence. My adolescent instrument was a hideous ashtray in the shape of the Empire State Building. It had been sent to my father by his young sister, who should have known better. One day, I was innocently spinning it in the air and catching it when it escaped my hand, fell on a newly purchased sofa, fragmented itself, and irreparably gashed the sofa. My father, who was the first person to teach me that people are more important than things, took an uncharacteristically sore view. He stopped my pocket money for a month. But the next day was Sunday!

Those who go to church will know of the ceremony of passing the plate. When it was thrust under my nose by my own father, I broke the awful silence of the Holy place by saying loudly, 'No thank you very much, dad'. The plate was withdrawn as though an adder had suddenly appeared in it. At the subsequent debriefing, my mother and my big brother were incandescent with rage. I had brought shame on the family. But when I explained, very reasonably, that with no income I couldn't finance a church, I saw a glint

in my father's eye. I think it was amusement but maybe it was respect. My pocket money was restored without comment by either side.

You can judge a dad by how many times he hits his children. (Note how the stern word 'father' keeps giving way to the affectionate word 'dad'.) My dad hated punishment. He must have hit me often but I can only remember it happening once. It was over a triviality, and it was worth it. Except in his business, dad had no sales resistance. He was a sucker for anything new. He had bought two dozen patented collar studs, a curse of the 20th century now forgotten. I frequently lost my stud, and had to ask for a replacement.

This day, as he took the stud from its attached card, he lectured me on thrift. He explained how he could make a stud last for five years. At this point, the stud took charge and disintegrated in his hand. He looked at it in dismay, and, as one does, tried fruitlessly to fit the pieces together. My hour had come. 'Aye weel, dad,' I said. 'Ye'll no' be wearing that one for five years'. The blow fell swift and hard, and my ear rang for hours. He never hit me except in anger. Compared to being prayed over, it was a benediction.

These stories are an attempt to get at a great mystery: the way of a man with his son and of a son with his father. To see ourselves as others see us, would merely be a humiliation: to see ourselves as our sons see us, would be too heartbreaking for words. I was immensely lucky. I admired my father. If there was anything mean about him I wouldn't tell you, but there wasn't. I shall try to describe what I know of his life so that you, and I, may see him.

He was born in 1889 into all the certainties of Victorian splendour. His parents and all around him were confident that their exalted and rightful place would last forever. Yet Kipling's *Recessional*, written two years before my father's birth, gave the first faint warning that hubris and nemesis come almost hand in hand. The late Victorians never quite kept up with the pace of change. This was apparent in my father's thinking. He was both a biblical fundamentalist and a Darwinian evolutionist. He believed equally in Noah's Ark and the evolution of the species. Nowadays, we would call such a position absurd. Yet we know that no father can discard the useless baggage of the ages. Listen to our sons, patiently try to bring ourselves up-to-date. Sons and fathers live in different countries.

I never challenged my father's religious or scientific beliefs. My decency surprises me. I challenged everything else that he held dear. He took the greatness of the Empire for granted. Such writers as William Morris, Bernard Shaw and the Fabians made me doubt the Empire, and he smiled tolerantly at my doubts. And yet I wonder.

His favourite poet was Kipling. He introduced me to *Recessional* to whose doubts I have already referred. In retrospect, I was lucky to have a father who read poetry at all. Many people who call themselves learned don't have a poetry book in the house. Dad brought me up with books. First of all, with Arthur Mee's 10-volume *Children's Encyclopaedia*. Disraeli's speeches were there for later. For a while I went about the house shouting, LEARN TO ASPIRE!

LEARN TO ASPIRE! It was a privileged boyhood. Dad spent his substance on my education, my elder brother's and his own.

I wonder what he would have been like had he gone to university. He might have become as bigoted as the Reverend Tam. Formal education narrows the mind. Family circumstances stopped him. His grandfather had been a man of substance. So had his father, of whom nobody spoke. I don't know why. When my father was in his teens, my grandfather was killed in a road accident. He left a tailoring business, a widow, and four children of whom my father was the eldest. He had no alternative but to take over and be his mother's support and a father to his siblings. He hated tailoring, but I only learned that from my mother many years later. Doubtless, the business made military uniforms. That, and the need to maintain his mother and his siblings, kept him from the trenches. He never talked about the war. He had lost too many friends.

With such a background, he hoped for more for his sons than he had had for himself. My brother, my elder by four years, couldn't take the pressure. He emigrated to Canada to escape the grimness of our Christian home. I stayed, and had the benefit of my father. I'll try to gloss over the cruelties of adolescence – my cruelties, not his. He wanted me to dress impeccably. 'I'd rather buy my own clothes in Burton's than wear yours,' I once burst out. The glimpse in his eye has been remembered for 60 years, and been remembered with shame.

I may have failed him in dress, but I wonder if I failed him in the road I took. Recently I read the obituary of the son of one of his friends. The son had 'got on'. He was an elder of the Abbey, held the TD, was chairman of this and director of that, and may even have been knighted. I can't remember. He had been blessed with every success my father would have wished for me – or would he? He knew that I sought a lonely road, and maybe he was proud. The harder I try, the less I understand. As a tailor in what was then a small town he dared not offend his customers, yet he was a dissenter at heart. He never censured me for my views.

At the age of 14, I mutinied at school. The Battle of Britain was being fought and the King and Queen were on a tour of Clydeside. We school kids were marshalled to show our loyalty by lining the streets and cheering. I refused. They were English royals. Nothing to do with me. Nothing could have more embarrassed my father yet he never reproached me. John Harris Hamilton was a very gentle person. I was 14 when I started saying to him, 'Everyone in Paisley knows me as Harrison Hamilton's son. Some day you'll be known as Ian Hamilton's father'. When it happened, no-one could have been more generous.

I wish I could describe him more clearly for you. He owned a large tenement building in the centre of Paisley. The first two floors held his business. Two charities held a further floor at peppercorn rents. The top floor flat was let to a caretaker. To my secret glee, he was a secret drinker who ordered his life by *Old Moore's Almanac*. On the ground floor, my father measured and fitted his customers. The grinding sound of his

sheers cutting the cloth is still with me. So is the smell of damp cloth from upstairs, where a dozen or so tailors sat cross-legged on a dais, raised to keep them above draughts from the floor. He was a careful employer.

Sometimes, I am complimented on my pleading as an advocate. I have one stock reply. 'My father was a tailor. He was angry if a button came off a jacket before the whole thing was worn out. I try to maintain the same tradesman-like standards'. These words are a revelation to me. Down through the years he has been the standard to which I aspire!

I'm going to write a twiddly bit in his memory. He was a Scot. He had all the failings of our race. His grandfather, a tailor in the town of Hamilton, was also the local bookie. When the horses weren't running, he stood outside his shop and took bets on which raindrop would be the first down the window. My father therefore eschewed gambling. He had every contradiction in his make-up that I have made my own. He was on both sides at Culloden. He signed the Covenant and rode with Montrose. He was a preacher in the moss hags, and a trooper with Bonnie Dundee. His ministry at Dunbar advised us to leave the hill for the shore where God would give us victory over Cromwell. I fought with his platoon at Stirling Bridge and fell with him at Flodden.

I turn now with fury on Kenneth Roy. In asking about our fathers, he has set a mirror to ourselves. Over our shoulder, we see the shadow of another man. He lingers, silent, speechless, beseeching to be understood. I am distressed. I have recalled a man I loved who cannot speak for himself and I speak of all wrong. I have made him seem like a religious bigot, yet he was not like that at all. I was with him when he died. If he still believed in God, he didn't call on Him in his last agonal moments as the man on the Cross did. I don't think he had given up on God. I think he was just too proud to ask for help.

A son is the wrong person to ask about his father. The emotions are too strong. My eldest child, the only grandchild to have known him, adores his memory. Harken to the child, not to me.

My violent dad

George Chalmers on Harry Chalmers

2000

On a slick November night in '58 or '59 we emerged from the La Scala movie theatre in Dundee. *Somebody Up There Likes Me* was showing and, even though a cold rain stung my face, inside my chest burned a warm glow from a happy ending.

We crossed the tramlines into an alleyway that led to the top of our street. He walked in front, paused at the side door of the Old Bank Bar, then moved on. We scuffed down a narrow flight of ill-lit stairs that gave onto a rectangular delivery area. Even at four or five paces behind, I heard his hard breaths pushing out air, occasionally in quick bursts as if to clear his nostrils. Turning up the collar of a leather-patched reefer, he swaggered in loose-limbed fashion. I had trouble keeping up.

Some black cars were parked under a high swinging light moving back and forth, illuminating different parts of the glistening bodywork. Ahead, a drunk man turned into the pend. He swayed forward, then shuffled his feet three or four steps so his bottom half could catch up. Singing softly, he staggered on, keeping his head down.

I moved to let him pass between us and when he drew level my father gave him an uppercut that seemed to send him flying backwards as his false teeth shot upwards. He landed near the front wheels of a Ford Popular and began to moan. In the breast pocket of a grey overcoat he'd placed a dark handkerchief. His shoes shone in glossy monochrome. He looked as old as my granddad, smart dresser too, like granddad. 'Are you waitin' on a doctor's line? Come on!' I stopped staring at the man who could have been someone's granddad and ran to catch a guy who could have been a father. But he didn't fancy it.

That is one of six clear memories I have of my father and I being together.

The earliest is when, at six, I managed to get us thrown out of Billy Smart's Circus for 'abusive and threatening behaviour' towards a whip-happy ringmaster. A clown dispatched to placate my rage had to dodge a few infantile right crosses and suffer a couple of boots to his shins. Inconsolable, I was ushered out of a secret flap in the tent, followed soon after by my father clutching our refund. If reasons were needed to hate circuses, there's none better than the misunderstood hero-child victimised by red-nosed authority figures wearing big boots.

That evening worked out perfect for him. Not only had he fulfilled a reluctant commitment to take me to the circus, he now held the entry fee for higher jinx in The Opera Bar, not to mention the potential pint-magnet of a funny story. 'Gone tell us again aboot that time wee Geordie an' you got barred fae Billy Smart's,' they'd ask, taking another bottle of India Pale Ale from the carry-out. 'Aye, gone Harry, tell us.' Eventually, I thought it never happened as reality became an ever-changing story.

A more fleeting memory reinventing itself with every visit is travelling pillion on a borrowed 500cc Triumph snaking back from Errol motorbike races. Aged nine and fearless, I swayed into every bend as we roared home to an untrendy dockland. Apart from a controlled dive off a high board, it's the closest thing to flying.

Our other three get-togethers were evenly spaced and, I suppose, bear witness to certain similarities in character. At 13, whistling on the last lap of a lengthy paper round, he (kind of) ambushed me in a tenement close. A smell of stale beer hung around him. 'Any tips the day?' he asked through a cloud of Woodbine.

'Aye – stay away fae the hoose,' I answered, surprising myself with a rapid reply. He laughed. Next thing, I'm on one knee trying to gasp air into empty lungs. Anyone who's had all the wind punched out of them will understand. He walked away. I sat on the stair rubbing my belly. The rest of the papers were delivered whistle-free.

At 16, there was no 'kind of' regarding the ambush. In the 60s, like most cities, Dundee had a vibrant, living city centre. When the pubs and dance halls emptied we congregated at a coffee stall to drink weak tea, eat dodgy mince rolls and, depending where one stood, declare allegiance to one of the various gangs.

In the doorway of the Sixty Minute Cleaners at the back of the coffee stall, four of us pretended to enjoy a nightcap of cheap wine. I saw him turn the corner from the Overgate, and he saw me. 'There's your auld man, George,' nodded one of the guys. All I remember is walking towards him, then ramming my forehead into his face. He fell back but didn't go down, I followed up with a few hooks to the face and body. Just like he told me to. ('You're jist wee – so hit them fast and often – if they don't go down – run.') Forgot that last bit, of course, and while we were rolling around on the pavement, two giant coppers pulled us apart. What could be called a split decision.

When they discovered we were father and son, they shook their heads and said they had more to do than 'sort out domestics'. 'Do you no' get on wi' yir da?' quipped one, as the other assessed the damage to my suit. If it wasn't for the vice closing round my ribs I might have joined in the laughter. 'You'll take him next time, wee man.' And, sadly, at 19 it proved unforgettably true. In a narrow space between some air-raid shelters, on a fierce summer evening we finally sorted out the pecking order. It was a no-contest, really, and it's sobering to beat up a man who terrified you during those important formative years. A ridiculous, hollow victory that rings like a broken chime. If anything was learned from that incident, it taught me never to feed off my emotions. We had a relationship built on fear and I reinforced its pointlessness.

It wasn't all laughs, of course. We were the classic nuclear family; encased in a shell and likely to explode at any time. Collision shanghaid communication. Consequently we carved out separate lives. Sneaking into the movies became a sanctuary from our bouncy single-end. His was any boozer he hadn't been barred from and my mother retreated into a rattle of pills swilled back with nips from a plastic container kept by the side of her chair. Behind a cushion adorned by the family friendly face of Pope Pius XII she stashed

a hatchet, sometimes a poker, indiscriminately in buccaneer style, which may account for my 'ducking and diving' later in life. Can't see how she hoped to render him unconscious when he was halfway across an ocean.

When he did work, it took the form of lengthy trips on merchant ships or tankers sailing to faraway places. Not that life seemed any calmer during these many departures, only nervously quiet. Silence, interrupted by *Housewives' Choice*, *Workers' Playtime* and *Saturday Night Theatre* became the norm. Until he disembarked and another radio sailed out the window to crash in the back court. This may have been his idea of an outside broadcast.

After one trip to the States, he actually arrived back with some money. He bought a second-hand radiogram from Paddy's Market. It took him and three other half-drunk losers an hour to carry it up two flights of stairs and position it in a mould-ridden recess. Its shimmering patina filled the alcove like a gleaming sacristy. On top – 'To really show it off' – he placed a whirling Chinese lamp that lighthoused a static willow-patterned tale of pinned-up wallpaper. Oriental hell became home for Uncle Max and The Man in Black. Scratchy 78s of Robert Johnston, Billie Holliday and Benjamino Gigli captivated me. Still do. One positive inheritance is an abiding love of music. But, predictable, his id drove him to kill the thing he loved and, one night, when the money had all been drunk, I sat awestruck as our beautiful walnut animal was reduced to kindling sticks. Frighteningly impressive best describes those few minutes that went on and ever on.

After another trip, I hazily recall the room swirling in sweet smoke and people sitting round smiling their fool heads off. At 3am, on went the frying pan and next day's food got tanned. I wolfed a 'piece in original lorne' covered in nippy sauce.

A few days passed in placid mood while the contents of a see-through bag dwindled with every roll-up. 'It's coolie's tea,' he said, grinning stupidly, 'an' this is how you help it brew'. A tea-strainer, topped-up with this green loose leaf tea, had boiling water poured over it until the teapot held enough for a few cups. Then he tapped the damp dregs onto a shovel which he placed on a gas ring to dry out. When dry, he spread it out on a newspaper draped across the table, then used more than one cigarette paper to build a tapered cone, twisting the narrow end. Him and his pal passed this reeking chimney to and fro, stopping now and then to slurp, red-eyed, from coronation mugs.

Those couple of days glided along in a fine and mellow groove until someone brought along some Country and Western records. From then the atmosphere spiralled downwards. Was the case of depression an absence of complicated tea, or Jim Reeves snivelling about a *Little Bitty Tear* letting him down? I blame the latter. One thing worse than gratuitous violence is gratuitous sentiment.

Nowadays, on the very rare occasions he crosses my mind, I think of Mailer's observation on Alan Ladd being 'a small boy's idea of a tough guy'. He was blond, weathered and boxer-squat, the first person I'd seen wearing perfectly faded Levi shirt and jeans 'bought in New York'. And when this denim-clad Viking shoved off (again) on

a wake of shredded linoleum I managed to submerge a dizzying feeling of ambivalence towards a falling idol. The whirling mass of contradictions bubbling in my 11-year-old head took some time to sort out but, gradually, a self-imposed order emerged from the familiarity of chaos.

They divorced when I was 11. During the proceedings I had to stand up in court to tell some of the things I'd seen and heard. No-one should ever do such a treacherous deed even when the truth sounds like a betrayal. But I was made to do it and, in an attempt to hold onto a bit of myself, I spoke fast in a mumbling tone, then lowered my head.

Apart from seeing him by accident, I never had much contact beyond those three incidents mentioned earlier. I've no more understanding of his interior life than, I suppose, he did. He wore his angst and anger on rolled-up sleeves displaying all the sturm und drang of a colourless firework. Still, depending on where some people have been, it's difficult to imagine alternatives for them. He should have married the sea. Sometimes, he spoke of it like his only true companion, whose unpredictable dangers somehow tamed him for a spell.

He died in 1984. Taken by a bout of pneumonia in the aftermath of a heart attack. I travelled to Ninewells Hospital but thankfully he remained unconscious for the five minutes or so I stayed. On my return to Glasgow, I phoned intensive care to be told he'd died an hour earlier. The world didn't feel less interesting without him.

Not many turned up at his funeral and I've never shed a tear. This has been easier to write than it was to think about. It may not be too late to grieve, but I just don't fancy it.

The bourgeois bohemian

Arnold Kemp on Robert Kemp

2000

Many years ago Sir Alec Guinness appeared in the West End production of John Mortimer's play *A Voyage Round My Father*. As I recall, the father was a blind barrister and his son's portrait was ambiguous and impressionistic. Indeed, the message was that the father, like all fathers, would inevitably remain mysterious to his son.

Although my father, Robert Kemp, was as kind, gentle and loving a parent as anyone could wish, allowing his study to become the family den even as he worked away at his plays, his novels, his radio and television scripts and his journalism, I became aware that beyond the attentive domestic figure there was another, subtly different personality that moved about in public. This figure had friends that were talented and raffish, engaged in the politics of theatre though rarely in the politics of parties and parliaments, loved his Saturday lunchtimes and occasional evenings at the Scottish Arts Club, where he served a term as president, and relished his hour in the Northern Bar on Saturday nights with *The Pink* and a small gathering of friends.

I suspected, too, that in his youth there had been riotous patches. Indeed, my mother once disclosed that he and a friend had been thrown out of a music hall in Manchester. Later, I sometimes came across his spoor, at the Cafe Royal or the Abbotsford, where those who had known him in the old days spoke of his conviviality. There were occasions, of course, when we glimpsed it at home, when he had visitors, and certainly our household was rarely too far away from laughter. But I suppose he felt he had to set us all an example of restraint, and like all parents, perhaps, he kept part of himself hidden.

He tried to inculcate the conventional values of honesty, integrity, sobriety, restraint, good manners and respect for others. Much of this was carried on, in collaboration with my mother, at our table. But there was talk, too, especially as we grew older, about ideas, history and cultures. And it was through his often complex attitudes that he most truly moulded me. He was a son of the manse and entertained a most lively dislike of science which, I suspect, came down from the days of the old Darwinian controversies. He wanted us to excel in the arts and humanities, though I fear we often disappointed him. He tried to communicate his own love of Scottish traditions, and would offer us a pound if we learned by heart *The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens* or *Tam O'Shanter*. If the school report spoke ill of our attainments in Latin, French or English, his brows would beetle in disapproval. But once I failed a science O-Level spectacularly, walking out before the end and scoring 3%. He was delighted, and congratulated me as if on a notable achievement.

His conversation must have planted in me the idea of being a journalist. My mother was

a teacher of English, for whom there was hardly any greater lapse than a grammatical error, and so between the two of them they hammered me into shape as an apprentice for my father's trade. After Aberdeen University, where he won the gold medal in English, he joined the *Manchester Guardian*. He was, as he liked to recall, the last reporter to have been appointed by the great C P Scott. At the interview, he was most impressed by the piercing gaze of the great man's right eye which, he felt, penetrated into the inner reaches of the soul, stripping away all duplicity. Only afterwards did he learn that this was a glass eye; he had been barely aware of the feeble and watery left eye through which Scott dimly saw the world.

After about seven years in the Manchester newsroom, he moved to the BBC features department in London. Radio documentaries, in those days, were fully scripted, and it was here that he began to learn his craft as a dramatist. The process continued at BBC Scotland, where he became a producer. But it was not until the success of his adaptation of *The Three Estates*, in the brilliant production by Tyrone Guthrie at the second Edinburgh International Festival of 1948, that he felt confident enough to leave the BBC payroll and embark on an independent career as a writer. Of course, the BBC remained an essential source of patronage but he devoted much of his energies to writing and with others consolidating a professional theatre company at the Gateway.

By then, too, he had become convinced that it would be possible to evolve a Scottish dramatic style. Like many of his contemporaries he admired the achievements of the Irish theatre and hoped to emulate them. His particular theory was that the theatre in Scotland had not been destroyed in the dark night of the Reformation; rather it had gone underground into the 'low theatre' of music hall. He detected in the art of the Scottish comedians something distinctive, more physical than the brittle artificial naturalism of the English stage, more reminiscent of French theatre with its mime and flowing movement. He saw his theory personified in the figure of the late Duncan Macrae, for whom his translations of Moliere into Scots were written (although Macrae, lured by the rich pickings in pantomime, only performed in the first). All his comedies owe something to this perception but equally they are rich in characters from the Scotland in which he had grown up, first in Orkney, then in Buchan and finally in Deeside, and from its burghs and cities. His plays are peopled by the characters who came to the manse which, as he later observed, stood as a panoramic social observation point with an eye on both the gentry and the common folk.

He loved Orkney, and remembered coming home from school one day during the First World War to find that the Grand Fleet had slipped into Scapa Flow in the course of the morning. But Buchan, where he spent his early teens, was more truly formative. The farmers there, many of whom owned their land, were stiff-necked and independent-minded. In Deeside, at Birse, he was astounded by the abundance of the trees but repelled, also, by the luxuriance of the snobberies and the deference to the landed class.

His upbringing, and the spirit of the times (the Scottish Renaissance was in the making) made him something of a nationalist. He lovingly collected examples of Scots

speech for his radio series *The Guid Scots Tongue*. This, he argued, was a language in its own right, not a dialect. He reviled the slipshod urban demotic which has since replaced Scots as a standard vehicle for literary expression, as in the works of Kelman and Welsh. He believed that Scots, once the language of the court, should be spoken with grammatical assurance, as indeed it still was in the country districts and small burghs.

Many of his own plays were very successful in his own time – for example, *The Other Dear Charmer*, on the theme of Burns' affair with Clarinda, or comedies like *The Penny Wedding*. His first and best novel, *The Malacca Cane*, is a comedy set in an Edinburgh where raffishness subverted a rigid lower-middle-class respectability, in that distant city of scrubbed common stairs and punctual church attendance and silent sabbaths. His plays did not translate easily to the London stage and by the time he made any serious attempt to confront the West End it was too late. The theatre had moved on. Bourgeois dramatists had been supplanted by the kitchen-sink school. He was in good company: Rattigan, the king of the West End, slipped into obscurity almost overnight.

My father detested the idea that theatre was some sort of cerebral or psychiatric laboratory and was dismayed by what he saw as the intellectual pretensions of the Edinburgh civic theatre at the Lyceum, under the directorship of his old friend Tom Fleming, into which the Gateway had mutated. He was not, however, afraid of social realism though he never wallowed in it. His one-act play *The Asset* was denounced by Ayr Presbytery because of what now seem mild scenes of drinking and swearing. This, and the fact that the little ministers had neither read the text nor seen the work, so infuriated my father that he briefly left the church. His plays are not much performed now, and hardly appear consonant with the brutal, self-revelatory frankness of our times. A national theatre, if we ever get one, may still find them worth exploring.

Behind the French influence, behind the rich and sentimental characterisation, there lay something else which I can best describe as a dream of social harmony. There was, therefore, something of an old-style Toryism in my father's political attitudes. The old Toryism believed in mutual obligation and valued the contribution of all to the social matrix. He once rebuked me for speaking slightly of a news vendor. He was an honest man making his living, he said sharply. Yet he was also quite capable of ticking off a bus conductor who greeted him with 'How are you, Jimmy?' with the reply, 'Well, thank you, Marmaduke'.

He was once asked to stand as a nationalist candidate but wisely declined. He would not have coped well with the infighting of politics. The Ayr Presbytery controversy caused him a disproportionate amount of distress and the campaign against the plan for an inner ring road in Edinburgh almost certainly hastened his death, so choleric did he become about a project that would have lopped the end off our graceful crescent at the fringe of the New Town and destroyed many more properties in its brutal sweep. He did not live to see the campaign's victory or the adoption, decades later, of its suggested alternative – an outer relief road.

His cultural nationalism remained dominant. He believed passionately that the distinctive traditions of Scotland should be celebrated, sustained and, if possible, renewed. He wrote several historical plays, for example about John Knox and Robert the Bruce, which show the depth of his knowledge and understanding. But the old Scotland was vanishing, the forces of assimilation and consumerism were taking hold, the Church of Scotland and the Tory party both beginning a period of rapid decline. Yet my father kept going. He had a fruitful relationship with television, writing several original plays for it and becoming the *Glasgow Herald's* television critic (and Saturday diarist). He was extraordinarily industrious and let little go to waste. A short story would resurface as a play and then as a novel.

His attitude to London and the English remained ambiguous and even contradictory. He counted English people among his dearest friends; he was devoted to his London agent, Derek Glynne; he gave his best years to Scotland but towards the end of his life, as new brooms came into the BBC and the work began to dry up at home, he aimed at last for London (he had two successful runs of late comedies at Windsor but ill luck, and perhaps the changed climate, kept them out of the West End).

My father died in 1957, at the age of 59, carried away by a stroke which, I suspect, was brought on by medical treatment he was receiving at the time for an ulcer. Scarcely a day goes by when I do not think of him. It is a sad truth that you remember your parents more vividly in their declining years than in their prime. Towards the end of his life, he suffered sometimes from melancholy which, in a man of such wit and merriment, was sad to see. But with only a little effort, I look beyond, to the sunlit days of our childhood beside the Water of Leith, to his love, his companionship, his cultivated intelligence and his lack of conceit or self-satisfaction. It is one of the delights of advancing years sometimes to see in my grandchildren, in a look or a laugh or a mannerism, sudden glimpses of both my father and my mother.

I suppose I have inherited some of his attitudes – his francophilia and his belief, sometimes strained in the face of mindless crime or excessive greed, in the possibility of social harmony. When I became the editor of the *Glasgow Herald* between 1981 and 1994, his influence was the most pervasive of all, perhaps because it operated unceasingly and often at a subconscious level. I had learned my trade from three fine masters – Alastair Dunnett, Alastair Hetherington and Eric Mackay – but any editor will tell you there is no single right way of doing the job. Everyone must find an approach and a method. I think I was more than usually sympathetic to contributors and freelances. If so, this was because I had seen how my father, down the years, had suffered at the hands of the mediocre and the arrogant. As a freelance, he usually had to grin and bear it, although sometimes he didn't.

But most of all, I think, he influenced my rejection of Thatcherism. Its emphasis on the marketplace would have offended his concepts of social harmony and he would, I fancy, have detested its hectoring tone, just as my mother did. His premature death still

fills me with a sense of injustice and every year by which my own lifespan exceeds his seems an ill-deserved bonus. Above all, like many Scots, I sense in myself that everlasting struggle between the bourgeois and the bohemian. In his case, the bourgeois won but the bohemian was always there too, never crudely dressed but wrapped in wit and irony. Philip Larkin's infamous judgement on parents does not apply to mine.

Chasing butterflies

Catherine Czerkawska on Julian Czerkowski

2000

If I was asked to name a time of pure happiness, I could think of a number of episodes, including my own wedding day (a small, family affair) or feeding my baby son in the quiet of the night, or more recently my first sight of the Bay of Naples with Vesuvius looming over it, but if pushed, I would have to pick one summer afternoon in Mill Hill when I was 10 years old.

My father was spending a year at a research institute in London and we had digs somewhere in Mill Hill which at that time was vaguely rural. We had gone for a walk up through the fields: myself, my mother and my father. It was hot and sunny and the air had that midsummer scent of cut grass and roses. We were a perfect triangle, absolutely sure of loving each other. And the field was full of butterflies. I don't know which one of us began chasing them, but within minutes, all three of us were running dementedly about the field, not catching them, just chasing them, and laughing until we fell over. Nothing before or since has matched it for a few moments of absolute and unadulterated happiness.

Now my teenage son Charles judges everything by the 'grandad' standard. His other grandfather died long before he was born but my dad, ah, he was the best. Grandad never lost his temper. (True.) Grandad would have loved the Playstation and the PC. (Quite probably.) Grandad would have adored ice hockey. (Indubitably.)

Boredom was the great enemy. He was a grandad, and before that, a father, who had to be doing things, or making things, all the time. He once threw a toothpaste tube on a bonfire 'just to see what would happen'. (Trousers covered in baked toothpaste, that was what happened.) On another occasion he decided to make himself a pair of those curious lawn aerating sandals with spikes all over the soles – you see them advertised in esoteric gardening catalogues – but being Polish (Poles can always do things better) he thought he would make them more efficient, so he added more spikes. A lot more spikes. The first time he tried them out they pinned him to the lawn and he stood there swaying back and forth calling for help while his family watched from the kitchen window, giggling uncontrollably.

He and my son were the best of friends right from the start. Charles Julian was the pride of the older Julian's life and the feeling was mutual. Even as a toddler Charles would tell my mother: 'You go away, Nana. Grandad and me have things to do'. They would cut the grass together, Charles gravely pushing his wooden lawnmower behind grandad's real one. They would go inside the fruit nets and eat raspberries and redcurrants in profusion. They would dig potatoes, to be boiled and eaten in the Polish

way with butter and dill. Alternatively, they would go to the beach and dig castles and ditches and dams. When Charles grew a little older, they would go fishing together and they would always catch something, usually a couple of trout which they would bring home and barbecue and eat. They would pick bilberries and brambles in season, and sometimes they would come home with bags full of edible mushrooms, much to the suspicion of their neighbours for whom these were toadstools and spelled instant death. On rainy days, they would play chess or board games or make extremely complicated drawings, usually of very graphic accidents.

'Let's draw disasters, grandad,' Charles would say enthusiastically.

Charles was born in 1986, the year dad retired, 'just at the right time', as he said. But my dad wasn't one of those people who only comes into their own as a grandad. He had been an indulgent father as well. I was rummaging through old photographs the other day, dozens of little black and white snapshots of the past and there was my father; very dark and handsome and foreign with the wavy jet black hair that was so fashionable at the time. In one snap he is staring uncharacteristically seriously, at the camera. He is dressed in a cream mac, and he is holding a tiny baby tenderly in his arms. The baby is me.

Later, my school friends all had crushes on him. 'Your dad's lovely', they would tell me. They liked his accent, though by this time he even thought in English. He would make them laugh or cajole them into confidences. But he was always the perfect gentleman with a kind of natural courtesy. It was a rare soul who wouldn't talk to my dad. Shyness was not one of his afflictions. After he died, I lost count of the number of people who wrote to me or came up to me in the streets of Maybole, the small Scottish town where he had lived for 25 years, and told me what my dad had meant to them and how proud they were to have known him.

Julian Wladyslaw Czerkawski was born, the only son of Wladyslaw Czerkawski and Lucja Szapera, on a country estate called Dziedzilow, in the Polish 'Wild East' – now Ukraine. They were reasonably wealthy. My grandfather Wladyslaw, one of five children, had inherited Dziedzilow from an elderly unmarried uncle, a distinguished politician called Julian Czerkawski after whom he would name his son. Wladyslaw was handsome, charming, and 'a bit of a devil' according to his brother-in-law, my great uncle Karol, whom I met much later and who had obviously been a bit of a devil himself. Wladyslaw owned a pet monkey and the only car for miles around and he was always making ambitious plans for the future of the estate: one year it was growing mushrooms, the next year it was going to be pigs and bacon. A linguist, he had started to teach my father English from an early age.

When war broke out Wladyslaw was imprisoned by the Russians (he was a landowner) and then when Stalin changed his mind about the Germans (but not his inclination to dislike Poles) he was released and sent East to join the Polish army in what was then Persia. But like the vast number of Poles heading in the same direction, he died

of typhus, and is buried in a place called Bukhara, thousands of miles from home. He was a 'lancer' – the last of the great Polish cavalrymen. And he had been born in January, in a sleigh. My father told me countless stories about him when I was a small girl. It seemed – and still seems – like the most outrageous fiction. But it was all true.

After war broke out, and my grandfather disappeared, my father went to the city of Lwow with his mother, acted as a courier for the resistance as soon as he was old enough, joined the army, was in a prison camp for a while, and then came to Britain with his tank regiment, via Italy where he had fought at Monte Cassino.

After he was demobbed he got a job in a textile mill in Leeds – 'aliens' had to work in mills or mines in those days – and met my Yorkshire mother at a dance. She had a cold sore on her lip and her hair tied back with a bootlace. She reckoned afterwards that it was definitely a match made in heaven since neither of these factors seemed to deter him from asking to see her again.

'I think they ought to send all those Poles home, don't you?' said a customer in my grandmother's little sweet shop, to my mum, serving behind the counter.

'Well, no, not really,' she replied, handing over the raspberry ruffles with a certain amount of satisfaction. 'You see I've just married one of them.' They had married in the Catholic church down the road – in January – and their honeymoon consisted of a chilly weekend in Scarborough.

My dad went to night school and took O Levels and A Levels and then he left the mill, and worked as a technician at the university while he studied for a degree in biochemistry. The three of us lived in a tiny two roomed flat above my grandparents' shop. It was not easy being an 'alien' in those post-war years even if you came from a nation which had fought alongside the Brits all along. (It was only last year that somebody old enough to have known better asked me in all seriousness if my father had been a prisoner of war in Scotland. I was so flabbergasted that I didn't quite know how to react!)

Mind you, my dad still had to report to a police station every so often; he carried an identity card which proved him to be an alien, and whenever a crime was thought to have been committed by a 'foreigner' in Leeds, the police would come hammering on the door, sometimes at midnight. One night, my mother elbowed my dad aside, and gave the Yorkshire constabulary a flea in its ear. Her husband fought for this country, moreover he was a happily married man and if they thought he would be roaming the streets at midnight they were sadly mistaken, besides which she had a baby (me) trying to sleep upstairs and she didn't intend to be harassed in this fashion any more. She wasn't. In spite of my father's misgivings the midnight visits ceased forthwith.

Dad must have spent a lot of time studying, but I don't remember his absences too much. He used to take me out every Saturday, sometimes to watch cartoons or comedies: Laurel and Hardy, The Three Stooges, Buster Keaton movies, all of which we adored. There was a classy sweet and fruit shop next to the little 'News Theatre' where he would

buy me sweet green grapes or pink and white sugared almonds that made me cough, or packets of Polish gingerbread called Katarzynki (Catherine's biscuits).

In summer, we would go out to the countryside, sometimes by train to the moors above Ilkley; sometimes a short bus ride from home to walk by the river or the canal, to Kirkstall Abbey or to the big pool at Horsforth where we caught tadpoles and on one memorable occasion a big green frog. (That one effectively cleared the top deck of the bus on the way home.) We listened to wasps' nests and once saw a grass snake curled up asleep in a sunny hollow.

My father must have worked hard when he wasn't watching cartoons or grass snakes with me because he got his BSc and then began studying for a PhD. When I was 11, we moved to Scotland. The years brought more distinctions: he gained a DSc, published a book, and at the age of 50 spent some time in India and was then appointed visiting expert by the World Food and Agriculture Organisation, based in Vienna but travelling all over the world to places as diverse as Madagascar and Iceland, giving help and advice in matters of agricultural biology. Ruminants were his speciality. Mum often went with him and the final years of his working life were full of new experiences for both of them. Then came retirement, odd bits of consultancy work and his beloved grandson.

Five or six years ago, my dear dad started to feel – and look – vaguely unwell. He began to lose weight. The doctor diagnosed the current fashionable catchall: irritable bowel syndrome. There followed several months of hospital visits, and inept diagnoses, during which time my perennially cheerful father became more depressed, yellower and thinner. Finally, many months later, he was given a CT scan. By this time he was in so much pain, that we could hear him wailing, as he went through the machine. 'Can't you keep him in for the night?', we asked. He seemed so very, very ill. But he could only be admitted on the recommendation of his GP and his GP was still diagnosing irritable bowel syndrome and extreme depression.

'Your father is a very difficult patient,' he told me, with laboured politeness.

By this time, dad was a walking skeleton with a grotesque distended belly. I could not bear the pathos of his thinning grey hair, and can remember combing it for him, as I pushed his wheelchair through draughty hospital corridors.

'There now. That's better.' But it wasn't. It never would be better. The results of the CT scan were delayed. There had been a computer failure. On Friday afternoon, the GP came to the house to see my dad, visibly impatient, prescribed anti-depressants, and left. In desperation over that weekend, we called in another GP. Could this possibly be all in his mind? Visibly shocked she said: 'No, this is a medical, not a mental condition' and phoned for an ambulance.

He was admitted to hospital on Sunday. On Monday afternoon he died of advanced metastatic cancer of the pancreas. We had been to see him that afternoon, me and my mother. They had given him morphine about which, crazily, they tried to reassure us, as though that could worry us more than his appearance. Mum cleaned his false teeth for

him and put them back in. The last thing he said to us was: 'Bring more books'. He had been reading little murder mysteries. Anything to take his mind off the discomfort. I can remember stroking his forehead and saying, as I would say to my son, 'Close your eyes. Go to sleep now. Go to sleep'. Just once, he squeezed my hand, hard and tight. And then his eyes closed. And then we went away. There was nobody about, and we didn't know what else to do. As soon as we got home, the hospital phoned to tell us that his condition had worsened, but actually, I think he was already dead. I think they came back to the ward and found him dead, not long after he had squeezed my hand, hard and tight.

I had written a poem for him years before, and it had been published in a collection.

If you regret
That I do not seem
Proud enough of you
For small achievements.
Do not forget
That I save
The greatest for the great
Which is
For all you have lost and fought
You do not hate.
And I have never heard
One phrase of bitterness
Over the war which
Tore your life apart.
Like those who pieced
Warsaw together
Stone by stone
When you rebuilt
You did so from the heart.

As I perhaps could not
You have stood the test.
My words are poor as
They are magnificent.
Of all great men
You are the best

My mother told me afterwards that she had never seen him so proud, that he had taken it into work and shown it to everybody. I read it at his funeral. For a while, the fact and manner of his death eclipsed everything else. My mother struggled with her grief, and

although to all intents and purposes she coped, she herself died of cancer some three years afterwards.

'I know you don't want me to go,' she told me, the day she was diagnosed, much too late again. I know from bitter experience that cancer services in this country are not just inadequate they are abysmal. And this was worse, because my mother's cancer – unlike my father's – might have been treatable. She was right, I didn't want her to go.

'But think how many years you have had me for. Forty odd years, That's a long time! And you know, I do want to see your dad again.' She did too. Last year when my parents' house was finally sold, I began to clear out drawers, the loft, the usual old boxes and cases of papers. I found my dad's tobacco jar. He had given up smoking when Charles was young, but he had kept his pipes and his tobacco jar, and when I took off the lid, and sniffed at it, it was as if he was there in the room with me. Most of all I miss going for walks with him. We did a lot of walking together down the years. Chasing butterflies. Even when I was in the middle of university exams he would sometimes drive over to Edinburgh and take me out – to Melrose, to North Berwick for fresh air, out for a long walk and then to a fancy restaurant like the Cramond Inn for dinner.

So I brought the tobacco jar home, as well as a pile of his luminous watercolour paintings and the photograph of myself and my mother that had always sat on his desk. There is a little Swiss musical box, which plays *Mignon* and *O Sole Mio*. Written in faded pen on the underside is 'to little Kotczie (his pet name for my mum) from ever loving Julian'. He bought it for her the Christmas after I was born.

I have lost count of the number of times I have found myself giving thanks for such a father. For such a friend. I miss him. And still, in my life, of all great men, he remains, the best.

Double Sanny

Rose Galt on Alexander Alexander

2000

My father was born in 1907, the last of seven children. Perhaps because his parents were fed up with the whole business of parenthood, he was called 'Alexander' despite that also being his surname. It led to all kinds of misunderstandings, like when he was asked to give his name to officials and bureaucrats, and to his bearing the name 'Double Sanny' among his workmates.

He grew up in Springburn in Glasgow where his father – whom I never met and for whom he had an intense loathing – was a foreman at the North British engineering works, a position of some social cachet. For instance, it seemed to give him the right to wear a bowler hat and lord it over lesser mortals. Although I never learned why my grandfather was so unloved by his youngest child, I suspect it had something to do with the demon drink. Certainly most of my father's siblings had a weakness for the hard stuff and he was a life-long abstainer. He was a quiet, even-tempered man and the only time he was ever intensely angry with me was when he returned to my 15th birthday party and found some bottles of cider, slipped into the festivities by the bad boys from 3E.

My brother recalls the time he returned home the worse for wear from the beer bar at Glasgow University Union. He slipped into his room, as he thought, unnoticed. He woke up with an appalling hangover to discover that retribution had merely been delayed. Hangover or not, he had to perform his customary task of cleaning the outside windows. Since we lived on the third floor of a tenement, whose windows did not swing inwards as modern ones do, it's a miracle that I still have a brother.

Like other young men who reached manhood in the late 20s/early 30s, he knew the reality of poverty and unemployment. It was a source of both hilarity and embarrassment that my sister's birth certificate gave, as her father's occupation, 'turf commission agent's clerk', or, not to put too fine a point on it, 'bookie's runner'. Off-course betting was at that time illegal and he was once lifted by the police and charged with 'loitering with intent'. I never regarded by father as a voluble man, but he elected to conduct his own defence and apparently did so brilliantly and successfully, bamboozling the court with abstruse arguments about the meaning and vagueness of the word 'intent'. By the time I came along, he was a more respectable scientific instrument maker, a job he did throughout the Second World War, before setting up as a watchmaker.

What really defined my father was his socialism. He was no great reader, but the books that he possessed and recommended were by left-wing writers like Howard Fast and Jack London, our papers were the *Daily Herald* and *Reynold's News*, our weekly *Forward*. He was prouder of my becoming president of my union than of my academic

success. My mother, who was not particularly political, used to bemoan the fact that all conversations, whatever their starting points, ended up being about politics. I don't remember his being an activist, though he must have been at one time. During my teenage years it seemed to me, with all the arrogance of youth, that he just sat there and pontificated. He had strong and unchallengeable views on most things. In politics his gurus were Tom Driberg, Nye Bevan and Michael Foot. He was very old Labour, in favour of mass nationalisation and trade union power, and he never forgave the Tories for giving the go-ahead to commercial television. He clearly had a thing about advertising: the day that Glasgow Corporation decided to put adverts on the trams and buses and even – horror of horrors! – on the weans' jotters was a black one indeed.

Most summers we used to spend the Glasgow Fair fortnight in Girvan on the Clyde coast. Sometimes we strayed to Millport or Dunoon, but never to the east coast, because 'the east coast smells of fish'. End of story. No argument tolerated. I was in my 20s before I experienced the delights of Crail, Pittenweem and St Andrews. Another of his incontrovertible absolutes was that teeth were a nuisance and should be removed at 19, as his had been. The funny thing was that I don't remember any of us challenging such an extreme view at the time. Two other universally acknowledged truths: Ingrid Bergman was the most beautiful woman who had ever lived and no woman ever liked her three-piece suite.

Domestically, he was very much a man of his time, doing little in the way of housework or cooking. Once when my mother was in hospital, he tried to make a rice pudding with dire results. Sunday mornings were the exception when he set about with a will to dish up the full Scottish breakfast of ham, eggs, 'bowly legs' and tattie scones to all five of us. This wasn't all that easy, given the spatial restrictions in our two-room-and-kitchen, and I remember his being inordinately pleased when he brought home from the Modern Homes Exhibition in Kelvin Hall a kind of frying pan extension which enabled him to keep the cooked food hot. Sometimes, his Sunday morning exuberance got the better of him and he would juggle eggs before cracking them into the pan – with predictable results.

Another aspect of his Scottishness was a comparative inability to express emotion. I have absolutely no doubt that he loved his family dearly, but I don't recall him ever calling my mother by her first name. The highest praise he ever gave to anything was 'it's no' bad'. This was deeply annoying to my mother who was a very good if frustrated cook. She had to provide the plainest of fare since he despised 'concoctions'. Even mince was suspect. However one year my parents came with my husband, daughter and me to a rented house in France. I was determined that he wouldn't dictate terms in the way of food and made my spaghetti bolognese as I always did, with garlic, wine and herbs. He ate it without complaint. He even developed a passion for peaches and little French cheeses called 'Petites Suisse' which we subsequently tried to buy, unsuccessfully, in the local Co-op.

With little more than primary schooling himself, he was deeply committed to

education and was determined that his children should go to university if they had the ability. I, the middle child, was the first to get a degree and I was followed some years later by my older sister and younger brother. He strongly resisted the prevailing view among some of my mother's friends that it was a waste of time giving a girl an education and I will always be grateful to him for that. When my sister who had left school at 15, decided, at the age of 25, to give up her relatively well-paid and secure job, to get her Highers and go to university, he gave her both encouragement and financial support.

I suppose my father must have given people the idea that he was distant, even dour. He worked at home most of his life and therefore had little of the social contact that most men of his generation had: remember, he didn't drink, so he didn't go to the pub. And the rest of us talked like budgies. But I remember fun occasions. We were one of the first families in our area to have a car, a sit-up-and-beg Ford Popular, and every weekend he took us on trips, which always included treats. If it was raining, he sent out to the cafe across the road for ice cream and tinned pineapple, his favourite fruit. On his 70th birthday in 1977 when, rarely, the whole family including the grandchildren were together, we mounted a hilarious and somewhat drunken cabaret – he had accepted the fact that his children and their spouses drank – and he even gave us an utterly tuneless rendition of his favourite song, *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square*. He later said it had been one of the best nights of his life.

He was a wonderful grandfather, better in that role, I think, than at parenthood. Following a minor heart attack in his 50s, he had taken up his one and only hobby, betting modestly on the horses. Maybe that early experience as a bookie's runner in Springburn had borne fruit. Whatever, when I picked up my four-year-old daughter after work, she would regale me on the way home with tales of 'papa's horses' and speak knowledgeably about 'yankees' and 'run-up tannery doubles'. Writing this, I realise that she and her cousins probably had a closer relationship with him than I had. I suspect that many people of my age would say the same. Life in the 40s and 50s, when I was a child, was pretty tough and just making ends meet was the main priority. Being self-employed, my father probably felt that imperative more than most. In his retirement, he could relax and his grandchildren were the beneficiaries.

My father died of a heart attack in 1982 at the age of 74. At 45, it was my first death and I learned from it in a very particular way. His funeral was a travesty, with a duty minister mouthing insincere words about a life-long atheist that he had never known. My sister, brother and I wanted a massed singing of *The Red Flag* but dropped the plan for our mother's sake. I still regret that and we as a family have never made that mistake again.

With all his political acumen, he could never have imagined the massive changes of the last 18 years: the onward march of privatisation, the unification of Germany, the fall of the Soviet Union. Nor could he have dreamed that the Tories would govern for another 15 years after his death or that their successors would bear so little resemblance to the Labour Party he knew.

The house my father built

Donald Macleod on Donald Macleod

2000

My father was a hero. The word, of course, has military associations. The ancient Latins made no distinction between a hero and a man, taking the view that both had one function: to fight. As a child of the war I was happy to buy into the package. My foetal brain heard little music, but it heard much of war and my childhood was steeped in its memories: 'the Crisis', Scapa Flow, the sinking of the Royal Oak, the Rawalpindi and the Hood and the countless friends who, in the moving Gaelic euphemism, had 'got in the way in the War' and never returned. I still have some of those obituaries from the early 40s, kept by my mother in the same black box as protected insurance policies and other valuables.

My father had been in the War from the beginning, of course. I say 'of course' because he was a Lewisman and in the manner of all his contemporaries he had enlisted in the Royal Naval Reserve at the age of 17. At the outbreak of hostilities, men from the Western Isles (with a population of some 30,000) accounted for a quarter of the Navy's entire body of reservists. This had little to do with patriotism, but much to do with poverty. Not only were reservists paid a small retainer, but they were also required to attend a two-week training course at a naval base every year. Full travelling expenses were paid and this gave the lads their first opportunity to leave the island and see the world. Nor was this all. Your travel-voucher was for the full return journey to and from Stornoway, but the return journey wasn't strictly necessary. For many the RNR meant that the Navy paid your fare to Glasgow to search for work or to join a ship.

These reservists were called up immediately. At the time, my parents, two years married, were living in Greenfield Street, Govan. You needn't go to look for it. It was obliterated by bulldozers in the 1970s and never put together again. My father was having his tea after a normal day at a Glasgow shipyard (Stephen's, Simon's, Fairfield's or John Brown's: I can't remember which. He'd worked in all of them). Suddenly there was a knock at the door. A policeman: 'Are you Donald Macleod?' 'Yes,' he said, knowing what was coming. 'You are to report to Chatham immediately. Here are your papers.'

My mother packed a few things. A couple of hours later, he said goodbye to her and their infant daughter. The following day he was on a naval drill-ground, imbibing a life-long contempt for those in charge of the early war-effort. No-one had thought of buying rifles: they practised with broom-sticks. I was never sure that that was the literal truth of it, but it was certainly the measure of it.

By the time I was five, I was sure my father had won the war. I used to pester him to find out how many men he had killed, but somehow he didn't seem to like the question.

This didn't deter me from boasting about it, button-holing anyone who wasn't bigger than myself and issuing a direct challenge: 'My father killed five men in the war. How many did yours kill?' None of them had an answer.

Whether he had a good war I never knew. He had had a real one and once it was over it had no interest for him. But it left a bitter legacy: a duodenal ulcer. On board the cruiser, HMS Glasgow, a naval surgeon wanted to operate. My father said 'No!', taking the view that with the whole Royal Navy searching for the Bismarck the surgeon's hand was unlikely to be steady and the convalescence of an able seaman even more unlikely to be a naval priority. His stomach and his ulcer survived the war and made the rest of his life a misery. In his later years as a self-employed joiner I often accompanied him, passing tools, holding things and doing some of the nailing and sawing. Many's the day I saw him waiting for the pain to subside before he could resume the job.

Inevitably, the stomach and the ulcer became a central part of our environment. Like school, the sky and the rain, they were always there. The odd thing is that in that world they were universal. Everyone seemed to have them: not in the sense in which you and I have stomachs, but in some existential sense as if you didn't have to live by them but had to live with them. It was the war, I suppose, wrecking lives and stomachs, but cleverly leaving no traces which might burden the state with a liability to provide pensions.

After years of writhings, baking-soda, milk, diets, doctors and learned support from the Working Man's Stomach Society came the Final Solution: a gastrectomy, condemning my father, along with thousands of other 60-somethings, to eke out their days with only a fraction of their stomachs.

Despite the ulcer, there was incredible stamina and energy. He was a small man, a mere five feet three or four in height and never more than seven stones in weight. I am six or seven inches taller and five stones heavier, but his lifestyle makes me shudder. Out to work at 7.30 every morning, working an eight-hour day and a 44-hour week. He had a week's holiday every summer and three days at New Year, but he worked every Christmas.

Nothing unusual about that. It's the way the world was in those days and had he been able to come home from work and just put his feet up, smoke a pipe and read the newspapers, I wouldn't feel so bad. But he wasn't. He was 'working on the house'. He had bought it initially as a splendid RAF hut ('Canadian red pine', he would say) for the princely sum of £90 and decorated it inside and out (especially out) with all the flair and verve of a Hungarian gypsy. He saw it as temporary. Circumstances made it permanent. But permanence meant constant improvements and extensions.

And that became his routine. Home from work by a quarter-to-six, working on the house from seven to 11. Yet it wasn't the toil that grieved him. It was the compromises he had to make. By the time he left for Glasgow in his early 20s, he had already served an apprenticeship with the local carpenter and undertaker. The Navy turned him into a joiner, elevating him to the rank of petty officer, entitling him to say, 'He's not a joiner. He's only a carpenter!' and giving him an obsession with the quality of work.

But as he worked on his own house, quality was a luxury he couldn't afford. He had the time and the skill, but not the materials. Five pounds 10 shillings a week was a good wage in those days and he could increase it by spending some of his evenings and holidays working on his neighbours' houses. But there was little surplus. A bag of cement cost eight shillings, a four-inch concrete block cost one shilling and three-pence, a six-inch block cost one shilling and nine-pence: more than a week's wages for 100; and another week's wages for a lorry-load of sand or shingle.

There was little left for timber. You had to make do with what you could salvage or recycle and that meant improvisation, not craftsmanship. He hated it. 'It's not a proper house.'

It stood for 55 years and is being demolished as I write. He would be relieved.

How can the debt I owe ever be repaid? In those days, joiners cut their joists and rafters on-site. They made their own windows and doors. They worked in all sorts of weather. Eight hours of that would be enough for any man. To endure it in your leisure hours, as well as for a whole working day, was pure heroism. The fact that many others were in the same position made it none the less so; and it has left me utterly impatient with all the tired, whining ministers, doctors, teachers and journalists in the world. Compared to him, I don't know what stress is.

How enormous the gulf between the world of a father and the world of a son! He worked as a young lad for the local parish minister, cutting hay for a penny-ha'penny an hour. The rate didn't bother him. What rankled to his dying day was that the minister 'broke the shilling', giving him 10-pence-ha'penny for seven hours' work. That's probably what turned him into an ardent trade unionist and life-long supporter of Old Labour. '*Pairtidh an duine bhochd*,' he would say ('The poor man's party').

At action stations in the early years of the war he was a powder-monkey, part of a chain-gang passing ammunition to the gunners. Locked into a narrow tunnel between decks, they had no idea what was going on above them. All they knew was that if the ship went down they hadn't a hope. His didn't. Many did.

But those were experiences shared in comradeship. Other furrows he had to plough alone. In March 1940, in Portsmouth, he received a postcard with some scribbles from his 15-month-old daughter. The following day, he received a telegram. She was dead. Meningitis. The whole length of a United Kingdom at war lay between him and the funeral. Afterwards he built, carved and etched a wooden headstone. The frame eventually yielded to Butt of Lewis gales, but the heart-shaped mahogany core, re-varnished, stands there still.

Thirty years later, in January 1970, he had a phone-call. Angus, my brother, was inside his caravan and no-one could get in. Not a big deal, in the overall scheme of things, but Angus (aged 28) was a self-destructive alcoholic. My father broke in and found him dead. He had overdosed on barbiturates. There was no point in asking questions which would never bring him back.

Such crises my father faced with equanimity, doing what had to be done, hiding the scars, seeking no comfort, putting the past behind him and moving on to the next chapter. He had, too, a quality often found in seamen: an ability to act in an emergency as if time had slowed down and there was no need to hurry. Where I would run, he would walk. Where I would shout, he wouldn't raise his voice. Where I would convey the impression of apocalypse his body language would be saying, What's the fuss?

The only thing was: first of all, you must put on your cap. However dire the emergency, that was the first step. Once you had your cap on, you could cope with anything.

Maybe that's my problem. I've never worn a cap.

What do I owe him?

First, the few stories that have survived from my own earliest years. On one occasion, around the age of three, I went walkabouts. He eventually found me in the chip shop, sitting on a bag of potatoes and filling myself with chips. Asked where I had found the money, I apparently replied, 'Oh! You can get them with money and you can get them without money'. Unfortunately, he didn't keep that story to himself and it followed me around for years. I knew nothing about money. All I knew was that in chip-shops (which fascinated me even then) people got a bag of chips when they said, 'A four-penny bag, please'. I had said exactly that, including the 'please', and when asked something about money I simply looked blank: which was perfectly okay, because by that time I already had the bag in my hands.

The other revelation from my childhood is that I was a regular frequenter of Stornoway's 'Lazy Wall' (the *balla leisg*, as it was known in Gaelic). This was the gathering-place of all the local unemployed: a convenient venue for taking the weight off your feet, having a smoke and yarning away the bitter hours of idleness; and an ideal preparation, I suppose, for a career as a professor of theology.

I also owe him a life long love affair with tools. He had an abundance of these, as well as various workshops which were wonderlands of gadgetry. I cannot remember these ever being off-limits, although my exploits with the Admiralty's circular-saw were strictly limited to playing cars with the height-adjusting wheel. I was sawing and hammering before I was walking. I even had my very own test-bench: a robust stool at which I could hack and hammer to my heart's content. Studded with nails and scarred by tenon-saws, it eventually fell apart a few years ago. Modern mums will blanch, but no mishap befell me. Nor, unfortunately, did I turn out to be a wood-working genius. My father's manual dexterity, like his immunity to sea-sickness, passed me by.

Was my father a stern Calvinist? I doubt if he had even the remotest idea what a Calvinist was. He hadn't read Iain Crichton Smith and the word seldom figured in the spiritual vocabulary of Lewis. In any case, his spiritual history was peculiar. My mother became a communicant member of the Free Church in her early 20s. My father became a member only in 1959, by which time I had left home. He was then 48 years of age and had just come through a momentous spiritual crisis.

This was linked to a sudden, overwhelming onset of asthma. To an extent, it was an experience we shared, particularly since my mother was recovering from major surgery the time. There are few more distressing sights than the victim of an asthma attack. In my father's case, it was no mere attack. For three long months, his chest heaved and wheezed as he fought for breath. You had to convince him he was going to make it. Some days you told him he was better. Others you accepted his own view that he wasn't. We moved him from room to room, tried spray after spray and medication after medication. We sat him up. We laid him down. We went to bed almost sure he'd be dead in the morning. How could any respiratory system continue in the explosive overdrive for three unrelenting months?

For him, it was a long black tunnel of panic and isolation. Death passed so close that he felt the blade miss him only by a hairsbreadth. He emerged a five-and-a-half stone skeleton, exultant to be alive and aglow with gratitude to God. He lived another 30 years, physically a mere shadow of himself, his ulcer still intact and his life contracted to a single passion: Christian discipleship.

Professionally, I'm sure it was a second conversion rather than a first and at a purely selfish level I'm glad it didn't happen earlier. If it had, he would have come under that ethic of abstinence which in those days defined church members by what they didn't do. As a mere adherent, he could go where he liked. He could take me to football matches; and he could be my minder during my brief career as the Aled Jones of the Lewis ceilidh circuit.

What do I feel, then, 50 years later? I can answer that unhesitatingly: guilt. We never realised the scale of his labour and pain. When asthma (and, later, Parkinson's) diminished him we forgot the contributions of his prime. If he was a wreck, it was because he had made himself a wreck for us.

It's not that I'm guilt-ridden. Far from it. My sins are forgiven. But the practical core of that peace is the assurance that God forgives the way I failed my father. That forgiveness deprives me of all right to mope over it.

But the first thing I will say to him when we meet again is 'Sorry'.

Were we close? Well, you tell me this: is this article about him or about me?

The promised land

Cathy McCormack

2001

My ma used to say that our lives are all laid out in front of us long before we are born, that we all have a bullet inscribed with the time and date of our death. I used to really laugh at some of the things ma used to say. She would have said that it was fate that I ended up on board this bus in Cranhill. But I never believed in fate then, and I wasn't laughing either when the bus left for Hull to catch the overnight ferry to Rotterdam.

I was really dreading the 3,000-mile-long journey to Rome. The furthest I had ever travelled by bus was from Managua to Somoto in the most northern region of Nicaragua and the heat coupled with the bumpy roads and potholes made me feel so sick. God only knows how I was going to survive this marathon. I actually felt a bit of excitement and more confident when my taxi pulled up outside the chapel in Bellrock Street and I first set eyes on the bus. It wasn't really a bus, but a brand new luxury coach, which I can only describe as being like a posh hotel on wheels.

Once on board, I was struck by the peacefulness of the interior. Perhaps it was the pews of seats upholstered in a hazy purple pizza-like design that looked so friendly and promised without saying that they wouldn't jag my legs. Blue curtains hung on the windows, which had tinted glass, and halfway up the coach was the toilet and the tea and coffee area with the freezer loaded with cans of cold drinks. That's when it dawned on me that this bus was to be my home on wheels for the next 10 days, and not the overnight hotels in the various countries that we were to visit en route.

Before boarding the bus, a special mass was arranged to celebrate our journey and to pray for our safe return. It was strange being back in the parish church of St Maria Goretti where I was married 25 years ago. My whole life had been turned inside out and upside down since that day, but nothing seemed to have changed about the parish where I grew up. The redbrick semi-oval-shaped building looked more like a grand country manor than a chapel, and so out of place tucked between the harsh four-storey-high brick tenements that housed its parishioners. Although the structure was the same age as me, it showed no signs of the same wear and tear. It even had the same musty smell of furniture polish tinged with stale candle wax, but the atmosphere had changed, or perhaps it was just my expectations that were different.

Mrs Docherty who was the life and soul of the parish in my childhood days was the main energy behind this holiday to Rome, even though she was now 85 years old. I used to be a devout Catholic just like her, until I was confronted with the evil of Thatcherism. My harrowing experience of being forced to try to keep my children alive on welfare made me question why my church did nothing to challenge the human suffering and

hardship that I both experienced and witnessed every day. It was then that I started to think that the rich and powerful used religion not only to try and justify poverty, but also to try and pacify the people like me who were forced to live in it. It was only then that I managed to finally break free from the church which had tamed the angry spirit that had been growing up inside me.

There were 50 other people on the bus, including the driver, but when I sat down on my seat next to the back, I suddenly became overwhelmed with a feeling of complete isolation. During the years that I have been involved in my community's fight for justice, I've travelled thousands of miles across land and sea and I had no choice but to travel by myself. Now, for the first time since I became a rebel, I was going on a journey which I thought was for me, and for me alone.

I don't know why the tears that had been locked up inside me all these years should threaten to erupt now. I just knew that I was so relieved when Mrs Docherty moved from the seat beside me. I sensed that she would have been shocked and confused at my forthcoming outburst. This was my first holiday in years and both she and the committee who had planned this trip to the Vatican had done everything to make me feel welcome when I joined them at the last minute. I was glad too for the music and the happy chatter of my fellow travellers as I snuggled up to face the window while the tears were wrenched from my body.

At first I thought it was just the relief from the stress that I had been under these past months. Apart from trying to be both mother and father to my three children, I also had to look after my own father who had senile dementia. I had also spent the summer months trying to construct a letter to Nelson Mandela to coincide with my forthcoming visit to South Africa. My last chance of having that letter published was gone when the computer that I had borrowed crashed the day before, and I had stayed up all night trying to fix it before the mass at 9am.

I just wish that my ma could have had the opportunity to go on a holiday like this before she died. She had never been abroad and I knew that she had been sick to death of the same routine of going to Blackpool every year. Even when they were both retired from work, it never seemed to dawn on my da that they could now take a holiday at any time of the year, instead of waiting for the traditional Glasgow Fair fortnight. Da was such a hard man to live with and it wasn't a holiday at the seaside she needed, but a two-week break away from da! Ma just wanted to retire gracefully but he had her rushing to the pubs and clubs and she always came back exhausted.

She would have recognised quite a few of the women on the bus who still lived in and around Bellrock Street where I grew up.

Ma never went to mass, though after she moved from the Gorbals to Cranhill she made her six weans go to chapel every Sunday. In many ways, I was glad that my ma never went to chapel, especially when I started to get taught the catechism at school. It just never made sense to me. Why would God create people only to send them to hell if

they didnae go to mass on a Sunday? And if my ma and my friends who were Protestants couldn't go to heaven, then I didnae want to go either.

It was only when I went to Nicaragua and met the mothers of the Martyrs and Heroes, whose children had been massacred while fighting in the revolution, that I realised the wisdom of some of the things ma used to say about God. Those mothers taught me that unless people understand their past history and their present reality, then they could never be free to choose their future. It was then that I realised that my working-class Catholic education was not about teaching me about my world, but about keeping people like me in ignorance.

Oh, I suppose my education wasn't a complete waste of time, although I don't remember being taught much relevant Scottish history. But I must give them full marks for producing an expert like me on the Stone Age. How else could I ever relate the brutality of our lives back to the first social animals? And when I think of the packs of children in communities like mine stabbing and clubbing each other with sticks and stones, I can't help feeling that history is repeating itself full cycle.

I didn't know much about my own family history. I never knew my grandparents and now that my mother is dead and my father senile, I have to rely on my own memories of the stories ma used to tell me about her life in the old Glasgow slums.

It was hard for me to imagine her drab life in the Gorbals while the bus sped down the M6 in the brilliant October sunshine. Those sooty black tenements with fires blazing up the lum and their smoke-filled chimney pots... And I just can't imagine what my grannies looked like. Ma said that women in those days looked like old grannies when they were in their 40s, and my Granny Brannan always wore a black shawl. Life must have been really harsh in the Gorbals, for both my grannies died before they were 50. I was named after my da's ma, Catherine Hughey Brannan. Both she and my Granda Brannan were Irish Catholics from Donegal and my Granda worked as a labourer on the roads.

My ma said that my granda's name was actually Brennen, but the registrar wrote Brannan on their marriage certificate. I always meant to ask if they were able to read and write or whether the registrar could understand their Irish accent.

My ma's own ma, Granny Campbell, was in the Salvation Army and my Granda Campbell was a Protestant and worked as a mason's labourer. He was an alcoholic and ma said that granny spent most of her married life pouring my granda's whisky down the sink, until one day she started to pour it down herself. My granny certainly didn't have an easy life. One day she lifted a cleaver and split my granda's head wide open. Ma said she then walked calmly down to the police station at the corner of their street and gave herself up expecting to be put behind bars, but my granda survived and insisted to the polis that he fell down the stairs.

I suspect that it was my Granny Campbell who furnished my own ma with all the sayings about God that still live with me now that they are both dead. Ma said that

people used to call my granny Alleluia Lizzy, but I never dared to ask if that was before or after she started to drink. I never really gave much thought to my grandas. Both died before ma and da got married. It is only now that my grandparents have actually started to feel real to me. Before, they were just like ghosts of the past and I have never spoken about them as my 'grannies and grandas' until now. It is only now that I'm starting to feel a real connection between their lives and my life in the modern day slums of Glasgow.

It was only since boarding the bus that I was beginning to really understand the kind of love ma used to have for my da.

My Granny Brannan had two sons and a daughter. Da was the oldest and, like his brother and sister, his hair was jet black and his skin very dark. Me and my oldest brother James have got their colouring and are often taken for foreigners. Ma said da was really handsome, and he was. Da lived in 257 Lawmoor Street and ma lived in number 217 in the same street. I have only one photo of ma that was taken when she was young, just before she married da when she was 20. She was so beautiful. Every time I look at that photo of her with her brown wavy hairstyle and her stunning looks, I think that she looks more like a Hollywood film star than a domestic servant.

I only vaguely remember her telling me that when she left school she cleaned the houses of Jewish families. I will never forget the stories she told me about her and da. He started work as a box maker in Buchanan's Whisky Bond after leaving school. Having had an alcoholic as a father, one of the things my ma most liked about da was that he would never put alcohol near his lips.

My ma loved him that much that she wanted to take on his religion as well as his name. She attended St Francis Church in Cumberland Street every week for months, undertaking religious instruction before she became a Catholic. She told me that the priest often said that she was the best convert they ever had. They were married in the same church on 18 April 1938, at 6am, and da and his brother caught a bus to Dundee to see Celtic playing while ma and her best maid went back home to bed.

My older sister Betty was born in February the following year and my eldest brother James was born the year after. Ma said that she was so ignorant about sex that when she was pregnant with Betty, she didn't know how the baby got out of her tummy. She had to pluck up the courage to ask my Granny Brannan. All she said was: 'It comes oot the same way that it got in, Lizzy'.

They lived in a single apartment on the ground floor of a tenement in Hospital Street and ma said she kept it as clean as the driven snow. Their happiness was short lived, however, when the Second World War broke out and da was conscripted into the army.

He was sent to the Middle East and trained in Cairo as a gunner to shoot down German warplanes. He said the closest he ever came to being killed was the first day in the trenches in Sicily. He was just about to hand the first shell to his mate to load the gun when his mate was shot through the heart with a bullet from one of the planes.

My ma said she was totally shattered when they took my da away. Then both her ma

and the two weans took ill. Betty took diphtheria and James took diseased bones and both were in sanatoriums in different parts of the city. Then the bombs came. Ma said that the folk up the stairs used to gather in her ground floor flat if they didn't have time to make it to the air-raid shelters. Ma told me that one of her neighbours was in the outside toilet when one of the bombs dropped and he was blown right over the building into the next street. When she used to tell me the horrific stories about the war, I kept praying to God that there would never be another.

Ma said that she and my da used to write love letters every day, but she couldn't cope on her own with the fear and the worry and she started to really pine for my da. She couldn't eat or sleep and she became so thin and weak that her ma thought she was going to die. My da kept pleading with the army to let him go home and eventually they gave him compassionate leave.

He was four years in the Army and claimed he shot down 12 German planes in the same day. My ma said that the neighbours decorated the street and had a big 'Welcome Home Jimmy' banner that hung from their tenement right across to the tenement on the other side of the street. She said her wee hoose was jam-packed with neighbours and my da was in the hoose 20 minutes and still hadn't recognised her. When the weans saw him they wanted to know what a soldier was doing in their hoose. Ma said he was a changed man when he came back from the Army. After the war, he started going to the pub like most of the men she knew and keeping her short of money, and their relationship never really recovered.

After my two brothers Billy and Graham were born, they moved to a room and kitchen in the top flat of a tenement in the same street. By this time, my two grannies had died. Ma said that one night my da woke her up – he was hysterical and the sweat was pouring off him. He said his ma shook him out of his sleep and kept saying to him: 'Give Lizzy the money, give Lizzy the money'. Ma was convinced that it was his guilty conscience playing tricks on him.

The impression that I got from my ma about her life in the slums was that in spite of the hardship and the rats, people were very friendly and their community close-knit. Ma said that nearly everybody kept a cat to catch the mice and the rats. She said her cat had kittens and one morning after da had gone to work, she left the four weans sleeping while she went down to the shop at the bottom of the close to get milk. While she was standing chatting to the shopkeeper, her cat came in and started to scratch at ma's leg. She knew that cat was trying to tell her something so she ran up the stairs to find smoke pouring out the front door. Her screams woke the other neighbours on the landing who helped to rescue the weans.

Ma said the only thing they managed to salvage from the fire apart from the weans was a big old fashioned picture frame with a picture of the Pope that was kept under the mattress, and which used to belong to my Granny Brannan. The explanation for the fire was that the kittens had been playing with the wire that was plugged into the wireless.

After the fire they all had to split up and stayed with the neighbours who took them in.

Then the news came that the slums were being demolished. Ma said they were promised that they would all be moved to a place that was a paradise compared to the one that they all lived in.

She was offered the tenancy of a pre-war house in Carntyne, a back and front door with a garden, but she refused this old house which she couldn't afford to decorate. Word was already buzzing in the streets about these new tenements that were being built in the giant housing schemes on the outskirts of Glasgow – places that the government promised would bring good health to the working-class heroes, places full of empty spaces, green open land, fresh air, and flats that had inside toilets, a bath and washing basin, kitchens that were big enough to sit in, and which were separated from the living room and bedrooms.

Ma said she was so excited when she was offered one of the first flats to be built in Cranhill. There were seven other families allocated a flat up the close at 64 Bellrock Street, but they were all strangers, and only met for the first time to ballot for the keys. My family moved into the four-apartment flat on the first landing and I was born two weeks later on 5 July 1952. I will never forget the scene that my ma imprinted on my mind when she told me about the flitting. I can still imagine too, their excitement as they travelled on the open coal lorry with the bits and pieces of furniture that their old community had scraped together. Ma said that their great adventure to the promised land was tinged with sadness when the cat which had saved her weans from the fire took fright as they passed over the River Clyde and jumped off the lorry.

Popeye

An intimate family portrait of John Boyd Orr

2001

John Boyd Orr (Lord Boyd Orr as he became) was born at Kilmaurs in Ayrshire in 1880. He received the Nobel Peace Prize for his scientific research into nutrition and for his pioneering work as the first director of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. Boyd Orr was undoubtedly one of the greatest Scotsmen of the 20th century, but what was he like as a personality? SR asked his family to contribute their memories of him.

There are seven of us grandchildren. The children of Dr Judy Orr (or Barton): John, Ann Marie and Callum; and the children of sculptress Minty Orr (or Lubbock): Ann Pat, Geoffrey, Andrew and Kenneth. We are now in our 50s. The Orrs also had a son Billy who was killed in the war at the age of 17, so there are no grandchildren called Boyd Orr.

Our name for our grandfather was Popeye, because of his bushy eyebrows and we termed our grandmother Nanimma because she was motherly. Her affectionate name for him was Wee Jockie and he called her Bess.

Ann Marie's reflections

A man of contradictions was my grandfather. The soldier who was in the Navy, the doctor who won medals for gallantry, the nutritionist whose meals were usually over cooked, the world traveller who thought Scotland the most beautiful place on earth. He came relatively late to grandfatherhood. He was 61 when the first of his daughters' children were born, and so his grandchildren's memories are of a man already old. And yet, even in his 70s, he travelled ferociously, always with my grandmother, to meetings and gatherings and sittings, in London, America, China, Russia. My childhood was punctuated with trips to the local railway stations where my mother or father and I would wait on grey platforms for the train. Clouds of steam and squeaking brakes presaged their arrival and like magicians they would appear, descending from the train, holding stamped and decorated suitcases instead of rabbits and doves.

On the way home, sitting in the back of the car between them, they would hold my hand and say how the countryside was more beautiful here than anywhere else. Despite his forbidding appearance, he loved Scottish dancing and a good joke. He liked the joke about the Scotsmen who were sent to Hell: 'Forgive us, God, we didna ken, we didna ken'. [Pause]. And God replies, 'Weel, ye ken noo'. His favourite toast he liked with a glass of claret was: 'Never above you, never beneath you, always beside you. Kai kai Baluch'.

And he was always with you: whether asking your opinion (even though you were just

a difficult teenager), listening to your reply, sharing his food – the apple cut with his penknife in the morning, his meat at Sunday lunch – or taking your arm on the way to supper. He was a great man, my grandfather.

Ann Marie Legge

General reflections

Surprisingly, we have discovered our earliest memories of Popeye are the same: that of clambering into his early morning bed to be given small slices of apple or orange, cut with a small silver knife about 1.5 inches long. He also had a bowl of pandrops, which we would plead for and enjoy: 'Just one more Popeye, just one more'.

Every Sunday his two daughters and their families would come to Sunday dinner at Newton of Stracathro. Mrs Mutch, known as Mutchie, used to prepare a three-course meal that started with soup. Usually it was a delicious Scotch broth with barley and fresh vegetables, parsley and snippets of curly kale. The main course was nearly always a roast beef, always very well done. It tasted much like cardboard. The milk always had 1 inch of cream on the top and it came directly from the farm milking parlour. Prior to lunch there was always the Bristol Cream sherry which Wee Jockie and Bess liked. We enjoyed sharing this family time with them in the warm library, with its deep red carpet, small cosy fire, and floor to ceiling books of medicine, papers, poetry and whodunnits.

At Christmas time, our grandparents would receive a great variety of cards. Our favourite was from Chou en Lai, the Vice-Premier of China. Every year he sent a nice one. Popeye was a great admirer of Chou en Lai, who was a mandarin before the revolution. We felt very privileged to obtain first-hand observations. He was soon disillusioned with Mao Tse Tung, although his signed photograph remained up on the wall with the other notables of the age, in 'the rogues' gallery'.

One of Popeye's passions was croquet. He played a kinder version of the game and you were not allowed to place your foot on your own ball while sending the other to kingdom come. He was also known to help his lie with his slippered foot. We watched carefully to catch him taking this little advantage.

Geoffrey tells us how he used to sit with Popeye for hours with his little black book in which he would enter his stock trades. He told Geoff that he made more money by investing in the stock market than he ever did by working.

Popeye was very interested in all of us and spent time with us, but if he was busy, as far as he was concerned we simply did not exist, and we would certainly never have dreamed of disturbing him.

Wee Jockie had no interest in his dress or appearance and Bess had a tricky time making sure he was appropriately dressed, with socks matching. He would leave the house with his adored Bess brushing off the last of the dog hairs.

John Boyd Orr was incredibly single-minded and he could be perfectly wrapped up in his own thoughts or business to the exclusion of all else. He smoked a pipe with a lovely

little round bowl and would knock it out into the waste paper basket beside him which was full of screwed up discarded paper. Nanimma found the basket smouldering away a few times while he was blissfully unaware of an impending house fire. Once he was having his hair cut and his mind was still busy on other things when the barber interrupted his thoughts to tell him he had finished. 'Well, cut it again!', he said.

Stories and anecdotes

We loved stories of incidences in his life, especially if they were politically risqué, adventurous or amusing. He always spoke in his lovely west coast burr and the story-telling often took place around the fire in the library.

When John and Elizabeth Boyd Orr had an audience with Pope John XXIII, the Pope asked if John would like him to bless anything. Wee Jockie, son of a pastor, immediately recalled the Bible passage about money (render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and render unto God the things that are God's) and asked the Pope to bless a coin in his pocket, which the Pope did. Because Popeye was in favour of population control and because he was brought up in a Protestant background, he was not a supporter of the Catholic Church, although he was an admirer of Pope John. Popeye, in fact, became an atheist, but he said Nanimma was a believer and that that gave her great comfort. He would never ever have given us any direction in religious belief, unless we had asked for it.

Geoffrey remembers Popeye telling him about being asked on prime TV time in the States, what he would do to establish world peace (as a Nobel peace prize winner). In his usual subtle manner, he replied: 'Fire Senator Joe McCarthy and bomb the Pentagon'. This was almost treason during the McCarthy era. After the broadcast, people would come by him in the street and surreptitiously squeeze his hand in agreement, because it was so dangerous to be anti-McCarthy. Kenneth has unsuccessfully tried to get the FBI file on John Boyd Orr.

When Popeye and Nanimma went to China, it was when relations with the west were poor. He was impressed with the university system of specialising in agriculture and general learning for future leaders etc. He told how he was at a state banquet and that there was a toast to Mao. After this, Popeye got up and asked if he could give a toast to a beautiful woman. The head of the banquet, assuming that he was referring to his bride, said: 'Of course'. He got to his feet and asked the Chinese to raise their glasses to toast the beautiful woman 'Queen Elizabeth'. There was a stunned silence for a short time, and then they all laughed and raised their glasses to Queen Elizabeth!

On a later trip to China, Wee Jockie shamed the Chinese into taking them to one of the dams they were boasting about as being part of their magnificent progress. They flew, took a car, then went on foot. They went through villages where they had never seen a white man. The villages trooped after the Boyd Orrs, laughing and pointing. When they asked why, they were told that white bushy eyebrows were the sign of a saint.

In addition, a large nose meant that the person had a large male member and John Boyd Orr's nose was prodigious.

He told the story of the soldier that he saved during the First World War. A young man was court-martialled for cowardice because he ran from the front. Popeye said that the man was not in a fit mental state to be shot. He was therefore condemned to be tied to a wheel. Popeye managed to get the man off this punishment. The soldier returned to the front and became a hero because at night he slipped across no man's land and stole the machine gun from the Germans that had them pinned down. When the man was presented with a medal from the provost of Glasgow, he stole the provost's watch!

While he was a medic in the First World War, Popeye found that the troops in the front needed water but that water had to be carried forward in regular army vehicles. Since the vehicles were frequently blown up before reaching the front, Popeye determined that the water was required for health and was therefore medicinal and was therefore eligible to be carried forward in the Red Cross ambulances. This probably saved a great number of lives.

Another First World War story was how the medical services came to inspect the health of his battalion because no men were being sent to hospital with intestinal problems, as there were from other battalions. They thought he was covering up. Indeed, Popeye was unaware of the anomaly at the time, let alone the reason for it. What had happened was that, being a practical person, sympathetic to the care of his men, he had organised that fresh vegetables from the surrounding deserted fields be made into tasty broths. These, of course, were full of minerals and vitamins, particularly vitamin C, which prevented illnesses. Vegetable broth always takes me back to this interesting accident of history.

Other accidents were not so happy. When it was his turn to wash the socks, he took time to read and he accidentally boiled them. His men were not happy!

Ann Pat Gooch and Geoffrey Lubbock, with input from Andrew and Kenneth

John's additional comments

For a nutrition expert, his diet was unusual. Apart from his orange (and vitamin pill) in bed every morning, he was subjected, by Mutchie, to bacon, eggs and fried scones floating in grease – a breakfast later described as 'a heart attack on a plate'. As Popeye lived to 90 and Nanimma to 99, they either had extraordinary constitutions or modern dieticians still have something to learn.

The investment technique he employed in his 'Little Black Book' was simple but effective. He would wait until the share price rose and then sell off sufficient shares to reduce the cost of the remainder to nil. (Sadly capital gains tax has made this more difficult for his grandchildren!) This technique does, of course, necessitate choosing shares which are going to rise in value – I never did discover what he did if the price fell!

John Barton

Last comment

He was not used to the telephone. He did not say goodbye or any other of the conversational niceties. When he was through with his conversation, he would either just hang up or say: 'That's all,' and then hang up.

Something dangerous: the life of George MacLeod

Ian Mackenzie

2002

Nobody can forget his first experience of this man. Mine takes place in St Cuthbert's Church in Edinburgh, in a world so far away I can't believe it existed or that I then did. The Second World War has just finished but douce Edinburgh seems untouched. On a Sunday morning little stirs. A dilatory rat scurries back to Princes Street Gardens after its Saturday night binge in McVities. But now behold the human race. Here appear people, multi-hatted and umbrella'd. Also me, in my teens, going to church with my mother. In the mists swirling in the swamp below the castle floats a spire. In our hundreds we descend silently into the graveyard, past the resting place of De Quincey, into the mausoleum which swallows us into the vast space of its piety, the organ quietly playing, female perfumes mingling. Edinburgh's bourgeoisie is ready for worship.

But not ready for George Fielden MacLeod. I am waiting my usual Sunday treat, an Adam Burnett sermon. Dr Burnett, collegiate minister of St Cuthbert's, is a prince of lyrical preachers, the Adonis of the poetic sermon. My soul is quivering in the pew, tuned to his lyre. But the beadle emerges, entirely bereft of Dr Burnett. And what *is* this striding in?

My mother whispers: George MacLeod. Who? After routine devotional exercises the interloper is introduced. He swaggers to the pulpit. I'm sorry, but that is what he does. He swaggers. Every bit of him swaggers. His legs swagger. His spine swaggers. His jowls swagger. His eyebrows swagger. He is the swagger made flesh. He mounts the pulpit like Field Marshal Montgomery commandeering a tank. During the last verse of the hymn, he glares at us like a brigade of tanks aiming its guns. Apprehensively we sit down.

I would like to describe in detail what happens next, but I can't. I'm too busy trying to survive. Cowering within the carapace of what I have hitherto taken to be my soul, I am aware of certain things. This is not a sermon. And this is not religion. And this is not about God. It is not a sermon, it is a speech. It is not religion, it is politics. And it is not about God, it is about Man. And it is not comforting, it is frightening. Apart from anything else this guy has no idea how to behave. Like a demented baby he is throwing everything out of the pram. He bites great theological chunks out of the pulpit and spits them at us. He throws statistics about poverty and hunger through a stained glass window. He hurls scriptural bombs at the gallery. He flings socialist thunderbolts at the ceiling, sets hellfire to the chancel, reduces the church soporific to rubble, burns my whole religious position to the ground. And then he has the nerve to walk calmly down the pulpit steps and back to his seat. Next Sunday, fortunately for the blood pressure of Christian Edinburgh, Dr Burnett returns to comfort us with quotes from the poets.

By the time I next hear Dr MacLeod, I am grown up. Well, I think I am. I'm a student,

and I edit *The Student*, the Edinburgh University magazine. The General Assembly is in town and this is a special youth night. St Giles is packed with yoof because the preacher is George MacLeod. But whereas the St Cuthbert's bourgeoisie had goaded him into a full-scale bombardment, this mass of young potential spread before him in St Giles moves him into mood-music. All the challenges are still there, two-thirds of the world is still starving, inasmuch as you drop a nuclear bomb on one of the least of these my brethren you do it to me, but there is a gentleness in the pleading. At the end, if a pin had dropped, it would have sounded like a meteor hitting St Giles. Afterwards I catch up with him and ask if I can print part of his address in the magazine. He doesn't know me from Adam, but, 'It's the usual rubbish,' he says, hands me the script, and disappears into the crowd. I look at the manuscript and am astounded. My illusion that he adjusted the sermon because he was moved by the congregation is exposed.

Not only is every word there exactly as read, but everything else is there, down to the most minuscule piece of stage direction and point of expression. Not only every comma and semi-colon; not just every bracket and every pause; not just every underlining, with two or three lines; and not only every important word in capitals; but specifically vital words are in RED. As I stand there in Parliament Square digesting this document, I have the first rudiment of comprehension that in George MacLeod I am confronted by a serious phenomenon; not just a spirit of extraordinary inspiration but a brain of dedicated perspiration; not a charismatic maverick but a diligent worker, a committed craftsman, a professional artisan, a person of meticulous organisation, a disciple of exactitude, an artist.

As a lazy student, I feel subdued into a rare humility, and it is from that moment that I begin to reform my ways, not because of the message in the MacLeod sermon, but because of this hard evidence that no amount of inspiration is a substitute for attention to detail. Here in my hand, I can see a brain of serious intent in the business of communicating with other brains. George MacLeod is not just a romantic adventurer, a Celtic word-spinner, a mystic, a poet, an entrepreneur, a warrior, a prophet, a seer. He is something more dangerous, something so insidious it is capable of not just rocking boats but sinking them. He is an intellectual, but worse, an intellectual pretending not to be. He is a Christian spy risking his mind in the world of shifting ideas. Where ignorant armies clash by night there will be George in the midst. No man's land is to be his chosen home and we all know the name of that no man's land: Iona.

Nobody can forget his first sight of Iona: simultaneously unbelievable, and yet suddenly the only thing worth believing. There it lies on the edge of the known world, naked yet formidable, inviting one to cross over into a different dimension. Except... that's all words. When you first see Iona, it's wordless.

And then, as with so much reality, when you cross over you're suddenly in the realm of cartoon (cartoon being another word for myth). Floating inches over the green lapping water, there's this Walt Disney island, small, perfect, here a little bay, there a

little machair, over here a little hill, on the horizon the little Aegean islands of Tiree and Coll, down there a little abbey, and oh, look, swaggering around there's a very big tall man looking like Prospero after a bad night.

Nobody can forget his first row with George MacLeod. Mine is over the abbey music. That is why I'm on the island. I've been asked to run the abbey music for the three-month summer season. I am no sooner on the island than with all the subtlety of a Scotch terrier catching sight of an ankle, I decide that the whole style of the Iona music needs to have teeth sunk into it. The singing should be in unison, not four-part harmony. It should be robustly brisk, not sentimentally lingering. More Reformation and Modern Tunes, fewer Victorian hymns. Out with Crimond and St George's Edinburgh. This modest programme of reform leaves George speechless – but not for long. The Scotch terrier finds towering over it a massive bulldog with quivering jaw. The MacLeod face vibrates. The body shakes with outrage. Then, the voice. 'Do you realise that at the very moment we're putting up a scrawny wail at the behest of your latest whim, there is a Community man bathing in the River Zambezi singing the 23rd Psalm to Crimond at the top of his voice, confident – CONFIDENT – that here on Iona we will be supplying the other parts?'

Three months later, it is my last night on the island. Late in the evening the Boss calls me to his private lair in the abbey. He glowers at me as if I'm some sort of disease. 'Sit down,' he growls. Clearly I am to be skinned alive and fed to the seagulls. But instead of reaching for a scimitar he reaches for a bottle and pours each of us a gigantic whisky. 'I hope you're happy,' he says. 'During your stay here you've upset and divided the island, the community, the associate members, the friends of Iona, half the visitors, and probably all the kings in their graves. Above all, you've upset me. Are you by any chance free to come back next summer and create more mayhem?' He lifts his glass. 'Drink up. Here's to mayhem. At least you've got stickability.' I've treasured that compliment all my life. That is how George made disciples.

But that isn't enough. He doesn't want disciples, he wants something more disturbing. Friendship? Love? Such psychological parameters make him uncomfortable. What he is pursuing, always pursuing, ceaselessly as the sea-tide pursuing, is the Presence. The Extra. The Crossing of Boundaries.

So halfway through the second whisky, he says, 'Actually, I owe you an apology. Two months ago I was walking past the abbey in the evening. The wind was getting up. There was foam on the waves running up the Sound. Then mixed up in the wind I heard Columba's monks. It wasn't, of course, it was your choir practice in the abbey and I realised what you were up to, getting us to sing in unison. Harmony is what you expect of upholstered Victorian angels. Unison expresses the unity of the whole Creation across Time and Space. My apology is that I should have told you then that I understood'.

To George, Columba and his monks were as real as wind and waves in the Sound. One evening, the following summer, he nabs two of us, myself and I think it was one of the

guides, and urgently rushes us to the tiny St Columba's shrine. A team of archaeologists has dug up some bones. George is convinced these are remains of a Columban monk which have lain outside consecrated ground for one and a half millennia. It is a matter of commanding importance that we commit these remains and pray for the soul of the monk *now*. Crushed into that tiny shrine, really little more than a cupboard in the outside wall, there in front of us is that hulk of a man on his knees, with us on ours behind him. He prays. The minutes cease, the 20th century falls away. We are on a voyage through time and beyond time. With the focus of a priest of any religion or a scientist in any laboratory wrestling with unseen forces and unresolved concepts, George intercedes for an unknown spirit. With difficulty, we return to the present, George thanks us for accompanying him, we return to our tasks, the matter is closed.

Except that later, the archaeologists give it as their opinion that we had prayed over the remains of a sheep. Yes, the whole island laughed so much that Iona moved a mile and a half south-west. But we did not laugh. We had been there. And it was no fantasy. In the matter of souls, in the soul of matter itself, we had been involved in some real transaction. Yes, George at one level had maybe got a fact wrong. But what is a *fact*? It is a *fact* that I had been caught up in a struggle between strong forces, between light and darkness, and the power of that prayer had affected something, somewhere. There had been another Presence. A Boundary had been crossed.

Nobody could ever forget his first involvement in a confrontation between a MacLeod and a Viking. One week one of the visitors to the community is a great Dane. This Danish pastor's arrival coincides with a drought. At the end of supper, George rises. Neptune rising from the deep is as nothing compared to George rising at the refectory top table. He stands there, vibrating, a cross between a horse of the Apocalypse with a toothache and Churchill personally preparing to fight Hitler on the beach. 'We have a crisis. This well is running dry. Visitors may think it a miracle that Iona which is nine-tenths composed of water, is surrounded by water, and for half of this summer has received water from the heavens in abundance, can run out of water, but the miracle is that the well was discovered in the first place. Nobody is to use a drop of water unless absolutely essential.'

After supper I'm on the rota for washing up. So is the Great Dane. As a good Scandinavian he is hot on hygiene. As a Viking, he is into power. As a Dane, he is into planning. He takes command of the sink. In a trice he has completed a complex scaffolding of sloping trays, wooden boards, plates and pans. 'The point,' he explains, 'is for good hygiene you should rinse everything three times'. With a flourish he turns on both taps.

Enter left, George Fielden MacLeod of Fuinary. He stands in mute disbelief, observing jets of water cascading everywhere. It turns out later, by the way, that our Viking had left the refectory to go to the loo before George made his announcement. He is therefore in a state of invincible ignorance. Picking his jaw off the floor, George advances on the sink. Smiling benevolently the Dane explains, 'You see, good rinsing'.

The rest of us hide behind our dishtowels. Peering over the top of mine I see Scotland's leading pacifist pawing the ground, smoke and fire queuing up to issue from his nostrils. Then George does his magic. Putting his arm around the Dane's shoulder he says in the friendliest voice, 'It is a great honour for us to have you here. The others can wash up. Come and tell me about the peace movement in Denmark'. Exit hygienic Viking with peacemaking Celt. George pops a menacing face back round the door. 'Every drop of that water, clean, dirty, filthy, goes into every pot, pan, jug, mug, egg-cup you can find. And put labels on saying "bottles in the chateau".'

One evening after supper, George announces with the weariness of Atlas with a broken collarbone, 'At 7.30 this evening in the Chapter House, a discussion will take place with our Anglican and Roman brethren on the subject of church unity and reconciliation'. As he sits down he sighs loudly, and adds, 'Volunteers, please, to join me afterwards in the mopping up of blood'.

It isn't that George doesn't believe in the unity of Christians. He believes in the unity of everyone. But he doesn't think it is advanced by sterile church debate. His brain and heart are big enough to live with paradox. Depending on who is condemning him, he is known in his lifetime as the militarily decorated pacifist, the aristocratic socialist, the Catholic communist. Love your enemies is not for him a theory. George pursues love not in abstract principles but in criss-crossing Britain to plead for borstal boys in court. In the 60s he supports his lifelong friend Harry Whitley, minister of St Giles, who has invited a young Episcopalian priest to celebrate Communion in St Giles. You'd have thought they are proposing human sacrifice or fertility rites on the altar. Not just Anglican bishops but Kirk leaders go purple with rage, accusing Whitley of breaking the ecumenical rules. To George this is blasphemy, for is not the essence of Communion the presence of God himself, the breaker of all rules, the crosser of all boundaries.

Once, walking down Edinburgh's Royal Mile, I see through a cafe door the back of an Inverness cape. I walk in and sit opposite the world's greatest champion of the starving millions. He is with childlike enthusiasm digging into a banana split. I address my hero: 'And two-thirds of the world is starving'. He looks stricken. 'I haven't eaten all day,' he mumbles. There is a silence, while I quietly die. Pushing away the glass dish, he looks me in the eye. 'You're right,' he says, 'they really are starving'.

George MacLeod was a true seer. He saw things others didn't. He saw further into things. He saw into the past and into the future. He saw into souls. He was human, of course. Over issues big and small he could be petty, blind, deaf, stubborn. But, on the whole, in him was as clear an access to the Word made flesh as I'm likely to meet. And as many thousands would attest, one met it closest in worship and specially in the conduct of Holy Communion. When, leading up to the breaking of the bread, he spoke the Great Prayer, the central part of which he spent hours writing fresh for every Sunday, the earth moved. And heaven moved. And in some way they fused. It wasn't just inspiring, it was shattering. An extra presence, a boundary crossed. A transubstantiation of matter and

spirit in dangerous fission and fusion. As his stupendous words mounted into a climax clashing metaphor, it really was as if Christ was released in an explosion of light-energy. We can't compute how many lives were altered by that experience.

In my second summer on Iona, the life of one visiting lecturer, a nuclear physicist, was changed. He threw away his lectures and delivered a blazing scientific and theological tour de force focussing on the Lipchitz statue of the Virgin Mary in the cloisters. That sculpture had one night given him a transforming vision, shared with Chris Adams, the father of Douglas Adams of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Chris Adams' life was also changed and I've often wondered if something of that cosmic experience passed on to his son influenced Douglas Adams in taking the universe on board.

These Communion experiences make my last story all the more strange and difficult. As it is a very private story I have swithered about sharing it. If I've decided wrongly, George in his generous way will forgive me.

In my last year at the BBC, I got a message that George was willing to be filmed. This was during the Assembly and I went to his Edinburgh home the day before filming to discuss what he'd like to say. He was now in his 90s and frail. Making and pouring the tea was a painful effort but what he had to say was more so. Two nights before, he'd had a dream. In his loneliness he had turned to Lorna, his much younger wife, whose early death he was still grieving over. In the dream, she had given him the most tremendous scolding. 'Oh George, stop all this self-pity. You've a lot to do. Just get on with it.' He said in the 48 hours since he'd felt released. He no longer needed Lorna's physical presence. The morning after that encounter he'd been walking up the Mound to the General Assembly Service of Holy Communion, and was suddenly stopped in his tracks by a devastating thought. 'Why am I going to this so-called Communion? Am I really saying that Christ's presence is more real in bread and wine than in the whole of life? We don't touch God in dedicated bread. We touch reality everywhere. We should just get on with it.'

I said, 'Do you want to say that on film tomorrow, you who have made Holy Communion central again in Presbyterianism?'

'If I have made Communion central,' he said, 'then I have failed. I only wanted to make love central'.

The next morning he sent a message saying he would rather not do the filming. I guess he decided he had to cross that no man's land alone.

Nobody can forget his last seeing of George. Mine was a year later. I saw him in the distance on the Mound. He'd obviously been at an evening Assembly meeting. He was standing totally alone, very bent. He hailed a taxi. With difficulty he climbed into it and was gone.

I stood looking at the spot where he'd been. Some words rang in my head. They weren't words of Columba, or of George, or of scripture, but of Shakespeare:

'What a piece of work is a man.'

My sisters were murdered

Jimmy Reid in conversation with Kenneth Roy

2003

Jimmy Reid, the political activist who led the legendary UCS work-in in the early 1970s, talks to the editor of SR

Has your recent experience of illness made you think about death?

I've always been conscious of mortality, including my own, but when you're young you defer the idea, you are less mortal. I recognise that I've lived the greatest chunk of my life. Another couple of decades would suit me fine! But I recognise the imminence of death. One time recently when people thought I was dying and I was kind of conscious of it myself, I must confess I didn't have any fear. I might have been frightened if there had been in my mind a heaven and hell.

So what is there?

I think there is death – the big sleep. Raymond Chandler wrote a book about it, didn't he? I think – as we now know – we go on living through the genes we pass on, and that in itself is a great immortality.

But you yourself are consigned to oblivion?

Eh, yes. But when I'm dying, however conscious I am that I'm dying, I want to know that my life has advanced the cause of decency and social justice just a wee bit, and that will make me feel comfortable.

Are you not troubled in any way by the prospect of nothingness?

I was a Shavian at the age of 12. When I read *Black Girl in Search of God*, it created in my mind the thought that it was somewhat absurd to perceive that there once was no matter but that there was a supreme being and somehow this supreme being created matter. What was he doing, for Christ's sake, if there was no matter? Just hanging about doing nothing? Then I got – have you ever read Ingersoll? He was a great rationalist. Though he was a bit too vehement about the God he didn't believe in.

You're not so vehement?

No. When I was young – 12 to 15 years old – I'd go to meetings and listen to all the debates. And I found that some people – some atheists – seemed to hate the God they didn't believe in. I didn't understand that. And then I used to go to meetings at Govan Cross. George MacLeod was there running the Iona Community. Now MacLeod was a

Christian socialist with a social programme based on the New Testament – a book which to all intents and purposes agrees with what I consider to be a correct attitude to life. And here in the New Testament is this guy arguing that you can only judge human beings by how they treat other human beings. Now, I believed in that before I read the New Testament. But it was lovely to read it there too. So I was kind of insured against the nihilism of many hard-nut atheists. I'm a kind of genial atheist who doesn't really believe there's a God but can well understand people who do believe. Can I make this point? I've got a rather anthropological view of religion – God had to be invented. Religion played an important part. It was almost the first attempt of human beings to try and rationalise something, to try and understand the forces of nature.

Where does the figure of Christ come into this? Did we need to invent him as well?

I've always assumed there was a historic Christ. He was a propagandist for a rebel Jewish sect that preached a lot of things. What really led to his demise was this concept that we're all sons of the one father – that one person is not superior to another. What did that do to the Roman empire? He was a rebel.

If he was only a rebel and a propagandist, why is he still remembered?

Because his propaganda contained some fundamental truths applied for all times.

Social truths or religious truths?

Well, a believer would say divine truth. I would say honest truth. I am perturbed at the capacity of believers for transmuting minimal differences of interpretation of some so-called text, differences that generate the terrible plague of religious wars. Particular religions become even more mind-bogglingly incomprehensible to me. I don't mind arguing about it – though I won't argue too much because I've got more important things to do.

So let's move on to more important things. Tell me about your parents.

My mother's father, Hamish McLean, came from Mull. Came down to Glasgow to work at the docks. He was an old Presbyterian, as you would expect, but he married a Highland Catholic. The first child went to a state school, which in Glasgow was called a Protestant school. But she was dying. And when she was on her deathbed she said to old Hamish: 'Will you do one last thing for me? Will you bring up the rest of my children in the Catholic faith?' And so he did just that. Kind of wonderful considering the time they lived. So my parents were Catholics, although I was never conscious of any great religious pressure and I don't ever remember saying my prayers in anticipation that anybody was listening. Anyway, they lived in the Gorbals and came through the worst of the depression. At that time the Gorbals was riddled with slums and disease and Glasgow had the highest infant mortality rate in the western world. They had seven of a family,

my parents, but three of them died within 18 months. My mother told me that one of the kids died over Hogmanay. My father had the dying kid in his arms, praying to God, while all around people were singing *Auld Lang Syne*.

I still don't have a picture of your dad.

My father – given no chance in life – was an intelligent man.

Did he read?

Not particularly. The only book I saw in the house was a well-thumbed Burns. I've still got it.

Was he political?

He was Labour. And I mean he was John Wheatley Labour. He was ILP in his attitude. My mother was the same. I've got to say this to you, Kenneth. In my early childhood, given the conditions, you imbibed a socialist creed with your mother's milk. I knew – I knew – there was something rotten in this society. I knew my sisters had been murdered – that whatever it said in the death certificate, they should have put down 'social conditions' as the cause. Or, in my opinion, capitalism.

How did this instinctive hostility to capitalism take root as you got older?

I was six or seven when the War started. During that war there was a tremendous process of politicisation going on. Discussions everywhere. And what were the discussions about? Not just about beating Hitler. We weren't going back to the 30s. We were going to change the world. And everybody was talking and arguing and debating and I was right in there, listening to it all. Then I really started reading when I was 11 or 12.

What did you read?

I started off reading Robert Louis Stevenson. I never read a kids' book in my life. Unless it was comics like *The Hotspur* and *The Wizard*.

What was it about Stevenson?

His adventure stories were great. I've read some of his poetry since and liked that too. I also read an essay of his about Burns which is one of the best things I've ever read about Burns. But there was no direction in my reading. I would read fiction, I would read serious books, I would go down to Elderpark Library and read Marx. Karl, not Groucho. From the first wage I got, my mother gave me 10 bob pocket money. 'Ye cannae get that every week, just because ye're working,' my mother said. I borrowed another sixpence from my elder sister Isa and walked into Glasgow and bought Tom Johnston's *History of the Working Class*. I was a bit precocious at 14 years old, I admit that, but I don't want to

sound here as if I'm a bookworm. I had a kind of feeling that lassies were different from us and I liked the difference. Don't get any wrong ideas.

What were your parents' ambitions for you?

Very limited indeed. I was sent to work – started in a stockbroker's office in Renfield Street. I left school at 14. I had been streamed for Latin, Greek, French. That's what happened if you passed your 11-plus well. I'm not sure if the 11-plus was a measure of a youngster's intelligence but I got 99% and so did a number of others from the poor part of Govan. But though we were streamed for the Oxbridge thing, none of us ever contemplated that we would go on to university. We were leaving school at 14 because we had to help out at home.

How did you get on at the stockbroker's? Could you have ended up in a pinstripe?

I worked for a firm called Kilpatrick & Robertson. Old Robertson was chairman of the Glasgow Stock Exchange. I ended up the youngest transfer clerk at the age of 15. By this time I was Chancellor of the Exchequer in George MacLeod's youth parliament, and buying the *Daily Herald* and the *Daily Worker* every day. And then old Robertson sent me to a class run by a guy called MacAulay. And MacAulay said: 'The Stock Exchange will last as long as the present socio-economic system'. And I said: 'We deserve more job security than that'. I went back to Robertson and said: 'Look, I'm leaving, I don't like this institution'. He tried to persuade me to stay on. Said that if all went well, they would consider a partnership when I was older. I really didn't want that. I might have become a left-wing stockbroker. So I think I made the right decision. At the age of 16, I went into engineering and joined the Communist party.

You believed in some form of utopia?

Oh, yes. From each according to his ability to each according to his needs...

Do you still believe in that ideal?

I believe in socialism. I believe it will become abundantly clear that globalisation driven by multi-national corporations will be a disaster. I think there will be a resurrection of the idea of socialism, but the Soviet model was a distortion of socialism. It ruled half the world's population – absolute rule – and no excuses can be made for it. The whole thing stank. Do I regret it? I don't regret anything.

Jimmy Reid died in August 2010

Twentieth century journey

Ian Hamilton

2003

If it be true that we walk backwards into the future with only the past to guide us then the 20th century shows how we must fall over our own feet. Take the Battle of Omdurman. In 1898 the British army machine-gunned rank upon rank of charging Dervishes. The conclusion drawn was that the British Empire was invincible. 'The valiant blacks,' wrote Winston Churchill, 'prepared themselves to meet the shock'. Eighteen years later, on 1st July 1916, his delight changed to a lament. 'There must be better ways to fight a war,' he said gloomily, 'than to pit the breasts of brave men against machine gun bullets'.

Step forward three years from Omdurman and we find Boer soldiers who would not stand to be shot down. They warred by hit-and-run. Kitchener defeated them by putting their civilians into concentration camps, where 25,000 women and children died. The lesson of the new century repeated that of the old. Empire was invincible. None thought that the spectre of the concentration camp would cast the most terrible shadow on the century just begun. The 20th century was born to the sound of machine guns and baptised in barbed wire.

If this is an unduly gloomy view, don't blame me. It wasn't my fault. I didn't come on the scene until 1925. By that time, the century had formed its character. Lenin was dead and any faint idealism died with him. The end now justified the means. Famine was to be used as a political weapon. The Weimar republic was twitching to an end. The Friekorps had been formed. The capitalist system was in grave decline. All in all, it was an interesting time to be born. Indeed, if I vary between elation and despair and a sort of comic gasping-with-laughter, then understand that these emotions were the oxygen of my century. Think what had happened before I was out of my teens.

Of the First World War, I only heard. Some say eight million died. Some say more. As the war ended, plague took over and 40 or 60 million died of influenza. No-one knows how many. Starvation and the gulags took millions more, and in the German gas camps countless millions perished. A strategic bombing campaign, in which I was just too young to take part, devastated German cities. Then two atom bombs were dropped. Millions more died in battle. At the going down of the sun and in the morning it seemed that European civilisation was among the dead.

Yet it wasn't. It flickered from time to time but the light still burned. What else do you do when Germany sits on your neighbour's land but try to help your neighbour? Few doubt that the Second World War was just a war. Yet in mid-January 2003 as I write these words, the tanks rattle louder than sabres, and it seems that my century has said its

farewell by spawning another age of imperial barbarism. Let it never be forgotten when we look on the excesses of Cambodia or of sub-Sahara Africa that we Europeans set the four horsemen loose in their wildest gallop ever. More people died in my century from war, famine and plague than in the whole previous history of our race. We Europeans have shown that the natural state of humankind is barbarity.

I first took my place in humankind as a schoolboy. I come of decent unremarkable stock, tailors and weavers and small time self-employed people from southern Lanarkshire. The only thing remarkable about my boyhood home was my father. He owned many books and listened without criticism to anything my brother and I said about them. About God he had such firm views that neither of us challenged him. My brother simply left home at an early age as he found Presbyterianism too heavy a cross to carry. I agree with him. After long and painful cogitation, I abolished God. The God of the gulag and the gas chamber is not for me. If He exists I am against him. Shortly I shall go to meet Him, and I shall tell him so.

My views began to diverge from those of my father when I was 10 or 12. The Spanish Civil War was the great enlightener. I discovered with childish amazement that people actually volunteered to fight in Spain. Any fighting that I had heard of before had been between real soldiers, but these International Brigaders were ordinary people from Paisley who knew for what they fought. Think for a moment of the power of that thought on a 13- or 14-year-old boy. Of course much more was to follow. Of Munich, I remember only my father's cynicism. I did not know the word then, but I knew what I saw in his face.

To people who didn't experience the event, it is impossible to explain what Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain felt like, but I will try. It was enhanced living. I lived more thoroughly and more comprehensively than ever before or since. Do not think that life was unthinking patriotism. It was not. In 1940 the King and Queen paid a sudden visit to Clydeside, and we school kids were marshalled to line the streets to cheer them by. I refused. I got onto my bike and went home. I was 14 years of age, and the only child in the school to act in this fashion. I think I represented something that was just beginning to be felt in Scotland.

The Windsors were nothing to Paisley, nor Paisley to the Windsors. I resented the assumption, as I have always resented such an assumption, that I would think in the way everyone else was thinking. I believed then, as I believe now, that in my childish way I was making a statement about the human spirit for which wars were properly fought. My teachers didn't see it in that fashion. They had hard words to say, but they didn't dare to punish me. My father, who ran his tailoring business for the Paisley toffs, might reasonably have been annoyed. I think secretly he was rather proud.

This is no place for a history of the War. Yet I am the author of this piece, and it is how I feel that counts. I never doubted that we would win. I never met anyone who thought differently. The Americans like to think that they won the War. Let them. When

they get too bumptious, remind them that in the 20th century they never won a war unless we were there to help them. Of course, I'm prejudiced. It was my generation who coined the phrases, over-paid, over-sexed, and over here. On one thing let history speak. The Americans think they saved democracy. They did not.

In 1940 when democracy was in its greatest peril they coined the phrase, 'Cash and Carry'. Our Cash, Our Carriage, for 40 of their clapped-out old destroyers. When our money ran out they coined another phase, 'Lend Lease'. We leased. They lent. They bled us white. They say they came into the war to help us defeat Germany. They did not. In December 1941, Germany declared war on America. Had Hitler not done so, the Americans might have fought in the Pacific and left us alone. America bled democracy and in 1945 emerged immeasurably richer than any other country had ever been. We emerged bankrupt. Americans love to be loved. They make it difficult.

Unlike America, I volunteered. I was still a schoolboy in 1943, and it was a close thing with me. I had been sent to Allan Glen's in Glasgow, and passing through Townhead I had seen children with rickets. In case you don't know, rickets is a disease of malnutrition which causes bones to grow soft and fuse. Kids walk on the sides of their feet. Their legs and arms bend at the bone. I knew the cause, and believed that in a rich country like Scotland rickets was a disease of wickedness not of malnutrition, a view from which I never swerved. I thought of being a conscientious objector, but in the end the war won.

Choice was in the air when the War ended, and in 1945 the electorate chose a Labour Government. This was the worst government in British history. It betrayed the ideals of us all. This is not the conventional view, but I was there and I remember the joy which soon turned to shattering disappointment as promise after promise was betrayed. Scotland has always been a radical country, even if we cringe in the shadow of our big neighbour. It's as though we were servants at heart. Somewhere it is written that about the same number of people are now employed as servants of the state as were employed as servants in the big houses. Abolish government by the great Whigs, and you get government by civil servants. The housemaid cringes for a crust; the civil servant for a knighthood. These people became our governors in 1945, and have never let up. Of course, we got the health service. Of course, we got a pittance in welfare when we were down and out, but that was all.

And down and out we remained as a result of Attlee's Government. The rebuilding of Germany is still called the German miracle. What nonsense! It was no miracle. It was hard work. We took no such step. We were still under the curse of the British Empire. Instead of regrouping we prodigally kept forces east of Suez, and scattered them elsewhere across the globe. India, of course, we had to give up, but the sun still never set on the Union Jack. More people were under arms than at any other time in our history. I was one of them. I lay in a barrack hut for three years doing nothing. All orders to the Empire and to Scotland came from London. Every function from road transport to your

health was controlled from the south. 'Put your coat on, it's raining in London,' I wrote bitterly. Imperialism was again rampant.

When writing about the Boer War, I did not mention one great green sprout of hope. A country with no history has difficulty in surviving. In 1901, the first professor of Scottish history in any university took his chair. It was at Edinburgh University, and his name was Hume Brown. By the coincidence that saves nations, his first student was the great medievalist A O Anderson. They worked like yeast, but it was 60 years before the mixture started to seethe. Even in 1949, when I was a student, the only Scottish history textbook was Hume Brown's. The second half of the century has produced so many that you cannot imagine what it was like to study Scottish history 60 years ago. The middle classes, the only ones who were even half-educated, had brought up their children to believe that we were a conquered country. To discover our long and proud history was itself an epiphany.

No wonder we took the Stone of Destiny. No wonder the ordinary people of Scotland cheered. But before that event something much more important had happened, something which is half forgotten, and which I'll now tell you about. The fire of it smoulders yet.

In 1948, six men of Knoydart came out of the forces and staked a claim to a small amount of land on the Knoydart peninsula. This land was owned by a beer baron called Lord Brocket, a pro-German fascist who would have been at home in the SS. He took an interdict in the Court of Session where the judges cravenly ordered the six men to go away. They went, but they had lit a fire in Scotland which has never quite gone out. I, and others, made speeches. The corner of Wellington Street and Sauchiehall Street was then given over to us radicals. I advocated armed revolt, but no-one listened. And in the House of Commons, dominated by a socialist majority, not one voice was raised in support of the six men. That was the Attlee Government that I despise.

My century had now reached its halfway mark. No doubt influenced by Ghandi's opinions, I have always loathed the British Empire. Empire bleaches worth from the imperialist, and sucks character from the subjected. I know the Brits believed that they carried the blacks on their backs, but they rifled their pockets as they did so. We never taught them honesty. How could we when we were there as imperialists? The Empire only enriched the toffs. Tucked away in the eaves of its memory, nearly every big house in Scotland holds a history of enrichment through selling slaves in the Carribean, or opium to the Chinese. Now the wheel has turned and we suffer under heroin as the Chinese suffered under the Empire's poppy.

As the British Empire was being wound up, much was happening at home. I knew and remember the old urban communities that had existed since the early days of the industrial revolution. Some were foul slums, yet they had something which no civil servant could understand. They had a sense of community, and from that sense of community came a sense of responsibility. Weans could safely play in the streets. It was

still something of a shame to get lifted. None went to prison without a backward glance and a shrug. Society still worked. Then came the planners. I saw it happen in the Lawnmarket in Edinburgh. Nearby, I had started a small printing business while I was waiting for my practice to develop down the road at the Parliament House. The centre of the community was Tommy Mowatt's Bar, now the Ensign Ewart. Even as a stranger, I knew everyone and they knew me. Then they were decanted. Family by family, they were shipped off to Craiglockhart while their old homes were gentrified. To begin with they came back, just to be at home. Then so-and-so was missed, and someone else found they couldn't afford the bus fares, and a community died.

Life was never quite the same in Craiglockhart. I still have friends there. Helen Crummy's wonderful book on the regeneration of Craiglockhart is under the elbow as I write. It is called *Let the People Sing*. People try for regeneration but the communities should never have been destroyed, and the use of the word 'decant' says it all. To use such a word about people says more about the brutal servants who employed it than it does about the victims. You cannot decant people like claret. I despise those civil servants who have tried.

I have just mentioned the name of a woman and of a glorious woman at that. The 20th century saw the species emancipate themselves. I wonder why they waited so long. Contraception gave them freedom from the tyranny of their own bodies, the typewriter gave them little jobs that led to economic freedom, and the bicycle gave them freedom in space. It beats common sense that they invented a phrase like 'the glass ceiling' to exempt them from trying to be upwardly mobile. There was empty air above them. We have only three women judges out of more than 30, and the disparity is not because they cannot do the job. Being a judge is easy. I know. I've been one. There is no reason why the hand that rocks the cradle shouldn't write the law. I suspect that, like us Scots, women live under the shadow of generations of subjection. If all this sounds very patronising, then I'm being patronising. Women have been so busy being feminist that their agitation exhausts their ambition. Maybe another generation will see them taking their place beside us as our equals. I would not take time to write of them if I did not think they were worth it.

To the idle clamour of women's voices, the century rolled on. The Cold War was fought and won, and in Europe no-one was killed. As one who lived through it, I never thought that would be otherwise. I used to advocate that the Russian spies, when caught, should be given a pension and the OBE. I pointed out that if they reported back accurately, Russia would see that in the west no-one was daft enough to want to attack them. I suspected that on the other side of the Iron Curtain the same view prevailed. Now I have been proved right. Spies are called weapons inspectors, and even if they don't get OBEs, they're damned well paid.

From spies I turn to Scottish nationalism. For much of the 20th century nationalism was a bad word. In some places it still is, unless it's English nationalism. *Land of Hope*

and Glory is allowed, and I once saw a group of blue-rinsed Scotswomen try it. When they saw my sardonic eye on them they became uneasy. At 'wider still and wider shall thy bounds be set' I grinned and they faltered. At 'God who made the mighty make thee mightier yet' only one was still singing. Then they gave up, and looked for their gloves and handbags, and went home without meeting anyone's eye.

I cannot take that sort of nationalism seriously. However there is no other word in the language to describe that love of a common heritage which for historical and geographical reasons makes a people feel that they belong to one another and are responsible for each other's wellbeing. This sentiment should be based on love, although if we are truthful an amiable sort of hate comes into it. The English hate the French, and it is reciprocated. The English patronise the Scots, and we grind our teeth. I now come out quite openly and say that the southern English gar me grue. Their superior airs and their flat yah yah voices make me want to caw the feet frae them. I know that this is a base feeling, but it is a very human one.

The English are about to abolish xenophobia by act of parliament. Soon it will be a crime to shout, 'Down with the English,' so I'll have to stop. Just see me! Like lust, xenophobia is bad, but it's also fun. Like lust, so long as it's kept within reasonable bounds, it doesn't do much harm. Hugh MacDiarmid used to conclude his *Who's Who* entry by listing anglophobia as his only hobby. Let me leave this shadowy side alone and make a simple affirmation. Scotland is a nation. Nations should govern themselves. Until we do so, we have no right to say we are hard done to.

As for the Holyrood Parliament, I suspected that it would turn out the way it has. We must make ourselves ungovernable from Westminster before we can come into our own again. It is typical of the cringing Scots that the SNP MSPs swore allegiance to the titular head of the Union they claim to intend to smash. I put it on record that when I was called to the bar I refused to take that offensive oath. I was a youngster, totally alone when I made my stand. There were 35 SNP members who foreswore themselves. Symbols matter. That is why there are such things as flags and queens and oaths.

Although I was a candidate for that parliament, I would never have taken that oath. Those who did remind me of the Jacobite rebels of the '45. They started their rebellion by burying their cannon, because they were too heavy to carry. Later they much missed them and wished they hadn't. I cannot help feeling that these misguided MSPs may feel the same. Principles are sometimes uncomfortable baggage, but a lack of them is even more of an encumbrance. Besides the English would have had to give in, as they gave in for me all those years before. World public opinion would never have countenanced 35 Scots being excluded from their own parliament because they refused to swear loyalty to an English Queen. It would have been a notable victory, but lack of courage denied it to us. As for Scottish nationalists who take English titles, oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!

Mention of the EIIR controversy makes me weep for my lost youth. I became an advocate with so many hopes for Scotland, yet by 1956 I was nearly conquered by that

terrible enemy of all Scots who dare to aspire. The enemy is the Giant Despair. How right Bunyan was! In 1956, in my play, *The Tinkers of the World*, I wrote, 'The dam is burst, and we shall never give anything more'. I do not take that pessimistic view now, but then I was thinking of the world and how little influence we have in it. We still have little influence on events, but now perhaps we can make more significant comments on them.

Looking for significant events, the most significant in my lifetime has been the migration of peoples. This has gone on from time immemorial but it has gathered pace in the last two decades. It must not be stopped. Hidden for centuries behind the bleak uplands that lie between us and the English border, the Scottish gene pool is small and has needed constant replenishing. There is no such thing as a pure bred Scot. We are a mongrel race. In that lies our strength. The incomers whom the English try to turn away have crossed continents to reach us. They are the young and the enterprising, and the very people that we need to replenish our dying stock.

The Scottish peoples are suffering from a race sickness that will surely kill us all if we cannot welcome those who come among us. They are strangers for only a generation, and then strangers no more. It is our genius as a people to have accepted them in the past, and now our genius is being thwarted by the narrow nationalism of our English neighbours. Our common humanity calls to these strangers even across the barbed wire.

When I write about our common humanity, I cannot but think of the thin faint wailing of the Church of Scotland where I have found little sight of humanity at all. I was brought up in that church, and early learned to loath it. Where does it stand on immigration, or on any of the great issues which troubled and perplexed us in the 20th century? It stands nowhere. It passes by on the other side. My job takes me constantly to the criminal courts. There I meet the dispossessed, the weak, both of body and mind, the broken few, the weeping relatives of the victims of crime, the victims themselves, the witnesses, the abused children, the people who more than anyone else need help and counselling, and the consolations of religion, but where are the ministers? I will tell you where. They are in the fat middle-class suburbs, where life is warm and comfortable and agreeably quiet. Except to mouth a few platitudes at the start of a circuit, and then go away, I haven't seen a minister in any courthouse for 30 years. We hear much from these prelates about how the people have deserted the church, but nothing of how the church has deserted the people.

I started this piece of writing with references to barbed wire and barbarism. I started with fire in my heart, and I end it with the fire still burning. My century was kind to me, if bitterly unkind to humankind. It is no longer possible to walk into the future looking at the past. We have fallen down too often doing that. In this 21st century, you must try to do better, even if privately I doubt if you will.

I remember when the Comintern was dissolved. It was much feared, and rightly so, yet for millions of wage slaves it flew a standard of hope. Two generations after its

dissolution a new Comintern is the globalisation of venture capitalism. What hope for mankind does such an organisation hold? Not much I fear. Its first loyalty is to shareholders, a handful of American businesspeople. With 6% of the world's population, America owns 50% of the world's wealth. Apart from trifling alms, it gives nothing away. It grows richer every day, and sometimes it demands a terrible price. Was it 500 or 1,000 Indians who were killed by the release of toxic gases by Union Carbide in Bhopal? How many were blinded? Who cares? Not, it appears, Union Carbide or globalised capital. Power without responsibility is not the prerogative of the harlot, but of the businessman. Maybe there was hope at the heart of the Comintern. Maybe globalised business doesn't have a heart at all.

Whatever! I write this out for all who wish to read. 25,000 innocent women and children died in Earl Kitchener's terror camps in 1901. 3,000 innocent people died in Abu Bin Laden's terrorist attack on the twin towers in 2001.

The more things change, the more they remain the same. That is the terrible lesson I have learned in my 20th-century journey. I pass it on to you.

Reunion on a beach

Allan Shiach

2005

My wife and I were walking on the West Beach in Lossiemouth last month. Among the many fine beaches of the Moray coast, I hadn't visited that particular one for perhaps three decades. We generally prefer Hopeman, Burghead or Findhorn. Not just for their proximity to our home near Forres but because each offers a variety of delights besides mere sand and gunmetal sea. However, last month on a fine weekend, it was Lossiemouth. The jet planes from the RAF base (formerly RNAS Fulmar and the only naval air base to be announced 'sunk' during the war by the German propaganda machine) were silent and the North Sea lapped the white sand with rare benevolence.

My wife took off her shoes and, as we passed a chap walking his dog, he turned to her and said, 'Be careful of your bare feet, there's quite a lot of broken glass about'. She thanked him, we patted his dog and were about to move on when he looked at me a second time.

'Alan?'

I looked at him and in that moment 46 years disappeared.

'Eric.'

Eric Adam, now 60, had been my closest childhood friend between the ages of seven and 14, standing half a year younger than me and half a year older than my brother.

It was with Eric that I learned how girls worked. With Eric that we roamed the countryside on bicycles, explored the cliffs, risked the caves, lifted the gulls eggs from their nest, played cowboys amid the inland dunes of the Spey Valley. But mainly, we went to movies and the municipal swimming baths.

The manager of the local baths took an interest in us three boys which, today, might be thought suspicious but in those more innocent times seemed quite properly friendly and helpful. We shared a changing cubicle, dived, ran, raced and spent shivering hours in our knitted swimming trunks under the hot showers, listening to other voices echo to the prefabricated roof of the Munro Baths.

And then we went to the movies. The 'fillums' were not just escape and pleasure, they were ceremony. Elgin had two cinemas, the Playhouse, the Picture House. The programmes changed every two days and since it was always a double bill this meant a menu of some 12 films a week. And that was just Elgin. Lossiemouth, too, had a cinema. Forres had one. So did Nairn. Even tiny Dufftown, where two distilleries were the sole support of the community, had an especially charming cinema, possibly (and impossibly) called the Dufftown Regal. With a little hard work on your bicycle pedals – weather was simply never a factor since like all childhoods the sun shone constantly in

mine – and a few shillings, this range of films was as extensive a choice as anything Rupert Murdoch can offer today and probably no more costly.

Eric and Peter and I shared all our childhood experiences with one exception. Peter and I seemed to belong to a family prone to dying. The funerals of my father, when I was eight, my grandparents, aunts and other relatives were ours alone to witness. Some of them searing, fundamentally changing losses. Most of them ending in the bleak cemetery which straddles a wind-blasted hill between Elgin and New Elgin. Only when those rites were concluded did Eric join us once again in our more prosaic rituals.

The Lossiemouth beach walk became a slow stroll as Eric and I had an animated exchange of memories. We made little reference to the intervening 46 years; adulthood, work, marriage, children and other relevant events which had changed two Elgin 'loons' into grey-haired men given to death-postponing exercise on the beach, were simply assumed. Instead, we concentrated on those few years of our shared past. He told my wife anecdotes of our childhood days together which never happened. I reminded him of other events and stories to which his blank expression gave the lie.

But it was a fine reunion. As we reached our respective cars, Eric had one last tale to tell. It was of my brother, Peter, who died of multiple cancers on his 36th birthday.

'You won't know this,' said Eric. 'But I was an alcoholic for most of my life. Eventually I hit the bottom, living in an unheated caravan, unable to work or feed myself, a semi-functioning wreck. Somehow your brother – the third of we three musketeers – had heard of my plight. He wrote me a letter. It contained no judgements or excoriations. Just a note of kind concern and the offer to help in any way he could, paying for rehab, ensuring I was warmed and fed.'

As Eric told me this, I remembered my ailing, chemotherapy and cancer-ridden brother telling me of his writing this letter and pondering the futility of it. He never had a reply.

'Three weeks later,' Eric continued, 'Peter died. The first of us to go. I couldn't face the funeral'. (In that same bleak cemetery which straddles a wind-blasted hill between Elgin and New Elgin.) 'But I was so struck by the generosity of his spirit, that a man in the last stages of confronting his own death cared enough to take the time to write to me with an offer to help.'

As Eric looked at me, the afternoon sun angling over Lossiemouth lighthouse, his eyes were dry, since it was a tale he had told before.

'I haven't touched a drop of alcohol,' he said, 'from that day 23 years ago. It saved my life'.

I'm sorry my brother never knew, at least in his life, how he had touched and changed our childhood friend. But Eric knows. And now I know, too.

Now that we have renewed contact, I look forward sometime to going to the movies with Eric again. It won't be quite the same, just the two of us. Sadly, where once there were six cinemas and over 30 films a week available in that part of Scotland, now there is only one.

An unexpected visitor

Allan Shiach

2005

I was eight when my father died. He was killed in a car accident in the late morning on an icy December day somewhere on the road between Elgin and Rothes. He was driving a black Lea-Francis, a marque long-gone but fancy and quite upmarket in its day, the acquisition of which, three months earlier, had distinctly thrilled him and his two sons and which had two bright yellow hand-covered cushions on its back seat.

I don't know the detail of the accident. Only that there was black ice on the road and the collision was with a large lorry. He was conscious for a while in Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin and spoke briefly to my mother before he died. Doubtless today, with airbags and seat belts and appropriate surgical intervention, he might have lived. But at 2.30 in the afternoon, my mother came home – all her children waiting for news in the hallway – and said, 'He's gone'. At first I wondered where he might have gone to. But as tears and prayers began to fill the house, I suppose I realised what was meant by the unaccustomed phrase.

Although I have driven that same road many times since that day, I still don't know precisely where the accident took place. I have always asked those who knew or might have known not to tell me. There are plenty of shrines to those we loved without adding a further memorial on some anonymous stretch of a remote rural road.

Many decades later, I was invited to make the acquaintance of a fellow Scot and it was arranged that we meet at the Caledonian Club in London. We didn't know each other though we seemed, in the way of Scots businessmen abroad, to affect an instant fellowship based on mutual friends, networks, circumstances or interests.

We had hardly begun talking when he told me that I was mistaken and that we had, in fact, known each other once. As fellow pupils, he said, at Wester Elchies, a prep school long demolished but once situated on a high south-facing hillside over the River Spey. I didn't remember his name from the school but perhaps we were separated by the widest gulf there is at boarding school – a year or so in age. He, however, remembered my father's death.

He remembered, he said, my father coming to visit his unhappy son during a winter term for afternoon tea – the only parental visit permitted to an eight-year-old who had been sent to survive in the British system of private education. Wester Elchies was a 'happy' school. Wonderful headteachers – who remained friends until their deaths long years after – and a staff of caring and considerate men and women. Rules enforced with gentle firmness, classes taught with pastoral kindness and intelligence. Such unhappiness as any child felt was no fault of the school or the schooling but my separation from the loving and dutiful parents.

He remembered my father's visit (I did not). He remembered that my father, knowing the interest of boys between the ages of eight and 11, had parked his car at the front of the school building and propped the bonnet open when he went inside so that appropriate inspection of the engine might be made by anyone interested. He remembered that the car was a Lea-Francis. And he remembered its registration number. ASO 147.

My expression of doubt as to his memory of this detail after five decades was swept aside with confidence and certainty. Of course, he remembered the number plate. His childhood hobby had been cars. (Hobbies were a sure and excellent way in which to bury anxiety, thoughts of separation and doubt.) It was a rare and beautiful model. And, most importantly, its owner – whom he had met – died in that same vehicle barely three weeks later. Its registration number was ASO 147.

Because I can remember nothing of my father, I watched my own (three) children growing up in constant hope that, should I be taken away from them in some random traffic accident, they would remember something of me. And as each of them grew past eight, nine, 10, 11 years of age, I was conscious of a fierce internal celebration: that I would not be forgotten by them. I rejoiced that some fragments of my life, personality, appearance, love, would remain with them.

I have perhaps three fleeting images of my father but little more. It was and is not enough. What I do remember was the aftermath. The now-recognised phase of shock, denial, bargaining, anger and reconciliation. The hopeless inability of an eight-year-old to offer comfort. The dreams of anxiety and death. The heart-fluttering moments of seeing him in the street and knowing that it was illusion. And the two small yellow cushions, returned to us as the only redeemable fragments of the accident. I remember the funeral as if it were a technicolour film played in an endless loop throughout my life. The chill church, the chillier cemetery. Holding the ropes that lowered the coffin into the earth. The priest and the prayers.

And most of all, I remember the visit made the day after the funeral. Someone came to the house. He was taken with unusual ceremony into my father's study. My mother made him tea, went in and closed the door. He stayed for what seemed a long time, shook hands with great formality when he left. I remember that he wore a suit, a shirt and a tie and seemed to be awkward and unaccustomed to the manner of his dress. As soon as he had left, we were told who the visitor had been. He was the lorry driver whose vehicle had crashed into the car in which my father was killed. He had come to offer his condolences and to express regret at his part in the accident.

He was not held to be, nor was he, at fault. Perhaps he came, as modern usage would have it, to reach out. Perhaps he came for his own reasons. Perhaps because the ethic of those days was different. Perhaps because he simply wanted a widow to know of his sorrow.

But after he left and my mother turned to face her family and the rest of her life, I thought then, and sometimes think now, he was the bravest man I ever saw.

The medallion

Allan Shiach

2007

Peter was born in Thurso, the most northerly town on mainland Britain where the wind and the turbulent waters of the Pentland Firth carved the rugged geography of the coast. He was subsequently brought up in a large happy home in Elgin, a sedate market town enfolded by farmlands in the lea of the Grampian hills. His mother was a devout Roman Catholic, her faith inherited from a line of ancestors traceable back to the days of Mary Tudor and the Auld Alliance. Like that of many cradle Catholics, her belief was rarely reinforced by intellectual ponderings, but was a simple, natural devotion born of practice, ritual and the unquestionable comfort that came with it.

Peter was therefore raised in the Catholic Church, his spiritual education provided with diligence and hope by priests who were members of a Benedictine monastic order. They lived nearby at Pluscarden Abbey where, with considerable hardship, the monks were restoring the ruins of a once-derelict 13th-century monastery. The abbey – in those days a mere priory – sits in a long, lush valley sheltered by a rising hill of woodland to its north. Surrounded by arable fields, the buildings of the monastery can be glimpsed from a distance through copses of mature trees, the warm stone latticed on sunny days by the angled shadows of northern latitudes.

Each Sunday after mass, Peter would enter one of the small, bare visitor rooms in the wooden annexe of the abbey, where Father Maurus, bustling, head shaven in tonsure and wearing the white habit of his order, offered an hour of religious instruction. Along with a couple of other Catholic boys from nearby Gordonstoun School, in his plain room decorated with a single crucifix, Father Maurus taught some of the fundamentals and mysteries of their religion and offered up strategies for arguing the defence of their faith in the face of occasionally hostile questioning from other boys who had been raised in the school of hard Knox. Children seek out difference and religion was as good a source to be mined as any other. It was during those years that Father Maurus and Peter began to develop a lifelong bond.

Dom Maurus OSB – to give his formal title – was born Frank Deegan and raised in some poverty in Liverpool. Maurus was among the first of the Benedictine community to occupy the derelict abbey in the late 1940s. He was a man of profound faith, contemplative and rigorous, yet also gregarious and humanely pragmatic. A woman friend was once surprised to run into him on the platform of Aberdeen station, his slightly grubby robe frayed and his battered suitcase, opened to check the railway timetable, containing no more than a toothbrush, underwear, a chasuble and stole, *The Rule of Saint Benedictine* and a mass book. She asked where he was travelling to.

'Ghana,' replied Father Maurus, explaining that he'd been invited to spend a few months helping with a religious community in one of the remoter areas.

'But the London train's just left,' she said.

'Ah yes,' replied Maurus. 'But I have no money for the journey yet.'

She looked at him, momentarily perplexed.

'I was just waiting for the Lord to send you along so I could ask you to buy me a ticket for the first stage of my travels.'

Despite the religious nurturing and the regular stream of intricate and lengthy letters from Father Maurus, when Peter grew up and moved out into the world he began to leave the practices of his faith behind. As an adult, like many others – though perhaps more thoughtfully than most – he joined the legions of the lapsed. It was, in his case, a curiously 'conscientious' separation. He felt unable to believe and unwilling to employ the rituals in the absence of a core belief.

Father Maurus and Peter's mother did what devout people are supposed to do: they continued to love him in their various ways, and they prayed for him. Throughout university and the jobs at which he worked, Peter remained in touch with both his family and his former spiritual mentor. He worked in several parts of the world, eventually settling back into the community in which he had been raised, living in a rambling old house just outside Elgin. He had a job in the whisky industry, took part in local activities and during an election campaign outraged some of his neighbouring squires by attaching a 'Vote Labour' poster to the driveway gates. Comfortable among the people with whom he had grown up and confident that he had found the place and the career he enjoyed, there was still a sense of restlessness about Peter which had earlier led him to travel extensively. Moray was his home and his base but it was clear that he felt there was yet more to be sought. And in the prime of his life he intended, one day, to seek it.

And then, aged 34, he got cancer.

He had recently married when the first diagnosis was made. It was, said the doctors, an unthreatening cancer, one of the few most likely to respond to prompt treatment. So following surgery and radiation therapies, he returned to work, his marriage and his life with some optimism.

Once or twice a year, he would see Father Maurus at family ceremonies – weddings, baptisms, funerals – and despite his lapsed faith, they remained on good terms. He made donations to the Pluscarden community and the monks quietly continued with their work of rebuilding their abbey, farming the land and offering succour to the needy.

A year later, when the cancer returned, it had metastasised in a more threatening way and Peter agreed to undergo the radical and debilitating treatments on offer. He declined the well-meaning friends who offered magical cures, the high-tech US hospitals which only dealt with VIPs and all the other medical and anecdotal snake-oil salesman who seem, with best intentions, to emerge when distress strikes. He continued to work as best

he could, but in the long winter months between treatments, he quietly and diligently set about organising matters for a less certain future.

It was during this period that I happened to have dinner with Rita, an actress friend, and her husband. I told them of Peter's struggle with the advancing tide of illness and of the doctors and others who kept offering him glimpses of hope. I also told of the weekend he stayed with us when he picked up a spoon instead of a fork and couldn't quite understand why he was having difficulty cutting his meat. Of how he put his hands on my shoulder – I can still feel the touch – to ensure that he didn't stumble as we walked down a long passageway. Of his frailty and quiet courage.

At the end of dinner Rita went to a cabinet drawer and took out a small medallion and chain. She didn't much believe in the tokens of religion, but somehow she had once been given this medallion, said to contain a tiny fragment of cloth belonging to Saint Bernadette of Lourdes, and insisted that I lend it to Peter. It was no more than a gesture of awkward superstition. But what harm could be done by the wearing of a small medallion? Faintly embarrassed by the warmth with which the loan was made, I quickly dropped it into my pocket and mumbled that I would pass it on and return it in due course.

When I told Peter about it, I was surprised that he smiled so brightly, promptly taking it and putting it on. 'At least it won't make me feel nauseous,' he said. I didn't have the heart to tell him it was only on loan.

Within weeks he was diagnosed with a new tumour, this one lodged deep in his brain. It was inoperable. They gave him drugs to contain the tumour's growth. At least for a while.

Perhaps because the chemotherapy had stopped, he began to grow stronger over a period of remission. Though still easily tired, he continued to work and, when we were separated by continents, he was often on the phone, discussing this issue and that, business problems, political events, and the rest. He rarely spoke of his health and indicated that he was enjoying the gathering weeks of mental clarity and physical strength. But he cleared his office desk, preferring to work from home.

His devout mother and his Benedictine friend – and for all I know several others – renewed their storming of heaven, lest Peter should die outwith the arms of what was once his church. It was unremarkable that one April day he invited his old friend, Father Maurus, to come to the house for lunch. It was a Monday, the beginning of another week. They had a simple meal, joined by Peter's wife and by his mother. Afterwards Peter asked to be left to have a private chat with Father Maurus.

They had been alone for about an hour when they emerged together. Peter said he felt tired and was going to lie down for a nap, so he did not go to the door to bid farewell to the priest. Which gave Maurus the opportunity quickly to report to the wife and the mother that he had just formally received Peter back into the church and had given him Communion.

As Father Maurus left, he did not know that Peter had fallen into a sleep from which he would not wake.

Summoned by the news that he was now in a terminal coma, I was present when Peter died at three in the morning. I lay awake during the remaining few hours of the night, knowing that I had two duties to perform. The first of which was to trudge up the long pathway to the cottage where Peter's mother lives and to tell her of his death.

She did not weep. 'Thank God,' she said, so utterly certain in her faith that her son was now in a better place, free of pain and re-united in heaven with his long-dead father.

The whirl of activity which results from a death at home conceals many emotions. The practicalities of the obsequies need to be dealt with. Dozens of little decisions need to be made. How is the body to lie out? In which room? Who will announce the death? Who will deal with the legalities of registering it? Should the doctor be called immediately or can that visit wait until later in the day? How to dispose of the powerful drugs which sustained consciousness and held pain at bay in the last days?

I hesitated over my second duty – which was to remove the medallion from the body. But before the undertakers arrived I walked into the sitting room, where the body lay, and steeled myself to the task. I was alone in the room as I reached down to Peter's chest and looked for the catch on the chain. Upon glancing at his face, I was momentarily startled to notice the eyes half open, glinting sightlessly at my fumbling fingers. I removed the chain and slipped it into my pocket to return to its owners in due course.

The funeral took place three days later. It was held at Pluscarden Abbey as if he was being somehow returned. The monks sang plain chant, echoing and resonant, and the coffin stood in the aisle where the walls of the 13th-century abbey rose on either side, silently oppressing the congregation with history and the passage of time. The burial was at Elgin cemetery, a bleak hillside even on sunny days. He was laid into the ground next to his father.

The strange thing about funerals is that they are often oddly social events. The house in which someone has died suddenly becomes the hub of social activity, laughter, eating and drinking. Peter's widow found herself as a hostess to almost a dozen friends and family, gathering from all over the country, and who somehow had to be found beds in dusty corners of the house. Improvised catering had to be arranged, linen provided, drinks brought and downed.

There were some 20 people at the lunch which followed the funeral. The day had brightened and I wandered outside when I saw Father Maurus standing alone for a moment.

'Late have I loved Thee,' said Maurus, quoting the words of Saint Augustine, as he quietly told me of his visit of three days previously and how Peter returned to his faith only minutes before he lost consciousness forever.

I told him of my uneasy time having to remove a medallion from the corpse. 'It was something borrowed from a friend,' I said.

'A crucifix?'

'No, a piece of cloth,' I replied. 'Supposedly from the robe of Saint Bernadette.'

Father Maurus stumbled suddenly, reaching out to find support as the blood drained from his face. I was about to help to steady him but he was already recovered and laughing again.

'The entire abbey community has been praying for your brother to find his way back to his church,' he said and I nodded without speaking, knowing there was more.

'It needed to be a miracle. Which is why, for the past six weeks, all our prayers for him were made to Bernadette of Lourdes.'

Postscript

Twenty-five years after these events, Dom Maurus OSB became, as the Scots say, 'wandered'. Despite his age (95), he took regular, vigorous walks down the lanes and byways in the Pluscarden valley. And then two years ago, on a clear spring day, he went out for his constitutional and never returned. Despite extensive searches, his body has not been found.

Last hours

Alan McIntyre

2008

One downside of living on another continent from your parents is that you're sometimes asked to play the angel of death. When I got the opportunity to live and work in the US, I knew that part of the Faustian bargain was that one day I'd get a phone call. The call would tell me to get to the airport, get on the first plane back to Scotland and make my way to either a hospital bedside or a funeral home. Not so much prodigal son as harbinger of doom. My arrival signalling the beginning of a final act, or maybe just a walk-on part in the epilogue to a life.

The call came one Sunday morning in the summer of 2006. My older sister telling me that my 74-year-old father wasn't going to make it. He had collapsed with a chest infection a few days before and a respirator had been keeping him alive. Now the prognosis was that congestive heart failure was imminent and there was nothing that could be done. I'd delayed flying home as he'd come back from the brink multiple times before. He'd had diphtheria as a child and his parents were told that he wouldn't survive, so he was left alone in an isolation ward in Darnley Hospital for six weeks. He survived, but lost the hearing in his right ear.

In his late 40s, his blood pressure was off the scale and should have killed him, but instead it took his sight by rupturing the blood vessels in his eyes. Of the group that went on experimental blood pressure drugs with him in 1980, he was the last survivor by over a decade. Finally, in 2003, he was in the Western Infirmary in Glasgow with kidney failure, a perforated bowel and septicemia and we were told he wouldn't last the night. But he did, thanks to a high-risk dialysis treatment that was more likely to kill him than cure him. Thankfully, what didn't kill him did in fact make him stronger, and within a week he was sitting up in bed complaining about the food.

Unfortunately, this time there was to be no reprieve. That Sunday morning the intensive care consultant had wielded his euphemistic axe: 'It's time you let him go'. My mother was presented with a simple but awful choice. Assent to her husband having a managed and likely pain-free exit from this life or risk the traumatic and possibly distressing death that was at best a few days away. So now it was time for me to go home.

When I got to Glasgow the next morning my mother was calm. Calmer than you'd expect for someone with the certain knowledge that her partner of nearly 50 years was going to die that day with her consent. We did what we always did when I got off an overnight flight from the US. We sat and talked in the kitchen of the terraced house in Renfrew where I'd grown up as she made me Weetabix and a cup of real tea. As we waited for my sister to arrive, so that we could all head up to the Western

Infirmery together, my mum fussed around, keeping herself busy, steeling herself.

Before seeing my dad the doctor took us aside into the family room. They wanted to review the situation, confirm the prognosis and make sure we understood the sequence of events that would unfold over the next few hours. He told us they'd tried again to remove my dad's respirator during the night to see if he could make it on his own, but within minutes he was a fish out of water, gasping and drowning, putting more pressure on his already enlarged heart. So there would be no 11th hour commuting of the death sentence. My sister and I probed a little, looking for some glimmers of hope, some possible options that hadn't been explored, but he gently but firmly shut us down with the finality of 'I know it's hard to accept, but I'm afraid this is the end'.

Then he added something that redrew my carefully constructed picture of how the next few hours would play out. An expectation that had been shaped and solidified through quiet hours in the cab to the airport, waiting in the departure lounge at Newark and a sleepless flight to Glasgow. 'This situation is very unusual,' he began. 'Despite the seriousness of your father's condition he is fully conscious. He obviously can't talk because of the respirator, but he is awake and alert. However, we're not sure he recognises the seriousness of his condition.'

Seemingly, by this point, it's normal for the patient to need sedation, or for the body to have taken things into its own hands and walled off the outside world in preparation for the end. That was certainly what I had assumed and expected. However, occasionally, in rare cases like my dad's, the paths of the mind and the body can diverge. This wasn't going to be a deathbed vigil with the family surrounding an inanimate object waiting for a final denouement. This was going to be an engaged and intense process, a chance to say a final goodbye, a real-time fading out of an active and lively consciousness for the last time.

What do you say? How do you broach the subject? 'Dad, do you know this is the end?' 'Would you prefer a managed death or would you like to ride the rollercoaster to the end?' The doctor's advice was to say nothing, and we quickly agreed. Convincing ourselves it was the best for my dad, while also recognising it would be a lot easier for us. We would just spend time with him and then at some point during the day the staff would gradually turn up the sedation and we would 'let him go'.

While our desire to protect my dad and ourselves from the finality of the situation was well intentioned, it became apparent that he was actually very well informed and no deception was required. My protestations that I had just detoured from a business trip to London cut no ice. His eyes told me that I might as well have been wearing a black cloak with a scythe over my shoulder. But he played the game for a couple of hours, listening to our rambling monologues covering everything from the health of his grandchildren to the state of the Rangers team. He nodded in all the right places, occasionally a slight smile touching the corners of his lips that were visible beyond the mouthpiece of the respirator.

We didn't play the usual intensive care game of letting the bleeping, flashing, oscillating monitor beside his bed dictate the mood and determine our anxiety level. We hardly looked at it. Instead, we just focused on the right-angled triangle of four people around and in the bed who had been a family for close to 40 years.

It could have gone on like this for many more hours. None of us would willingly have been the instigator. As we floated into this no man's land between a life still being lived right in front of us and imminent death, my dad unexpectedly blessed us. He lifted a burden we'd have carried for the rest of our lives. He signalled to my mum with his right hand. A weak rotating gesture, not easy given the tubes in his hand and arm. 'What do you want?' my mum asked. 'Do you want the radio on?' This only elicited a more aggressive signalling and some obvious frustration at not being understood. 'Do you want turned over? I'll get the nurse.' Clearly exasperated – and with some difficulty – my dad lifted his hand clear of the bed, pointed at his chest and then drew his index finger slowly across his throat with an intent that was unambiguous.

We didn't acknowledge it directly. Instead, we grew quiet; the need for an upbeat commentary now gone. Not long after that, the process of dying officially began. As the nurse came in every so often to fuss around the bed, she would casually adjust the IV which was out of his field of vision. After a couple of these visits, he began to get noticeably drowsy. He obviously knew what was happening, but there was no struggle, no distress, no raging against the dying of the light. We took turns holding his hand and he shared an iPod with my mum; one small white earpiece each for one last shared experience after a lifetime of them. Now we did watch the monitors tick down like sand in an hourglass and waited for the nurse to confirm he was officially gone. There was no defining moment, no death rattle, no urgent beeping and flashing lights, just flat green lines and zeros.

He died in the early afternoon as he would have chosen to live much of his life; listening to Glenn Miller and holding my mum's hand. We let the nurses clean him up while we had the obligatory cup of tea in the family room. I was the only one that went back in to see him. It was the right decision. When we left him he was at peace, visibly my dad, the only evidence of death rather than sleep the stillness of the room and the silence of the machines. When I saw him later, unplugged and laid out, it only confirmed what I had always believed about death. At some point Elvis truly does leave the building. His body was there but my dad was gone.

When we got back to Renfrew, my sister and I started the calls. The seemingly endless reeling of the final days and hours. 'Bill... Betty... Agnes... Tom. I've got some bad news.' In hindsight, I can see it as the beginning of the process that would help put structure and narrative to both his death and the life that had preceded it. The bottomless cups of tea, the living room full of people, a rolling cast of characters from my childhood, others just names up until this point. They comforted my mum and paid their respects. The chronology of each conversation worked backwards from the events

of the last couple of days to earlier better times. Reminiscences from months before or decades before, depending on the vintage of the friendship. Tears but also the humour he'd have wanted. 'He'll be happy it wasn't the Dunhills or the Bacardi that got him in the end.'

He deserved and he got a good send off. A church funeral, a big turnout and a good spread afterwards. He was quite literally a dying breed. His parents had a pew in Renfrew Old Parish Church, he was baptised there, was a Sunday school teacher and Boys Brigade officer, his kids and one grandchild had been baptised there and my sister married. When he died, he'd been an elder for close to 20 years. Only my mother had broken the cycle, taking him off to the wilds of Clydebank on his wedding day. I stood beside the coffin and gave him the best tribute I could. A brave life summed up in about 10 minutes. A eulogy I'd guiltily started sketching out somewhere over the North Atlantic six days before as he lay that night – his last night – in the Western, with who knows what going through his head.

Finally, there was the scattering of the ashes. This was where specificity and forward planning became a problem. My dad had been very clear about his wishes. He wanted his ashes scattered on the West Sands in Millport. His grandmother had a house there and it featured prominently in his happiest childhood memories and remained one of his favourite places. When he was alive, we didn't pay much attention to this particular request. But it didn't take us long to figure out that as a municipal beach with dog walkers, sandcastle builders and – Scottish weather permitting – the occasional sunbather, it wouldn't be as straightforward as he had intended.

A quick call to the council confirmed that you couldn't just go scattering remains on a public beach, no matter how specific the deceased had been. So we compromised and honoured the spirit if not the letter of his wishes. On a beautiful summer's night two days after the funeral, we chartered a small motor boat from Inverkip Marina. We sailed down the coast past Skelmorlie and Wemyss Bay, recognising familiar landmarks from countless Sunday trips to Largs to play putting and eat ice cream at Nardinis. Our captain took us right into Millport Bay and cut the engine a couple of hundred yards off the West Sands. 'You're lucky,' he said. 'The tide's going in. He'll be on the beach in an hour or so.'

With the formalities complete, my Faustian bargain then had another payment due. Eight days after I arrived in Scotland, I got back on a plane to Newark, New Jersey. Back to my heavily pregnant wife and three young children. Back to a life where, unlike my mum and sister, I don't need to look at the empty chair every day.

Among the VIPs in the House of Tongue

Ian Mackay

2009

I am enjoying *Islay McLeod's Scotland* and found her photo features on the north coast brought back memories of my time working as a ghillie at the House of Tongue in student summer holidays for three years in the late 1960s.

The house was let each August to the Longman family (of publishing fame) who invited some of their more successful clients and friends. I was ghillie, relief gardener, handyman, dishwasher, shopper, etc and generally on hand to ensure everyone enjoyed their holiday. There are several occasions I remember in particular:

Taking Ludovic Kennedy out for five hours' loch fishing when we covered so many topics including his career, the state and future of the Highlands and politics generally. He talked about his switch from the Liberals to SNP which I had not been aware of but in Tongue I did not have access to radio or television and rarely saw a newspaper (they did not arrive there until 5.30pm). A couple of months later, back in Edinburgh, I heard him give a speech in which he announced his switch and it was headline news the next day. I had had an exclusive two months earlier and did not realise it.

His wife, Moira Shearer, was there also, with their children. She had given up her highly successful ballet career to look after the family. She was about 40 when I met her and even to someone still in his teens she was stunning with her red hair, wonderful figure and friendly personality. For grouse shooting we used two pointer dogs, one of which roamed the hill picking up grouse scent while I held the other on a lead to give it a rest. In addition to dealing with the dogs, I carried the game bag and any jackets if it was hot. Moira was the only guest ever to offer to take the dogs. When I had two strong dogs on a Y-shaped lead, life was fine if they pulled in opposite directions, but if they set off with a common aim across the old peat bogs, mud up to the knees was often the result for the poor dog handler. She was determined to take the dogs despite my warnings and off she went leaping over any obstacles with such poise.

Taking William Douglas Home, brother of Sir Alec and a successful playwright at the time, fishing and him not catching anything for hours. That evening one of his plays was opening in the West End and he was naturally anxious. To keep his spirits up he burst into song, at the top of his voice, singing *When I'm 64*.

Shooting with Richard Beaumont, chairman of Purdey guns, who had great tales of having to go with an engineer to fix guns for some of their more influential clients such as various Russian leaders and Franco.

The Longmans used Sir Gordon Richards to train their horses and he used to phone any time one of their horses ran, to explain why it had lost and how it would do better

next time. He usually called when the family was out and my girlfriend (long since my wife), who had a summer job as a housemaid, usually took his calls and passed on all his excuses to the family.

Going to the local shop for groceries and having to wait from 11.00 to 11.15am while all the staff had their tea break.

Being quizzed by the shop owner on what brands of luxury foods they had brought from Harrods. Within days, he would have them on his shelves, they would spot them and decide that next time they could get them in Tongue. My reward was a Mars Bar.

Taking the mail to the Post Office in the morning to catch the mail bus and being given the job of franking them while the postmistress read the post cards.

Seeing the best display of the northern lights imaginable.

Being probably the only Mackay to celebrate his 21st birthday in the clan seat since it was sold to the Sutherlands in 1829. As one day seemed to roll into the next, I had forgotten about my birthday until the post brought my cards at 5.30pm.

Jack Profumo and family were regular guests at the House of Tongue in the early 1960s and when the affair with Christine Keeler hit the headlines they sought refuge there. As they were very well liked in the area, the locals discouraged the press pack as much as they could, mainly by not offering accommodation and by leading them on wild goose chases. A few nights sleeping in their cars, no sightings and no stories and most of them departed. My first year there was roughly when his brother-in-law bought an estate in east Sutherland and for years after the family holidayed there, making regular visits to Dornoch Cathedral. He was in the congregation when my daughter was christened in 1975.

But it was not all idyllic. One of my phobias is handling a bird, alive or dead, so catching and dealing with an injured grouse was an ordeal and cleaning them was even worse but fortunately after the first day of the season I could cope. I once spoke to a careers advisor about how I could get into land management so I could live in somewhere like Tongue (is there anywhere like Tongue?) but without an agricultural background I had to forget it. So Tongue became a host of great experiences and Dornoch is not that far away from it.

Wee, the people

Jack McLean

2009

When a young friend of mine, a god-daughter called Chiarra (I have 17 god-children because there is a tradition in the west of Scotland that godfathers should be bachelors: I think this stems from the, certainly in my case, mistaken belief that bachelors are richer than married chaps), informed me that a teacher of hers had told her about a phenomenon called 'a Napoleon Complex', she then asked me if I had this dreadful burden. I told her that I thought I had a lot of complexes but I have not so far worn a cocked hat sideways or in a regular fashion put my hand up my jacket in time-honoured I-am-a-loony style Napoleon. 'I don't mean that,' said the chit, exasperated, 'I mean a Napoleon Complex because you're small'. I demurred at this. 'Small? Small? What do you mean small? Anyway,' I said, 'Napoleon wasn't small. He was five-foot six, about the normal height for a Corsican of his time'.

It took a bit more, well, time to explain that Napoleon was from Corsica and was also French because Corsica was then – well it took a bit more time than Chiarra was prepared to put up with so I asked her why she wanted to know and got the chilling reply that when she was older she might not want to marry a small man in case he had this dreaded Napoleon Complex. There is a lot of time in the above sentence because it takes time to understand what I am talking about.

I once worked with a man called William Hunter. We shared a Friday column; well he did one at the bottom of the page and I wrote one at the side of it. I rather liked Willie, though he didn't like me much. Strangely he was often called, by the young ladies who were our secretaries, 'Wee Willie'. Willie Hunter was at least five foot 10. Nobody, not even the secretaries myself and Willie Hunter shared, ever called me Wee Jack.

But permit me this observation. If my god-daughter Chiarra noted that I am not very tall, why did the secretaries of whom I speak not notice this when they said that Willie was wee? And here I have to tell you what height I am. I am five foot five inches tall. From start to finish. I am, I suppose, a small chap. Until Chiarra asked me this nonsense about a Napoleon Complex, I never thought I was small at all. I thought I was about the same size as a Glaswegian. A wee one though. Normal.

Well it is up to you really. Am I small man? As you can't see me on this I don't suppose that this question makes much sense. But I want to ask those of you who may well have read the drivel I have written over a good many years and I ask of you who are only reading this now, do I sound like a small man and anyway does that count at all?

Well I think it does and it doesn't.

Probably the reason why nobody, except my god-daughter who noticed this

circumstance, has commented on my lack of height is that I am perhaps a little odd for a short sort of fellow. For a start, I am rather powerfully-built, broad in the shoulders. I am uncharacteristically, for a small man, long-legged. I have a large head but small features. I even have slim hips and small, though I think quite sensible, buttocks. I take a size five in shoes and my hat size is an astounding seven and three quarters. I need a 17-inch shirt collar. In short – that's good that – I look like a big man who is small.

In fact – if this is a fact and it may be in a way that I am not sure about – when Chiarra asked me about my stature as a physical thing I had never thought about whether I was big or small. It never occurred to me what size I was. I always thought that I was the same as everybody else when it came to physical size. I mostly thought I was bigger than everybody else when it came to intellect. That's when I thought, at last, that perhaps Chiarra had a point: am I making myself think I'm bigger than I am, am I sporting the Napoleonic hat sideways and adopting the gesture of Bonaparte. Am I... is there a vestige of the Napoleon Complex? Suddenly it occurred to me. Am I wee? Has it made a difference to my life, being wee?

I can't think that it has because until my god-daughter brought it up I always thought of myself as sort of average. Until Chiarra said it, I never thought I was, as she obviously considered me, a dwarf. Well that's the way, the sort of way she said it when she said I was small. She didn't quite say 'tiny', but that word was implied. It made me feel as though I should be sitting at the bottom of a garden wearing a wee red hat and holding a fishing rod, a sort of nice gnome or perhaps a friendly bloody hobbit.

So I told her about the undersized little men who fought in the Great War and were called the Bantam Regiments, and why they were undersized: because they were undernourished and the late 19th century had made them so out of poverty, and I told her that though antiquity made much of giants like Achilles and so on, the real world was made out of giants who had big hearts and not bodies, and that my mum and dad were even smaller than me, and that Celts were small because they put all of their efforts into having bigger brains, and when I finished, I asked her why she thought I was small anyway and she said: 'Well, I'm only 14 and I'm the same height as you'. I put on my cocked hat sideways and told her straight 'You might get taller than me,' I said, 'But you'll never get to have a symphony in your honour. *Eroica*, Chiarra,' I said with triumph in my voice. 'The sound for heroes'.

One man's demons

Walter Humes

2009

The late Dame Thora Hird, who continued working as an actress to a ripe old age, used to say: 'It's not being old that stops you doing things, rather it's not doing things that makes you old'. I was reminded of this maxim as I attended the funeral of a friend and former colleague this week.

As a young man, John had led a very active and adventurous life. He was a keen sailor and served in the navy for a number of years, travelling all over the world. At the funeral, some of his youthful exploits while at sea and onshore were recalled with affection, including his tendency to disregard the rules on occasion. When he returned to civilian life, he trained as a youth worker and developed a lifelong commitment to ensuring that youngsters, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, had every opportunity to do something useful with their lives. He later moved into higher education, helping to train the next generation of youth and community workers. He was a lively lecturer, full of fun and extremely popular with students, many of whom kept in touch after qualifying.

As the end of working life approached, the prospect of retirement did not appeal to John. His marriage had ended and he knew he would miss the demands of work, the daily exchanges and even the irritations that accompany any job. His earlier exploits meant that he had no desire to travel the world again. His one extravagance was a powerful car which he drove at reckless speed. He once scared the wits out of me by insisting on taking me for a spin in the latest model, reaching 100 mph within an alarmingly short time. As I pointed out later, it was just as well we were having lunch after the drive rather than before, otherwise I might have made a mess of the smart leather interior.

John aged quickly after retirement. He did not enjoy good health and after a bad fall his mobility was greatly reduced. Not surprisingly, he became a bit depressed. He also lost his faith. One day while reading the lesson in church, he suddenly thought: 'I don't believe this any more'. He wrote to the minister explaining what had happened. That same minister at his funeral said that they had remained good friends and whenever he visited John he was treated as hospitably as ever. In a very touching moment at the end of the service, the minister said that we had rightly been celebrating all the positive aspects of John's colourful personality – his warmth, his humour, his generosity – but that he also had a darker side. The sad thing was that he had found it difficult to talk about the demons that haunted him. In common with many people who provide support and inspiration to others, when it came to expressing his own needs he was at a loss how to proceed.

As I drove home, I reflected again on Dame Thora's words. One can see the common sense in them but the brisk philosophy which they express may not connect with everyone's personal journey. In his final years, John lost his appetite for life, partly because his capacity to 'do things' was impaired. But as the many people who attended his funeral would testify, what really mattered were those earlier years, filled with energy, commitment and good cheer: these were the qualities that lifted the spirits of those who were fortunate enough to know him.

Daydreams

Francis O Young

2010

A recent television documentary showed the graduating class at an American high school. There were two co-valedictorians, a white girl and a black boy. The girl gave her speech, delineating the dreams she had for the future. The boy, who had been extremely reluctant to attend the event at all, was ultimately persuaded to come by a teacher with whom he had some rapport. He stepped up to the microphone and said: 'I don't have a dream,' and described his absence of expectations or hopes. That to me is real deprivation.

In the early 1930s, I was going to elementary school in Clydebank. The silent, unfinished and rusting hulk of the 534 (subsequently to become the Queen Mary) seemed to dominate the sky above the school. The shipyards were idle as was almost the entire population. Preparing for a depression-immune job was the preoccupation of most of my classmates. One idea was to be a bookie: people would find money to play the horses or the dogs no matter what. Everyone in Clydebank seemed to be breeding greyhounds. The richest boy in the class was the son of a bookie. At Christmas he gave everyone in the class a crocodile-like wallet, an advertisement for the 'Turf Agent'.

One boy's enthusiastic suggestion was to be a barber. Hair would grow, no matter what. The aspiring barber eventually became the manager of a grocery. People eat too, no matter what. My father did not work in the shipyards but had steady work baking bread, working nightshift, and earning four pounds a week. We counted every farthing. I remember the prices. Ground beef was four pence a pound, as was sliced sausage. I remember when a loaf of bread went from thrupence three farthings to four pence farthing. I was probably more materially deprived than the black valedictorian, but I never felt deprived. I had dreams.

My mother occasionally took me to a movie theatre, usually the Bank Cinema or the Empire, and later the Paramount. I saw a movie *The Red Sheik of Araby*. At my request for a red cloak, my mother dyed a square of muslin red and I was the Red Sheik. My father told me stories of T E Lawrence and I dreamed of leading Arab armies, on horseback, through the Arabian desert. An upturned table with a sheet draped over the legs became my Bedouin tent.

There were movies about pirates of the Barbary Coast. I don't remember who was the Johnny Depp of the 1930s – Errol Flynn perhaps? The upturned table became my square rigged ship, the sheet my sails. 'Stand by to repel boarders!'

In 1935, I started science classes at school. My mother said she visualised me as a mad scientist living in a castle on a hill. We must have seen a *Frankenstein* movie. I daydreamed a lot.

My schoolteachers ranged widely in their motivational abilities. Some initiated extracurricular activities such as a science club, magazine projects, track and field events or summer camping trips. Others seemed discouraged, but they too contributed to our education, their scepticism teaching us to question: 'Is everything what it seems?' School-teaching was a leading available choice.

I liked music. I listened enraptured to Enrico Caruso on the gramophone. I listened to the Quintet of the Hot Club of Paris on the wireless. I thought Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli were the greatest. One of my uncles (disabled by chronic osteomyelitis and unable to work) could easily play anything on any instrument. I did not inherit that gene. After two years of violin lessons, I found I had to practise every day just to avoid getting any worse than I already was. I was clearly not going to be a musician.

The legendary violinists like Millstein, Mischa Elman, Heifetz or Oistrakh did not even seem to realise that what they were doing was difficult. They lived in a different universe. Of course, they played on Stradivarius instruments worth millions. My violin cost a pound. I did not delude myself into thinking I could be as good as they were if only I had a Strad. Itzhak Perlman knows that what he does is difficult and I appreciate his playing the more for it.

My athletic talents were strictly limited. I could run 100 yards very fast but that was it. I could have been a wide receiver but I didn't live in America and soccer does not have wide receivers.

The Queen Mary was eventually completed and I absented myself from school without official leave to watch from Blythswood Meadow as it moved down the Clyde on 24 March 1936. No vessel so large had ever gone down the Clyde before. *National Geographic* magazine had an aerial photograph of the event, including the onlookers at Blythswood. Mud banks had been dredged but it was still dicey. The ship went aground twice. Next day at school, I was chastised for my absence. On the maiden voyage one of my classmates stowed away.

I easily learned the physics and maths of ballistics and I thought of using my skills in the military. In Bellahouston in 1938 the Empire Exhibition was inspiring: the flags, the fountains, the music, the tower. The former stowaway was arrested for climbing the tower. I made a linocut drawing of the tower for the cover of the school magazine. I saw a Spitfire and thought that looked promising. I was intrigued by the ship models at Kelvingrove. 1938 was a very good year.

When the Luftwaffe attacked Clydebank on 13 March 1941, a stick of high-explosive bombs straddled our house, blowing it up. My mother had herded my sister and me into the Anderson shelter at the foot of the garden. The local first aid post took a direct hit, killing the nurse who was a neighbour. One of the bombs made a crater between the wickets of the university cricket ground behind our house, the best tended grass patch in the west of Scotland. When dawn broke, my mother lined up my sister and me on the

sidewalk in front of our ruined house so my father could see that we had survived as he walked back home from his night shift at the bakery. My sister still has nightmares of Hitler pursuing her. Two days later, the looters appeared and stripped the ruins clean of everything salvageable.

We had to leave the Clydebank area temporarily and I completed high school in Motherwell where the teachers were outstanding. My maths teacher told me my options were open – the choice was mine to make. It was he who introduced me to Sylvanus P Thompson's book on calculus which was clearer to me than anything else I had ever read. The headmaster told me I should seriously consider medical school, but I knew I couldn't afford it. Still I had enjoyed the stories of *Rab and his Friends* which I read at school.

The naval architecture department at the university seemed the crème de la crème. One of my uncles was a naval architect at Yarrow's and later at the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Another uncle had been a first engineer in the Merchant Navy. They were the most prosperous members of my family. I don't know if they were the happiest. Perhaps the musician was, if one can judge by the joy of his music. Complications of the osteomyelitis eventually killed him. A grandfather had been a demolition expert and taught me how to demolish but I saw no future in that. Building seemed more forward-looking than demolishing. The Queen Mary was by now a troopship.

I unexpectedly won a competitive Hutcheson Trust scholarship to university which would support five years of study. Just before Pearl Harbour I applied for admission to medical school and was enrolled the following year. I had a part-time job at the public library that paid 30 shillings a week plus all the books I could read. I read how to make a small wooden boat. I learned how the hydraulic servo steering mechanism works on a diesel bus. From *The Collected Papers of Wilfred Trotter, FRS, FRCS* I learned how a scientist thinks.

At medical school, I was immediately inspired. The most wonderful outcome I ever saw was when an attending surgeon, Mr Schoolar-Buchanan, showed us a patient who had operated a paper-cutting guillotine and who had accidentally severed his right thumb. Reattachment was not an available option in 1942. It was explained that loss of a thumb is equivalent to a 50% loss of hand function. The prospect of living a life but being deprived of the ability to earn a livelihood seemed to me worse than death. Restorative surgery involved a multistage reconstruction with formation of a tubular pedicle skin graft, transfer of attachment blood supply and insertion of a rib bone graft. The ultimate result was a functioning opposable thumb though lacking a nail and interphalangeal joint. Spectacular. Reconstructive surgery seemed the best job on earth but I could see no open pathway to becoming a reconstructive surgeon in wartime Scotland.

Then I found neurology wonderful too. A patient – a housewife – was presented who complained of loss of sensation in all her fingers. A prize was offered for the student who gave the best analysis of the problem. I was motivated to win it. I knew that a doctor has

to explain all of a patient's symptoms with a single diagnosis if possible so I demonstrated that there was no known physical neurologic entity which could fit and that therefore the problem was hysteria, as had been reported by Freud. I won the prize for my analysis of the case but the professor told me nevertheless that my diagnosis was wrong. I had failed to ask what the patient had done before she became a housewife – a mistake I never made again. She had in fact been a trapeze artist and it was asserted that she had suffered multiple traumatic injuries to her digital nerves. Carpal tunnel syndrome was unknown at the time but I now know that that was the real diagnosis.

Another influence was John Glaister Jr, professor of forensic medicine and medical jurisprudence, who had previously been a forensic pathologist in Egypt and who vividly described his experiences there.

Diagnostic medicine fascinated me; I loved the challenge of solving problems but pre-antibiotic medicine too often lacked the resources to intervene successfully. Then I saw the first patient ever to recover from subacute bacterial endocarditis at the Western Infirmary, Glasgow. He was my former science teacher. Limited amounts of penicillin were becoming available and he was treated with what were then massive doses, 100 units at a time, now considered minuscule. Although penicillin had been discovered by Dr Alexander Fleming, a Scottish bacteriologist, only America had the resources to manufacture and use it. The penicillin available to us had to be recovered from the urine of American soldiers who were on treatment.

I kept finding myself more attracted to the scientific basis of medical practice and after medical school I went south to London in 1949, where I was eventually recruited by the Foreign Office to join a medical team in Arab Africa under a United Nations mandate as the pathologist. My assigned region stretched from El Aghela on the Gulf of Sidra in the west to Tobruk and the Egyptian border 350 miles to the east, and inland as far as Chad and I was able to pursue scientific medicine within those confines.

My work included medical forensic science so I came into frequent contact with the police and legal authorities. The crimes I encountered were of the usual varieties – assault, murder, bullet wounds, poisoning, sex crimes, robberies – but the spectrum of poisons used differed from experience in the West, more exotic, and the ingenuity of the sex crimes is better left without elaboration.

I found Glaister's writings a great help. Ten years earlier I had applied for permission to take a law degree concurrently with medical school but had been refused on the supposed grounds that I didn't know enough Latin, without having been tested; I did not have an engraved embossed Latin diploma although I knew more Latin than many (most?) attorneys do. My first experience of a courtroom had been in 1942 when a law student had invited me as a spectator to a session of the High Court. The case was of alleged political graft and corruption but the prosecution's case was so poorly prepared and presented that the defence counsel demolished it in one sentence. The accusation may well have been valid but was dismissed on a technicality. Made me wonder!

I have given medical forensic evidence many times and have frequently been satisfied when my evidence was taken seriously and contributed to a just outcome. Juries always received my evidence respectfully but too often I have known of judges and juries ignoring evidence, facts and the law with disappointing results. Frequently, I have been amazed that submitted evidence was of such poor quality, or even transparently fabricated. I believe, however, that incompetence greatly exceeds malfeasance.

A friend in North Africa who was a captain of police suggested that my wife and I assist in exercising the police horses on weekends so we got to go horse riding on the desert arrayed in pith helmets and jodhpurs: we eschewed Arab robes and headdress in deference to our hosts who might not have had such sanguine memories of T E Lawrence. I enjoyed the waning days of Empire.

In 1961, I became the director of a laboratory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the following year my wife and I bought a European-style house with a stone tower and walled flagstone terraces on a hill outside Boston. After buying it, we found out that it was known to the locals as 'The Castle'. After some years, I began to miss the Mediterranean climate and I did not particularly care for the politicised pursuit of power in Cambridge. I had the great good fortune to be invited by a physician who had achieved renown for his contribution to scientific medicine to join him in Miami, Florida.

Soon after arriving in Miami, I acquired a 41-foot boat so I became the captain of my own vessel on Biscayne Bay. Not quite the Spanish Main but close enough. I seemed to be touching all the bases, except perhaps for 'mad' – or maybe I should let you be the judge of that.

The next act? I don't know. I didn't get to fly a Spitfire yet. I hear there is still one around somewhere. Well, perhaps on flight simulator? That reminds me: there's still a computer programme I need to write. I don't remember seeing any movies about computers in the '30s.

My brother Kenny

Lorn Macintyre

2011

Lorn Macintyre's 'Funky Facebook History of the Macintyre Family', inspired by his three short stories collections, 'Tobermory Days,' 'Tobermory Tales' and 'Maclay Days,' is attracting admirers on Facebook. Here he offers Scottish Review readers a preview of his Facebook posting relating to the activities of his late legendary brother Kenny, BBC Scotland's political and industrial correspondent.

Dramatis personae:

The Banker: Angus Macintyre, patriarch of the family, 'a cultured man of wit and wisdom for whom the working of an electric kettle was as mysterious as the Hedron Collider'.

The Banker's Wife: Betty, matriarch, 'a beautiful elegant woman who reared four sons who, like their male parent, were not of much assistance to her on the domestic scene'.

The Author: Lorn.

The Political Correspondent: Kenny.

Sister Mary: The Author's wife, 'educated by nuns, re-educated by Kenny in the use of expressive language'.

The Political (and Industrial) Correspondent went out jogging round a Glasgow reservoir on Sunday 30 May 1999. When the Author visited him that evening, he was lying on a mortuary slab in the Western Infirmary. He was 54.

Every major media outlet on both sides of the border carried an obituary. Tony Blair, then prime minister, said: 'Kenny was more than a journalist, he was an institution'. When Mrs Thatcher was visiting Inverness, her press secretary was adamant: no interviews. But as she progressed in stately fashion along a corridor the Political Correspondent, with the timing of Groucho Marx, emerged from a cupboard, microphone in hand. 'Ah, Kenny!' the Prime Minister greeted him, and gave him his interview.

The Author has been in the Political Correspondent's car of an evening in a layby when he had a mobile phone clamped to each ear, talking simultaneously to a Prime Minister and a Secretary of State for Scotland. The Author was ordered to take a stroll, since he had no business eavesdropping on affairs of state.

The Political Correspondent was a very fast and impatient driver. Detained on Loch Lomondside by a traffic jam and, as always, late for the Mull ferry, he drove up among the trees, but as he descended from this sylvan detour a policeman was waiting to book him. The Political Correspondent's car was really a skip on wheels, its floor inches deep in dud betting slips, discarded press releases and newspapers.

Once Sister Mary was in the car with him when he was forced to brake at a zebra crossing to spare the lives of a family of four. The garbage in the car slithered forward with the sound of an avalanche and a mobile phone came to rest against the Political Correspondent's shoe. 'Ah, that's where it was!' he exclaimed.

When the Political Correspondent was a record-breaking athletic youth on Mull, Dr Flora Macdonald of Salen warned the Banker that his third son had an enlarged heart. It was a metaphor as well as a medical diagnosis. The Political Correspondent cared nothing for fame, fortune or honours. Very often he had holes in the soles of his shoes and his suits would have been rejected by a charity shop.

For purposes of sociological study, the Author used to accompany the Political Correspondent to Shawfield and various flapping tracks because the Political Correspondent was devoted to greyhounds. On one occasion, the Author witnessed the Political Correspondent distributing his winnings to the homeless lying on the warm-air grilles outside Central Station.

When a letter arrived, informing the Political Correspondent that he was being awarded an OBE for services to political journalism, he tossed it into the wastepaper basket with an expletive relating to a certain bodily function.

Not only did the Political Correspondent keep to himself some of the hottest political stories of his time until the morn arrived to break them to the nation; he was friends with politicians and supported them in their personal problems. The Author recalls walking up Byres Road to the BBC in Glasgow with the Political Correspondent, the only occasion on which he divulged his dealings.

'There's a big story in the tabloids tomorrow,' he announced. A prominent Scottish politician was facing exposure for an indiscretion.

The Political Correspondent was summoned to the politician's house and was asked by the distraught wife: 'Can he survive, Kenny?' The Author had to wait for the answer because the Political Correspondent had stopped at a flower stall to buy a red rose for a female broadcasting colleague he had been annoying. 'I phoned Downing Street and was told, no, he can't.' The Political Correspondent stayed at the fallen politician's house after that fatal call, to offer his support on a personal level.

The Political Correspondent could never have retired. Some prominent people survive on alcohol and cocaine; his stimulant was adrenalin, supplemented, like his close friend Donald Dewar, with junk food, despite the culinary skills and care of his wife Elizabeth. The Political Correspondent would have made an intolerable pensioner.

His grave is in the peaceful cemetery in Taynuilt, where he was born, under the shadow of Ben Cruachan. His sons put a mobile phone into his coffin, but Downing Street has been spared a ghostly persistent ring-tone. Nearby are the graves of the Banker and the Banker's Wife. All are tended with love by the Family, and Sister Mary is constantly lighting candles for the repose of their souls, and in gratitude for having survived numerous excursions in the Political Correspondent's car.

A modern Scottish man: Part I

Gerry Hassan

2011

I am a Scottish man and I think we have a problem. There is the familiar story of Scots men behaving badly – drinking, being violent, committing crime, harming others and themselves. We have the worst health and life expectancy for men in Western Europe, and shameful suicide rates for men.

Then there is the stereotyping of Scottish men – with clichés about 'the West of Scotland man' and the caricaturing of some of our poorest communities by middle-class professionals talking about 'Shettleston man'.

Even more serious than this is the fact that Scottish men don't write or think about themselves as men. This is one of the central paradoxes of modern Scotland. Scottish men are everywhere – in public, in life – making noise, dominating people and places – and yet are silent about what it means to be a man.

How we encourage men to begin a national debate requires starting with basics and a different route. It requires public personal reflection. Why then am I the kind of man who thinks Scottish men have problems and need to address them as men?

I grew up in Dundee. My parents, Edwin and Jean, married relatively late for their generation at 29, and I came into the world as their only child when they both turned 31. I had a happy, positive childhood filled with hope and warmth. My parents were loving, supportive and there for me. My home was filled with friends and neighbours, animated conversation, and in a way I recognised was different from all my school friends – filled with books – mostly Book Club novels and reference books.

I grew up in Ardler, on the north-west outskirts of Dundee, in what had once been a private golf course, where the council built six large multi-storey blocks surrounded by acres of green space. Each was named after a golf course – and we lived on the 13th floor of the second row – at 13A Edzell Court.

It was, in the 1970s, a peaceful, safe place for a child to grow up with a tangible sense of people looking after each other. Once Kenneth Williams appeared on *Parkinson* in about 1975 and commented on 'the isolation and remoteness of living in tower blocks'. That was enough for my mother to fire off a letter to him pointing out the example of Ardler. And getting a reply. That was typical of my mum.

Eddie and Jean were self-educated working people. My father and mother had both left school at 14 and he had read all three volumes of Marx's *Capital* at 16 in the local library. My mum read all the time – Orwell, Greene, Kafka and much more.

My father worked in NCR, a huge local employer along with Timex, where he was a shop steward and Communist, believing in the Soviet dream. He was a little too much of

an iconoclast, loner and dreamer to somehow be a complete believer in everything Soviet. He had a very unserious side to him, and liked to crack 'weak' jokes and make Eric Morecambe impersonations with his specs.

My mother was a do-er. Working in the local chemist shop, she had declined training as a pharmacist when I came along. She ran the local community newspaper, *Ardler News*, where, under an alias, I wrote the bi-monthly pop and rock column – my first experience of public writing. She organised rent strikes against the Heath Government and campaigned for a new secondary school – Ardler High – whose cancellation in the mid-1970s was one of the first major signs of economic troubles ahead.

My father, like many of his generation, didn't get feminism. My mum had a copy of Helen Reddy's *Greatest Hits* on cassette, and my dad actually regarded her *I Am Woman* as a personal threat and attack on him. Sitting in our living room in a 1970s fashionable brown leather swivel chair, hearing the words, 'I am strong, I am invisible, I am woman' on my parents' all-singing all-dancing Sharp music centre, was enough for my dad to feel deeply uneasy and make some dismissive comment. He couldn't stand the sentiment in the lyrics.

His constant lament to my mother was, 'Why do women want a separate revolution? Why can't they be part of the general revolution?' It wasn't the sort of question I imagine asked in that many Dundee homes. And I am sure that my dad wasn't really looking for an answer.

For years, because my father talked 'big' politics, I thought he was the political one of my parents. It took me until my early 20s to realise that my dad was an armchair activist who didn't do very much, whereas my mum as a community activist was the 'real' political one. My dad did like sounding off at points. When my parents went out to friends, my mum would try to keep the conversation away from politics. My recollection is that she would usually manage to do this most of the evening – until the last minute.

I can remember one evening in the mid-70s, when my parents were seeing my mum's friend, Dot. She was a bit of a snob, a Tory and fancied herself because she lived in a Scottish Special Housing Association cottage, so she didn't completely get on with my dad. The evening went fine until near the end. Dot commented that 'the country was going to the dogs under the socialists'. This impelled my dad to launch his thesis that 'we have never had a socialist government. That's the problem,' and all hell broke loose. My parents left, my mum got cross with my dad, and the night was ruined. I now think, looking back, that this self-indulgent behaviour gave my father some enjoyment.

My childhood was characterised by a constant stream of people coming to our home, while I, unlike my friends, could retreat to the sanctuary and quiet of my bedroom, which I didn't have to share with brothers and sisters. It was filled with books, a decent desk to work at, and lots of maps and charts on the walls. At the age of 11, I got an old black and white TV before portables became the norm. Many an evening I spent in my bedroom, head in a book, listening to music or playing myself at Subbuteo and practising to perfection my flick to kick.

There was something in the ether in the late 1970s that the world was changing. My parents' sole advice career-wise to me was to 'not go into a factory' like my dad. Then there was a sense that what it meant to be a man was changing too. People talked on TV about gay liberation and sexuality. There was the sensation one Sunday night of Quentin Crisp's *Naked Civil Servant* being broadcast. This met with my mother's approval. My father enjoyed the film, but was uneasy about the whole subject of gay sexuality.

Then there was the argument that men should be sensitive, talk about their feelings and be more open to their feminine side. As a child, I understood this via the appeal of Woody Allen films such as *Play It Again, Sam* and *Annie Hall*. Woody was a bit strange, clearly neurotic, and yet with all his hang-ups he nearly always got a gal, although he sometimes lost her.

Being an only child, I had the time and space to think and ruminate about all this. And then my world and my parents began to change in ways none of us had foreseen.

A modern Scottish man: Part II

Gerry Hassan

2011

My father took voluntary redundancy from NCR in 1978. He was, for a period of six months, unemployed and went on a government training centre course. This involved him fine-tuning his arithmetic and maths skills to a level I was well past, so I was able to assist my dad's tutoring.

I felt ashamed that my dad was unemployed. We lived in a working-class neighbourhood filled with bank managers, teachers, and people running small firms. I had only known one unemployed person – a friend's dad – who had to get a job as a bin man. I distinctly remember to my shame that I and some of my pals made fun of our friend and his dad.

I didn't tell a single person about my dad's unemployment. It was the first time I ever noticed my parents consciously being careful about money. When I talked to my careers adviser about my O grades, I recall him saying, 'If you study hard, you can do as well as your dad and get a job like he has building computers'. I stood there at the time thinking that it wasn't a great job in the first place, and now he doesn't even have that.

After six months – a very long six months – my dad got another job working with Tayside Police as a traffic warden. This was a momentous change because my father hated everything about the job – the public persona, working with the police with their overtime scams. This was far removed from 'workers of the world unite'. His only enjoyment was letting off students and people who looked poor, and on one occasion booking the chief executives of Dundee and Tayside councils at the same time. This was how he continued the class war.

This changed something in my dad. It hurt his pride and sense of himself. And I suspect it undermined my mum's view of him in some respects. Two years later, my parents split up when my mother left my father for Frank, a more traditional, machismo man, who lived one floor above us. He was everything my father wasn't, a qualified electrician and very practical around the house.

My father was just about to turn 47 when this happened – the age I am now – and it was a turning point. He never fully recovered from it. Even though he went through the motions, he never saw life in the same way, and died aged 60 still heartbroken.

Their split changed everything. Until then, I had felt protected in the warmth of my parents' love and home. I thought I knew my parents. Then it turned out I didn't as they both changed into something else. This gave me a huge insight into the fragility of the human condition. What is the true sense of 'the self' if people can change so quickly? Or act in ways which ultimately turn out to be self-destructive?

My father was unable to keep his life on the rails and had a long period off on the sick with depression, while he was unable to run his life – financially or in any sense. I ended up as a 16-year-old child, still at school, running the house, paying all the bills and doing the shopping.

My mum's story wasn't simple either. At first she and Frank worked out; they clearly loved each other and Frank was Mr Practical, a contrast my mum enjoyed. But he seemed to my mum at times controlling and angry at the world. After my father died, 13 years after their separation, my mother began to remember the Eddie she had loved. All of this became more poignant because my mum in some way blamed herself for his premature death, while Frank couldn't deal with her still powerful emotions.

Slowly my mother's stories of the Eddie of the good times re-emerged: the charmer, the joker, the man who could bring light into a room. The other side remained: the black and white politics, and the lack of practicalness, but they slowly mattered less and less. By the time my mum died, a few years ago, aged 73, Frank, having passed away nearly a decade before, my mum in her heart had made her peace with my dad.

My relationship with my father was never easy after my parents' separation. He became an uncomfortable person to be with, and yet we still had lots of connections. We shared a love of politics, football, supporting Dundee United, and Frank Sinatra. To this day, these are some of the biggest passions in my life. And I also learned from my father that unless someone is a racist or homophobic, that you don't fall out with people over political differences, or ruin evenings. Friends might tell you otherwise.

I did have positive moments with my dad. Dundee United won the league in 1983, just before Thatcher won her second term. Then, in 1987, United got to the UEFA cup final against IFK Gothenburg. In those days, this was a two-legged final, home and away, so the second leg was at Tannadice, after we lost the first leg one-nil.

It was a packed, romantic, expectant Tannadice that Wednesday May night. It was again just weeks before Thatcher won another election. I can still visualise that night and standing next to my dad in the terracing behind one of the goals known as 'The Shed'. We played well, but a first half goal from IFK Gothenburg killed the tie, and although we scored, we drew one-all and lost the final two-one on aggregate.

Then something magical happened. The United fans, aware of the occasion, started applauding both teams off the park in sustained applause. It was a special, inclusive moment, and one UEFA recognised by giving United a fair play award. My father, whose story with Dundee United went back to his father and tales of United playing in front of crowds of 500 while second bottom of the Second Division, started to cry. He stood there on the terraces and cried, tears running down his cheeks. It felt completely natural to him and to me; we were caught in a wonderful, emotionally affirmative coming together as father and son.

Years later, returning to that May night and discussing it with friends, I would recount that it was the only time I ever saw my dad cry. Some friends have reflected on the

sadness of this; that it took a football match for the tears to flow. Others though, and over the years this has become the prevailing reaction, have commented how lucky I have been to have that rare moment with my dad, of which so many others have been denied. They felt I had been accorded a privilege and insight into my father. I take the latter view as true, but so is the former.

That's why I am driven about Scottish men. I am a Scottish man, from a proud working-class background. I was shaped by good parents, trying their best, filled with hope, love and an innate belief that society and the world would get better: better for them compared to their parents, and better for their son.

In some respects they were right, but in many other respects those feelings are like a postcard from another age and world: an age of innocence, before Thatcher and Blair. Scottish masculinity has given the world so much: discoveries, explorations and ideas. And yet, it has got stuck in an unhelpful place. There is something deeply rotten at the heart of the condition of Scottish men: in our behaviours, in our evasions, and most of all in our silences as men.

Isn't it about time we dared to speak and relate to each other as men – as brothers, lovers, husbands, fathers and sons?

A Forfar childhood

Bob Cant

2011

The bidders went off every day at the same time and you could be back in your classroom at two o'clock without upsetting anybody. Watchless wee boys and girls could regularly be seen rushing up the Lour Road at the behest of the bidders. It was some years before I realised that this helpful noise was produced by a siren in a textile factory requiring workers (rather than school-children) to behave punctually.

I started travelling to Forfar at the age of four and a half, when Attlee was still Prime Minister. After a short walk from the farm where I lived, I caught a bus at 8.10am and I made that same journey every day for the next 13 years. My parents were not worried about sending me off on my own because an older cousin could keep an eye on me; he was eight. The seating arrangements on the bus were hierarchical and utterly inflexible.

We passed through villages with names like Craichie, Bowriefaulds, Letham and Dunnichen, just near the spot where the Picts had definitively defeated the Northumbrian army in 685 at the battle of Nechtansmere. By the time we reached Forfar, we knew we were in the 20th century; we passed through a council housing scheme at Easterbank and ahead of us lay the factories, the schools, the shops, the pubs and the churches of Angus's county town.

I enjoyed school but my time there pre-dated the invention of learning by discovery and it was entirely classroom-based. There were no trips back into the Pictish heartland to study wildlife; no trips down the town to explore the sites of the places where Malcolm Canmore had held court; the magnificent First World War memorial at the top of Balmashanner Hill remained unadmired. At secondary school, the name of Lewis Grassie Gibbon was never uttered, although many of us came from places that could have been Kinraddie. I learned to spell, to parse a sentence, to count, to read in silence and I understood why Martin Luther had objected to the sale of indulgences. I was a bookish boy in a school system which valued bookishness.

I cannot recall any sex education but I do remember hearing a girl in my class being admonished by a male teacher for wearing a bra before he thought it was appropriate. It seemed it was never too early to learn about sexual shame.

A lot of valuable learning took place outwith the classroom.

The Vennel was the route to the heart of Forfar and key to many of my extra-mural experiences. My first independent journey down the Vennel was to a shop on Little Causeway when sweet rationing was abolished; no-one had told me that the removal of rationing was not the same as the removal of prices. Years later, I made my way beyond the Vennel to record shops and to Woolies, with its collection of 'unnecessary plastic

objects'. On one of these forays, I discovered the reading room in the Meffan Institute; I became a regular there but the bummers made sure I was never back late for class. I discovered the *Daily Herald* and, though I can now barely remember much that I read in it, it showed me that the *Dundee Courier* was not the only path to truth and enlightenment.

Forfar liked to see itself as a community without barriers. The *Forfar Dispatch*, four pages of dense print, reported on the activities of any of the citizenry without fear or favour every Thursday. The golf course was open to all, regardless of income, though I never did hear of a woman golfer. On my first visit to the Forfar Labour Party, I was surprised to find that the managing director of one of the textile companies was a leading member; so, I was less surprised later when Harold Wilson ennobled him and made him a Scottish Office minister. The nearest that Forfar had to an Exotic Other were the Poles who had arrived during the Second World War. One teenage wit was heard to remark that communism must be a truly terrible thing if folk chose to stay in Forfar rather than return to their native Poland.

My family were regular churchgoers and one summer when I was about 13 our church had a regular lay preacher from Dundee called Ken Mathers. I was very attracted to the Christian version of social justice that he preached and was particularly taken with the idea that the feeding of the 5,000 was more of a collective act than it was an inexplicable miracle. These ideas provided a framework to help me shape my sense of the world and I soon became proficient at arguing about issues, such as capital punishment, immigration, the bomb, which were not really part of everyday life in Forfar. Years later, I discovered that he was associated with the Iona Community.

My friend Ian was a regular subscriber to the *New Musical Express* and he tried hard to keep me up-to-date with developments in the world of rock and pop so that I knew what to listen out for on Radio Luxemburg. I think he despaired of me when I confessed to preferring Bobby Vee to Elvis. We discussed the mysteries surrounding the identity of Gary US Bonds and he explained that it was important to pronounce the second -w in Dionne Warwick.

As my teenage years progressed, I spent more and more time in Forfar after dark. There were two cinemas in the town and I became a regular attender. The Regal was rather grand; it had a restaurant and lavish waiting areas with portraits of glamorous stars such as Ruth Roman and Gary Cooper. The other cinema, the Pavilion, but commonly known as the Gaff, had been thrown up in a space behind the shops on East High Street. I saw everything from *The Mouse That Roared* to *Psycho*, but no-one would go with me to see *Victim*.

I started going to what were still called dances; the music was live but traditional country dancing was just on the point of disappearing from events like these. The voluntary sector often organised fundraising dances in the Reid Hall; on the other side of Castle Street, the Forfar Palais was home to profit-making, private sector dances. I was

both thrilled and horrified to be sexually propositioned by an older man at the Palais. The atmosphere there was always raucous and you could well believe that people headed off to the waste land known as the Mirie to have some kind of sex; people from the Reid Hall probably went there too but they would have pretended that they were going somewhere else.

By the time I was 16, Macmillan was Prime Minister and my life was busy. I was studying for four highers; I was arguing about social justice at lunchtime; I was planning a way out from life on the farm; on top of all that, the suppression of any understanding of my sexuality was very draining. One day I realised that I no longer heard the bummers.

Chimes of midnight

Andro Linklater on Eric Linklater

2013

When I was a child in the 1950s, my father's reputation as a writer had passed its peak. He was one year older than the century and his great fame had come in the 1930s and 1940s with a succession of best-selling novels beginning with *Juan in America* and ending with *Private Angelo*.

Nevertheless, his reputation remained sufficiently powerful to breed in me a distinct expectancy of recognition. In the company of strangers, voices above my head would say 'This is Eric Linklater's boy,' or a face would duck down to my level and assert brightly, 'So you're the great man's son,' and I would feel the spread of a wider penumbra than a small boy could throw. To be Eric Linklater's son then seemed no hardship.

With my father on hand, however, the expectancy was shot through by a fearful apprehension that something might go wrong. Like some infant Duke of Norfolk superintending a coronation, I felt it imperative that his importance be acknowledged by those around him. My worries reached a peak when he appeared in public – on a local *Matter of Opinion* panel where he was bound to be contradicted, or on the radio where the interviewer would surely fail to catch his jokes, or on television where the camera would reveal him, as indeed it did, with his flies undone. To be his son in those circumstances was to feel his dignity threatened at every turn.

To some extent, these were the natural misgivings of any child seeing his parent perform in public, but they also had a source in Eric's own apprehensions. Beneath his exuberant exterior ran a layer of uncertainty. My father disliked his physical appearance and emotional inhibition, and from adolescence had fought to overcome these shortcomings, as he perceived them to be. Anything which reminded him of them was liable to provoke a fury quite disproportionate to its overt cause. There was a manner in which people *should* behave and in a way in which things *should* be done, and it was crucial that the people or things around him should measure up to the standards he had set himself. Thus, my Norfolk-like concern for appearances echoed in some degree that of the monarch.

From our different standpoints, we were both familiar with the ideal. It came when he was in the company of men he admired, for the most part those who added writing to other accomplishments: soldiers, such as Robert Henriques or Bernard Fergusson; a doctor such as O H Mavor (James Bridie); and above all Compton Mackenzie whose additional guises defy brief description. With them he became the person he wanted to be, extravagant in affection, hospitality and discourse.

When they came to stay, the house swelled in sympathetic grandeur. The dining-room

table grew in length, the cellar was harvested of bottles, and dark corners of the hall sprouted sheaves of roses, lupins or gladioli. From a mingled sense of drama and terror, the butcher produced his best mutton, my mother her best cooking, and the four children their best behaviour. It was a pleasure to be present on such occasions, and to offer a second helping of carrots was to stand on the edge of glory.

Eric then made a splendid companion. His conversation was served by a Jacobean wit and a prodigious memory crammed with reading and experience, but most importantly admiration unstoppered his feelings so that his friends were bathed in their warmth. Driven by the gale of his personality their talk grew boisterous and its direction unpredictable. Allusion served for explanation, personal experience stood in for definition. A quotation from Racine comprehended France and war was caught in the memory of a battle. Like wizards, they leapt from some conversational peak to another, and wherever they landed an entire mountain of knowledge was assumed to stand beneath their feet.

There was something of *Cinderella* in this gaiety and the departure of the guests represented the chimes of midnight. Then the saddle of mutton turned to rissoles, the claret bottles became a water-jug, and in place of the glittering talkers sat four bespectacled, unattractive children. I surmise that nothing reminded Eric more forcibly of his secret faults than his children, for he strove repeatedly and angrily to mould us to a less irritating form.

In memory, these attempts have their focus on the long-polished table in the dining-room from one end of which he sat facing the window so that its westerly light illuminated the pink, imperial dome of his bald head and made his spectacles gleam like mirrors. Meals took place in an atmosphere which I recall as being so charged the squeal of a knife on china or the slurrup of soup on lip could trigger an explosion. 'If you can't eat like a civilised human being,' he bellowed, 'you can finish your meal at the bottom of the garden'. At his most irritable, he had a habit of addressing us through my mother as though she were the NCO of a slovenly platoon he had to inspect. 'Marjorie! Have you seen this boy's tie? Does he have to come to table looking like a slum child?' or, on the occasion I first tried to carve a chicken, 'Marjorie! What's that bloody boy been doing? The bird looks as though it's been attacked with a Mills grenade'.

When he shouted, his voice had a percussive force at which I usually cried, as much for my own failure as his anger. Despite straining every Norfolk nerve, things could not be prevented from going wrong. There were sudden unannounced purges against the smell of peeled oranges or grapes pulled from the stalk, and if these were avoided, paralysing interrogations exposed my ignorance about people, places and dates.

The other children, being older, had presumably run this gauntlet before me, and our collective failings must have seemed part of a conspiracy against him. For all his shouting, deficiencies continued to appear on every side. Plates were served cool when they should have been hot, drinking water was tepid instead of cold, and spoons were

dull instead of sparkling. There was, in consequence, no mistaking who was at the centre of the conspiracy – the woman responsible for plates, spoons, children and, most infuriatingly of all, for boiled potatoes which either dissolved to flour or split as crisply as apples. 'Good God, woman, look at this!' he bawled in disbelief. 'After 23 years of married life you still haven't learned to boil a potato.' And despite the years, he would still be goaded into slinging the potato at my mother, though either because she was only a silhouette against the light, or out of good manners, he usually missed.

The emotional drama left no-one untouched, and viewed on the distorting screen of memory, meal-times have a decidedly operatic quality. Conversations are shouted arguments, unforgivable accusations are hurled across the table, people break down and cry, exits are made to the sound of slammed doors – my elder sister once exited with a slam which dislodged a full-length portrait of my maternal grandmother from the wall and two painted plates from the sideboard. Acknowledging a force as elemental as himself, my father relapsed briefly into silence.

I do not present this as the whole truth – the sunnier moods are absent, and as we grow older and tougher, and thus more acceptable, they often predominated – but it is accurate as to the intemperate quality of his frustration. For a child, it was impossible to understand that the violence of his emotions was inseparable from his writing, and that what enraged him in life could become comedy in fiction. In fact, I remember my embarrassment at the age of seven when I first read *The Pirates in the Deep Green Sea*, a book which he wrote for my brother Magnus and me. There for all to see was my father in the person of the ferocious pirate, Dan Scumbril, who terrified half the North Atlantic with his blazing temper and loud voice. 'Split my liver with a brass harpoon,' thundered Dan Scumbril, and I quailed, not with fright but shame that my father's rages should now be known to everyone. When, so far from being thought the worse of, he was congratulated on the creation of an exceptionally comic character, I logged it as one more of those bewildering quirks of existence which had to be accepted even though they made no sense.

As it happens, it is more complex than most childhood matters to understand how fiction transforms reality. In my adolescence and early 20s, I found – as did most of my contemporaries to judge by reviews and comments – a lack of sensitivity in his resort to comedy. It was too obviously the right thing to do, not to take the world very seriously – even his nightmare of service on the Western Front in the First World War was presented in *The Man On My Back* in comic form.

Yet, when I read his books today it seems to me that what underlies his writing is not an absence but an excess of feeling. A violent sentiment runs through his most extravagant comedy so that it dances on the edge of blackness or slips abruptly into tragedy. The variety of his approaches to fiction which once irritated his critics – the rollicking of *Juan in America* followed by the gut-spilling *Men of Ness*, the macaroni jollity of *Private Angelo* and the sombre *Roll of Honour* – now appear much more a

piece. A word which he likes was inenarrable, or untellable, and what strikes me is the persistent attempt to convey the inenarrable exorbitance of his feelings.

Had he been born with a poet's head, with tragic brows and an aquiline nose, he would have had a mask to suit his inner being. As it was, the sergeant-major's jaw was surmounted by a massive skull and a nose which he explained as the outcome of 800 years of peasant ancestry exposed to the bulbous gales of Orkney. The physical ideal was subverted before he began, and his spirit met a similar stumbling-block in the weighty Victorian values instilled by his parents. It was little wonder that he raged so furiously, sometimes to be free of the encumbrances, sometimes to make sense of them.

They bred in him a lust for beauty – for the sense of liberation which it conferred and for the model which it offered of the way things should be. No moment exposes him more clearly than when in wartime he found himself alone in the room where Botticelli's *Primavera* had been stored for protection, and stretching up on tiptoe he pressed his lips to those of Spring. He married a beautiful wife, he built and bought houses for their views rather than their suitability as homes, and he purchased pictures even faster than poverty required him to sell them. He kept Highland cattle for their shaggy grandeur, and allowed a succession of elegant, self-possessed Siamese cats to step with impunity across his writing-paper. Even the aggressive pattern of his tweed jackets I suspect of answering some aspiration which he felt to be bold and carefree.

His laugh was always loud and in old age his tears grew copious. He cried at memories of soldiering, at a pipe tune or a reading of *Danny Deever*. Perhaps they sprang in part from an old man's sentimentality, but I also remember the remark made by a neighbour, Donald MacGillivray, a supreme piper and teacher of piping. When he played *The Lament for the Children*, Eric was not the only one moved to tears, but it was for him in particular that the piece was performed. 'I always like playing for your father,' Donald said. 'You see, he has the soul for it.'

My brother Andro

Magnus Linklater

2013

The writer Andro Linklater died on 3 November 2013, aged 68. His brother Magnus, former editor of the Scotsman, delivered this address at his funeral

There is a photograph of Andro taken during a holiday in Italy, sent to me by his friend (and mine) Peter Webb. Andro is sitting in the sun on a low wall, with his back to a valley. On his lap is a large foolscap notebook in which he is writing. He is immersed in it, locked in the concentration of the moment. I would say he looks completely happy – or, as Peter himself writes, 'wholly at peace with the world'. It is a good image to retain, for Andro himself took enormous delight in such moments in his life, recalling them with pleasure and enthusiasm.

As to what he is writing, one can only guess. But he is probably sketching out the idea for his next book. Looking back at his life, I cannot recall a time when he was not wrestling with a new project, trying something new and a bit risky, exploring its possibilities, testing its limits. On the back of his last book, *Owning the Earth* – whose American publishing date is, poignantly, today – the historian David McCullough talks of 'the adventure of ideas', and I think it fits Andro to a T. For his life as a whole was a series of adventures. I know because during our childhood I was part of them. Mostly the scary ones.

Looking back at those days, what I remember are two things – the insane risks we took, and the matter-of-fact way that Andro dealt with them. Paddling across the Cromarty Firth, famous for its unpredictable currents, in a canvas canoe with my English setter Tops'l on the back, and not a life-jacket in sight, we found ourselves in the middle of a school of porpoises, each one of them the length of our fragile craft. 'Don't worry,' said Andro, as one dived beneath us, 'they think we're another porpoise'.

Or the time when he and our father Eric sailed a small boat with an inboard engine, from Tarbert Loch Fyne, planning to take it through the Caledonian Canal. Armed only with the AA road map of Britain, they took a wrong turn and sailed it through the Corryvreckan Gulf, with its famously dangerous whirlpool. 'Such an irresponsible thing to do,' admitted Andro – beaming with delight at the memory.

He and I used to take that boat round the cliff-edges beyond Nigg Bay in a vain attempt to shoot rock pigeons, and once the engine cut out leaving us at the mercy of the waves. Shipping water, the engine was soon half-submerged as the boat lurched alarmingly close to the rocks. We turned the handle one more time, and, miraculously, the little Perkins engine sprang into life, sending a plume of water high into the air.

Talking about it later, Andro acknowledged the danger, but said that what he really remembered was the plume of water – 'such a beautiful sight,' he remarked.

He canoed down the Danube and motor-biked to Greece with his friend Christian Tyler. He lived amongst the Iban people of Sarawak, and was delighted that they named him 'bigbellied crocodile'. 'The Iban were full of admiration for him,' wrote one of his companions on the trip. 'His sword dance with about 10 pints of rice wine in him with razor sharp swords as his props, had the Iban pleading with him to stop for fear he would do himself an injury.'

Our son Archie was talking last weekend about the time off Isle Martin, when Andro's sailing boat was dismasted in a stiff breeze, with me, Alexander and Archie aboard. We drifted helplessly. 'Don't worry,' said Andro, 'we're probably going to be driven ashore over there' – pointing to a distant beach. 'What happens if the wind shifts the other way?' asked one of the boys. 'Well, there's not much between us and America,' said Andro.

We landed safely, and yomped homewards, to be greeted by Veronica and Freya, convinced they would never see us again. What Archie remembers is Andro's sheer enjoyment of yet another *Boy's Own* adventure.

It was always he who dared most. There's a portrait of us both as children, painted by Mary Potter. I am sitting bolt upright, staring obediently at the artist. I had just been awarded a good-conduct medal by my father, and it's pinned to my jersey. I look, frankly, pretty smug. Andro, on the other hand, is craning round, clearly eager to get up and go, his hair a mess, shirt collar untidy. It is, of course, he who makes the portrait.

It was a pattern repeated at Belhaven Hill, the prep school we both went to. By the time he got there I was a patrol-leader, and rather grand. He was intolerably disobedient, with no sense of my important status. At one point he was found roaming the corridors. 'Where do you think you're going?' asked a master. 'Ah'm looking for ma brother,' he announced. 'And why do you want him?' asked the master. 'I want tae gie him a kick in the pants.'

It was perhaps merciful that we then went to separate public schools and universities. But our encounters down the years have always been joyful ones – we used to joke that we got on so well because we lived at opposite ends of the country. He never lost his deep affection for Scotland. You can always tell an exiled Scot. He rings up and asks what on earth has gone wrong with the Scottish front row after another thumping defeat at Murrayfield.

As so many of Andro's friends and relations have been recalling, in letters and emails sent since the awful news of his death, a meeting with Andro was always an event: stories, arguments, jokes, and, who knows, a song at the end of it. There was that burst of uncontrollable laughter, the heaving shoulders, the head clutched in mirth: he was the best audience in the world, however poor the joke. He had that wonderful gift of being able to listen, and to give you the impression that what you were saying was the most interesting thing in the world.

Here is his sister Kristin: 'His charm, his love of company, food, drink, people and life in general – it's what everyone speaks about when they think of Andro'. His publisher, George Gibson: 'I have, truly, never worked with an author I cared for or valued more than Andro'. His dear friend, Phil Evans: 'Warm and witty, forever asking pertinent questions, packed with humour and full of love'. An American friend: 'He made me laugh more than anyone on the planet'.

Andro had the greatest gift of all – the gift of friendship, and here in Markbeech, where he came to live with his beloved Marielou, he found that gift appreciated more than anywhere.

It was, however, a long and often testing journey that led him here. Andro struggled with life as well as enjoying it. Neither school nor university offered him a settled compass. He knew he wanted to write, but was, I think at first overwhelmed by his father's reputation and force of personality. He tried other things – working in a gallery in San Francisco, tutoring, teaching in a hard school in London. Then, when Eric died, he left uncompleted a history of the Black Watch, and Andro was asked by Eric's good friend Bernard Fergusson, Colonel of the Regiment, if he would finish it. So here he was, pitching right into his father's territory – another high-risk challenge. He did it superbly well, and in doing so, I think, laid the ghost of his father's legacy.

But he did not always find writing easy. His biography of Compton Mackenzie, which he finally completed in the isolation of Isle Martin off the west coast of Scotland, almost defeated him. But he stuck with it, as he did with his other biographies, all of them works of elegance and style.

His one book for children: *Amazing Maisie and the Cold Porridge Brigade*, so beautifully illustrated by Joanna Carey, is still read today with huge enjoyment. Andro had a natural gift with children – he treated them as grown-ups, and they loved him for it, 'enlisting himself in their cause against the entire adult conspiracy,' as Robert Gray wrote in his fine obituary for the *Telegraph*, adding: 'One of his godchildren was delighted to find himself the beneficiary of a fund for Running Away From School'. Nephews, nieces, god-children – I have been touched by how many felt the loss of Andro so keenly. 'Please remember the bristly kisses' he always gave us, said my son Archie.

As well as his books, the articles he wrote for many magazines gave him the opportunity to indulge in more adventure. He was also a stylish book reviewer for the *Spectator* – 'happy to take on tricky assignments, full of enthusiasm and humour – perfect really,' as the literary editor, Mark Amory put it. But it was, of course, his completely original and groundbreaking work on how the early pioneers measured their land as they moved west across America, the famous grid system set by Thomas Jefferson, and the way it influenced the whole course of the nation, that will be his literary legacy.

As ever, it was his enthusiasm for the subject that gave it wings. Here he is, writing to us in November 2000, after a flight over America: 'Far beyond the last rocky outcrop and

after miles of desert, streets and offices sprang up built on exactly the same sized squares, oriented and boreated and occidented and australicised on exactly the same lines. Even the lines of orange trees and cabbage rows ran north/south and east/west, and the Kansas prairies and the Michigan walnut groves and St Louis shopping malls and Chicago slums were all griddled and waffle-ironed to the same rectangular shape. If I can get it right, I shall use the land survey and its impact on the people as a scalpel to open up the American psyche like a sardine can (Can you use scalpels on psyches and sardines? Of course you can!).'

His last book, *Owning the Earth* is published in America today, and George Gibson calls it simply 'a masterpiece'. I'm sure he is right.

But I want to end with Marielou and their relationship which was central to his happiness. Here in Markbeech, they made a life together that brought him contentment, fulfilment and immense pleasure. He loved the place and understood it intimately.

It is, however, a picture of them both in Sweden that sticks in my mind. It is on the edge of an immense lake, and Andro is determined to swim to a far shore. He sets off, resolutely – in the wrong direction. Marielou, standing on the edge of the lake, realises what is happening, and makes an arrow-head with her arms, pointing to where he should be going, desperately trying to attract his attention. But Andro carries on, out into the darkness of the lake, still heading in the wrong direction. Of course he made it back – eventually, happy to have tracked his way back through a forest to some other shore. Andro usually did.

Sadly, on his last journey, in the Hebrides, he didn't. He had completed an immense walk on Rhum, and was then cycling uphill in heavy weather on the nearby island of Eigg when he experienced the first intimations of his heart attack. Typically for Andro, he did not take it seriously enough, and though he was brought down two days later to the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh where we were sure he would recover, he suffered a second and fatal heart attack. Fit, healthy, and already in the first stages of yet another book, he was taken from us far too soon.

Those whom the gods love die young, they say, and that is true of Andro. But the memory of him is so sharp, so vivid, that he will live on for ever in our minds. As Norman MacCaig so beautifully says: 'He is gone, but you can still see his tracks in the snow of the world'.

A story of hopeless love

David Donnison

2013

Many readers of the *Scottish Review* will know the charming little white church at Dalmally, a village on the road from Tyndrum to Oban. They may recall that the porch at the foot of its tower, through which they entered the church, has two beautifully inscribed plaques on its walls that commemorate 15 people: a colonel, two captains, three lieutenants, a civil commissioner at the Cape of Good Hope, and their wives and children – dying between 1786 and 1856 in Scotland, Domenica, Jamaica, Ceylon and several of them in India. All had ventured from this remote Argyll village to seek their fortunes in the British Empire. And that was just the Campbells.

Over the years, hundreds of their tenants must have gone forth to the same countries as soldiers, clerks, traders, missionaries, engineers, administrators and more. Other small communities all over Scotland can tell a similar story.

The privilege our history has given us to explore the world was brought home to me recently on a visit to old friends in the Czech Republic. Intelligent, highly civilised people, speaking several European languages, my friends have lived under five different regimes: social democratic, Nazi, social democratic again, Soviet-socialist, and now Thatcherite. For most of those years they were unable to travel beyond the borders of their small country. The more privileged of them were occasionally given a brief exit visa with the expectation that they would in return report on their friends and colleagues to the secret police.

But we should remember that our freedom to travel and the hazards that came with it were, until recently, only for men. So their sisters, left at home, had difficulty in finding husbands. It is not surprising that women's search for a mate plays so central a part in British fiction and drama from Jane Austen onwards. That was the world every woman knew about.

It was tough for the men too. In the early days of Empire, it was acceptable for British men to marry native women. But from the mid-19th century – and particularly after the Indian mutiny – men with professional ambitions were expected to find a white wife. To live publicly with a native woman would wreck their careers. (My father, who joined the Indian civil service in 1922, was brought together with other new recruits from Britain a few days after their arrival to be warned by a senior official that they should never do this.)

Later, some of them did indeed find native partners who could not be publicly recognised – an arrangement on which their colleagues would turn a tactfully blind eye. When eventually they went home to Britain these men left their women and their

offspring behind. These deprivations led to the annual arrival of what came, rather unkindly, to be called 'the fishing fleet': ships bringing husband-seeking women from Britain to various imperial ports where bachelors eagerly awaited them. In India, their main destination, they usually arrived in January because that was when the cool weather started.

I was unwittingly involved in an episode of this kind. My earliest memories, when I was still only three years old, are of a voyage on an ocean liner sailing to Burma (then part of the Indian Raj) when my father was returning from the six months leave he was given every three years. It was January 1930. With us came a lady, somewhat older than my parents, whom I was taught to call 'Aunty Lally'. She was to be my governess for the next three years.

Officials returning from leave had to report first to their superiors in Rangoon to learn where they were to be posted. My parents, who were natural explorers and adventurers, were delighted when he was given his first posting as a district officer in Mergui, close to the equator at the southern tip of the country on the borders of Siam and Malaya. There would be lots of trekking through jungle-clad mountains, and by small boats sailing among islands along a wild coastline.

Lally, who would have been hoping to stay in Rangoon where there were plenty of European men, must have been desperately disappointed. She taught me to read. But she had other more pressing interests and I never formed a close relationship with her. For maternal affection I relied on my mother – when she was not away on tour with my father – and on Ma Thein, a loving, copper-skinned Burmese woman who got me up each morning, bathed me, put me to bed at night, and taught me quite a lot of her language.

Lally eventually found a young Englishman, employed on a rubber plantation, whom she persuaded to become engaged to her. Mergui's small European community, mingling after work in their gossip club, got to know each other pretty well, and my parents disapproved of this match, believing the young man would be 'quite unsuitable'. Their view seemed to be confirmed quite soon when he was charged with embezzling a large sum from his employers.

The district officer, besides being head of a small administrative staff, was responsible for his district's treasury and its police force, and was also its chief magistrate. So my father had to try Lally's fiancée. It was an open-and-shut case because he made no attempt to deny the charges against him. But what sentence should be imposed? Another young man – a Chinese man – had been convicted a few weeks earlier of a similar offence and been sent to prison. The whole of Mergui was agog to learn whether a European would be given the same sentence.

My father asked in court if there was anything to be said in mitigation before he passed sentence. But the young man refused to say anything. Although my father believed he was being quite courageous in refusing to incriminate bigger fish who had

been involved in the crime, he felt he had no choice but to send him to prison. That sentence was appealed to a pompous judge in Rangoon who roundly reproved my father for his decision and freed the young man who was quickly hustled off home to Britain.

What must have been the atmosphere around the breakfast table on the morning after the trial? What must Lally have felt about her employers – this couple, younger than she was, who were happily married and now proud parents of a second child? All I know is that she played to the whistle. As the day approached for my father to be sent home again on leave, Lally found another man working on a plantation; a man a good deal older than herself this time. My parents again thought he was 'quite unsuitable'. According to gossip in the club, he already had a wife in Malaya. Undeterred, Lally got him to the altar a few days before our departure and they were married. He disappeared next morning and was never seen or heard of again.

Soon afterwards, we set off on a small ship to Rangoon and there boarded the liner that took us on the four-week voyage to Britain. Aged just six, I knew nothing about these events at the time. On the voyage home, Aunt Lally seemed quiet and rather sad. I never saw her again, and she must now be long dead. I still feel I owe her some sort of apology.

The girl from the library

Paul Tritzschler

2014

Gorbals Library, the first public lending library in Glasgow, started life in 1901. The etymology is uncertain; some claim the name Gorbals has its roots in Latin, others Gaelic, and there are several translations reaching back to medieval times, but the one I favour is 'a garden of the town'.

This former leper colony was never a garden, not the kind associated with magnolias and camellias; historically, the Gorbals held occupancy in the popular imagination as a dark, terrifying place, home to thieves and cut-throats, and perhaps it was, but it was also a vibrant immigrant city within a city. It was home to those forced from their native land by the Famine or the Clearances and to the dispossessed born into servitude and debt peonage, it was home to persecuted populations subjected to violent expulsions by barbaric regimes and rapacious landowners – both foreign and domestic.

And it was home, even the adopted home, to some remarkable individuals who stood as 'accusers of capitalism dripping with blood from head to foot' – people who were imprisoned and brutalised over campaigns for social change and a life worth living.

Perhaps it was after all a garden once, a place where things nourished will grow; it is the name I prefer because the library was exactly that to me. I crossed the suspension bridge over the Clyde to the library after school in Ropework Lane almost every day. I loved the fact you could bounce the bridge a little (the impossible hope was to make it sway), and I loved it because it was a bridge to another world. Through the years I progressed to Stirling's Library, not at all far from that bridge, where I delved into weightier tomes, and where I did my best to draw the attention of the young woman who stamped the return dates on my books most evenings. She never looked up, and then one day she did.

Harry Young was born in the same year as Gorbals Library, but it was outside Stirling's Library that circumstances brought me to meet him. Had I not known one, I would not have known the other and would not have known him.

In the mid-1970s, before coffee and couture culture dominated the area around (the now former) Stirling's Library, it was not unusual to find someone standing on a box plunked down on the pavement outside the old reading rooms, trying through raised voice to raise the consciousness of passing crowds. They hoped to spur intellectual self-development and muster up revolutionary ideas among the working class. Had this effort been applied to a profit-making venture they might have been rich, but as it was they were lucky if they sold a few skimpy newspapers or reduced their bundle of flyers by a fraction. But some stopped and listened, and one day, stepping out of the library into the cold grey air, I did the same.

The voice on a box advocated with sincerity non-violent conversion through majority vote to a socialist paradise, and something in all that got my attention, as perhaps it would any peacenik teenager of the time. Time passed with the talker punctuated by palms and fists about ists – Leninists, vanguardists, reformists and pessimists.

The gist I got, and before leaving I accepted an invite by way of a flyer to the McLellan Galleries in Sauchiehall Street – a gig spot for local bands and dreary causes – to hear a keynote speaker called Harry Young talk about the prospect of paradise on planet earth. He was the longest serving member in one of the oldest parties, and whilst my interest was piqued in part – the quirky quixotic part – by the thought of earthly splendour in an idyllic state with free String Band albums, I don't think I had any serious intention of showing up; I had read *The Grapes of Wrath* (twice), but truth be told I was more attracted to Buddhism at the time.

The flyer remained in the pocket of my well-worn brown velvet jacket for a week, and by the time it once more saw the light of day it had all the appearance of an ancient document. Unplanned, I gently smoothed it out on the counter at Stirling's Library just after Zola was date-stamped by the young woman that never looked up. Interested in going to this? To my complete surprise, she said yes and we did. We met on the stone steps to the library between the neoclassical columns and within half an hour were at Harry's venue, on time and too early. During our talk and walk, albeit a bit brisk and breathless, we exchanged facts about ourselves, and it must have gone well because several times we laughed as though we actually knew each other.

An old guy on the grog the double of Spencer Tracy clownishly barred our way up Hope Street asking for spare change, and after pocketing the money gripped our forearms as though he was going to marry us, then emphatically declared how perfect we were as a couple – he even made me promise I'd look after her. After we escaped he called after us in a loud, gravelly voice, causing other heads to turn, 'Hey! You look beautiful, hen, by the way!' She did, too – I wonder if I told her?

We took a seat in the front row and waited. Fearful of the sudden silence, I scanned the area and suggested we wander over to the bookstall at the back of the hall. Literature was spread out and we flicked through books that, judging by the covers, might have been about bearded fraternities. The bearded vendors and their bearded mates were engaged in one big huge conversation punctuated by brash bursts of laughter, and their inexplicable joy made me feel intimidated.

I began to worry about what the maverick version of me had landed us in. There were any number of venues I might have suggested – a pub with a band, like The Kind Man on Pollokshaws Road, was just one of the many ideas translated as missed opportunities that came crashing in. Instead, I had brought her to a place where people had very particular notions about what it means to get in the party mood. Then Harry appeared.

Harry spoke spiritedly and engagingly about life as lived within a rigged system punctuated by starvation, wars, and routinised death, and spoke unrelentingly about

why we should be socialists, giving compelling cause for optimism and action. He captivated the small audience by way of an account of the progression of his life across continents and epochs, and the people he met at socialist world congresses, including Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin and Stalin – though Bukharin was by far the one he would have preferred to meet down the pub for a pint.

It was perhaps nonsense coming from my side of the conversation, but Harry had a way about him that led me to forget my self-doubts, and I put my questions. I knew then, just as he must have known as a young man sitting at a conference table in those heady revolutionary days, that this was a moment.

Would the rich allow any threat to their interests? (I was thinking of a teacher I had at school just two years earlier when I asked this question; he promised fair treatment if I owned up to a misdemeanour, then thrashed me thoroughly.) True, socialist campaigners such as Rosa Luxemburg were murdered, Harry replied, and we might therefore consider force as the answer; but capitalism is armed to the teeth and insurrection would be flattened. Besides, the use of force must be maintained, or the threat of it, just as it is under the system of capitalism, and how could a truly representative socialist state be built on those sorts of foundations? Only a vote by a massive majority would demonstrate the desire for the overthrow of capitalism, and in so doing negate the need for violence.

Quoting Gramsci, Harry insisted we should not allow the enemy to define the space within which we solve problems. I wrote down those words and have them still. Today as a teacher of psychology, and equally as a student of psychology, the words have even greater resonance; the enemy, after all, is in part our fixed mindset, and we cannot change that if we accept illusory boundaries.

We navigated our way through the crowds to the Lido café. Saturday night discos were feverishly popular at that time. They were magnets for party people with dress codes that included wide collars, clingy trousers, shiny materials, dangly things, and dangerous footwear – akin to walking in mini oil-rig platforms. They passed purposefully in pairs through city streets, gleeful and exultant, to boogie wonderland. As we walked we talked about Harry's hopes, and maybe we looked miserable amidst the Glasgow glitterati, but I remember being filled with dreams about the future and the certainty of lasting change. All power to the imagination, as they said in '68.

On the white stone edge encircling the George Square flowerbeds, we waited on the night bus. We kissed, and waited for the next bus – I was never so happy to miss buses – but then the situation flipped; through a clearing in the mist of our dreamy conversation I saw trouble staggering our way, two devotees of violence, each carrying a quarter bottle of whisky and already quite drunk – and trouble saw piñatas. They introduced me to their Doc Martens.

True to the findings of numerous field studies on bystander behaviour, people passed or moved away, then two Samaritans sitting on a nearby bench came to our rescue; their

involvement should have led more to follow, but no-one did. Nonetheless, we thought it was over when the heavyweights – finding themselves up against equals – backed off, but they returned armed with a crate-load of bottles and began throwing them wildly across the square.

Glass scattered in all directions, threatening crowds waiting on buses, and people screamed. Some ran hysterically into the main road. Even the Samaritans left the scene. The girl from the library got a black eye, and I had cuts and bruises – one of the men took a grip of my hair and thumped my head repeatedly off the ground. Within a few weeks, the injuries were hardly visible, but some wounds never healed.

After I saw her home, we never again met. She heard pebbles pinging against her window, but her answer was to close the curtains – or perhaps that was her mother. In any case, to be truthful I didn't try so hard. In the heat of the violent episode, I lost the girl from the library, and when things cooled I realised I had also lost all sense of Harry's aspirations. Within the confines of my experience, and the dichotomous mindset so typical of youth, the people of George Square – thugs and bystanders – became the working class in their entirety, and I hated them. Stalin in all his brutality might possibly have had more appeal – after all, didn't he say a revolution could not be made with silk gloves?

The episode appears now as a test of faith; today I understand more about poverty, violence, class, and group behaviour. And yet, I often find myself returning to change the events of that night. I felt responsible, but also shame, and against all reason, I still do.

Years later, whilst visiting relatives on the west coast, I was lured into the local library by the offer of cheap books withdrawn from stock – ironically, one of the withdrawn was on overcoming shyness. André Gorz caught my eye, and I slid 50 pence across the counter. I hadn't expected to see her. She turned Gorz and glanced at the title for a moment – *Farewell to the Working Class* – then she glanced at me.

The tramp who saved me

Paul Tritschler

2014

Wandering timelessly between Greece and Rome and Egypt, I came across Mamu, God of Dreams. It is a beautiful thing. For a time it seemed as though this creation of the ancients was from a bright and glorious future, rendering the here and now a dull and decadent past.

It is difficult to see the creative power of the minds that created this god of dreams, to imagine their imaginativeness. How does it compare with the mindset that is today immersed in unreal reality and wanton consumerism – are we moving forward? I shuffled along and dipped into the next exhibit, like a connoisseur tasting a range of different wines at various stalls.

That was the British Museum. I was now sitting at the window of a cafe in Notting Hill Gate, looking out passively at passing machines and global signage. A man across the street, dipping into a bin, rescued an unopened plastic bottle of milk from deep within and squeezed it into one of four very full plastic bags before pushing on to the next at a steady clip.

The receptacles hold assets to those who form a circle of cognoscenti, and they have to be quick to get the good stuff people absently throw away: a packet of cigarettes from someone who made the snap decision to quit; a tossed bag of blueberry muffins past their sell-by date; an unfinished can of beer. Between Pizza Express and Prontaprint, the man excavated the second bin, extending the full length of his arm to hollow to the bottom and lifted something out. I was eager to know what it was. There was a discerning look as he weighed in his mind whether it was a collectable before deciding to let gravity reclaim the mystery object. Perhaps someone further along would assess its market value differently.

Soon after, a woman of indeterminate age determinedly tried her luck in the first bin – I could see three from my vantage point – then quickly moved along to the second. He was now at the third, and I imagined if she caught up there could be trouble. She picked out a bunch of withered flowers tied decoratively with a ribbon – evidently something he considered worthless – and cradled them in the crook of her arm, before walking on a little more slowly than before, perhaps plunged in thought with her petals or simply keeping a safe distance from the plunderer a few steps ahead.

Bin scavenging is fraught with dangers and demands, and is as fiercely competitive as any job in the visible world. Here, too, time is the enemy; for whilst they are in competition with each other, they are also racing against the clock to beat the men in yellow jackets whose job it is to empty the bins into the mouths of guzzling trucks.

They are caught in a unity of opposites, simultaneously inside and outside the world – subjected to regular routes and routines, but only in order to sustain life in a sleeping bag. How they got there? Relieved of wages and possessions, anyone can join this club; admission is not restricted to addicts or the mentally ill. The distance from the cliff's edge to the bottom may be vast even for those on an average salary, but the descent is rapid.

The woman with dead flowers wasn't born on the street. Perhaps the sun was shining brightly for her as she sang her lungs out in class. A beam of sunlight on her desk, and inside that desk pens and pencils, a jotter with her name on it, a skipping rope, a treasured note from an early love interest. I see her running around the yard with other children at playtime, using up some of that excess energy, laughing and giggling, hearing children call her by her real name. Now, she has her head in bins and is invisible, all but dead to the world.

The man who walked past, obviously at some point his life changed. Maybe it was sudden, but equally it could have been gradual – losing his grip finger by finger until unable to cling to the ledge any longer and forced to fall.

People don't give up the fight easily, though. I met a family in Walsall who were pulling up the floorboards in the upstairs bedroom for fuel – from financial desperation tearing up the timbers of what was essentially their raft and hanging on to whatever may be left. I helped them break up their floor. That night, I had been on the street opposite their house in relentless rain trying to hitch a lift back to the motorway. They called me over and invited me in to dry off and warm up by a roaring fire, and for the next few hours he and his wife cheerfully competed to tell stories of better times. Their son was the colour of death.

I met that family on a miserable trip that started and finished in freezing rain. Almost as soon as I arrived in London, I turned and headed home to Scotland, unsure why I set out in the first place. On my way back, the day started off bad and got steadily worse. It was dim from dawn, and lifts from motorists were few and very far between. Most were only going a few miles along the road.

Somewhere on the bleak A1, I found myself stranded, numb with the cold and wet. At one point, I felt the situation was deteriorating so badly, in fact, that I felt compelled to stand in the middle of the road to stop a jeep – I got the lift, but only for half a mile, then he stopped to turn in towards a concealed entrance to his farm and I was on the wayside again. Once out of the jeep and back into the cruel, treeless landscape, there emerged from behind me an old tramp wearing several coats and a beaming smile – an instantly friendly and overwhelmingly sociable Glaswegian. My heart sank.

To my eternal shame, I did not want to be burdened with a bushy bearded beggar, and most likely an alcoholic, not least because he greatly reduced the chance of a motorist stopping; a long-haired teenager appearing to motorists as a safe, somewhat typical student, I stood a better chance alone.

But the ice broke, and with few cars passing it hardly mattered for the time being, so we walked on together for what probably turned out to be a fair stretch of road, and got so caught up in conversation that until he asked I quite forgot that I was hungry. Starving in fact, I told him, and immediately foil-wrapped sandwiches were produced from out of the deep pockets of one of his overcoats.

Being a vegetarian, I gave him the contents of the sandwiches back and just ate the buttered white bread. His face darkened; I didn't know real hunger, he said. However, he was back to his cheerful self in about one second, giving views and advice on everything: Scottish history they won't tell you in school, how to find out if a rabbit's at home using a twig, and ways to get sandwiches – find the back door of hospital kitchens, domestics are always willing to help.

After an hour or two of fast, friendly and fascinating talk about history, rabbits and sandwiches, I reminded myself that a raggedy old down-and-out was a hitchhiker's hindrance – how had he ever got this far? – and declared we should go our separate ways to increase the chance of getting a lift. If I was so convinced, why was I weighed down by guilt? He thought I considered him beneath me – I could read him reading me, and I suppose he was right – but he resumed his smile and rose above this to emphasise we should stay together. If it came to it, he said, he knew ways of surviving a bad run on the motorway, but I was emphatic, and quickly walked on ahead.

In the hour that followed, darkness descended and with it despair. I couldn't see where I was walking along the grass verge, and frequently slipped. The rain fell heavily, and I was soaked through, shivering and weak. Then hope in the form of distant car headlights shone through the pelting rain, and in desperation I stuck out my thumb from the edge of the road. The car sprayed me as it passed and showed no signs of stopping, then quite suddenly it pulled in to the verge ahead and I ran towards the pulsating hazard lights as fast as I was able.

I pulled open the door and climbed in to the front seat, thanking the driver profusely for saving my life. He turned the wheel to pull back on to the road. 'No need to thank me,' he said, 'it was this guy insisted I stop,' indicating with his thumb the tramp, with the big smile, sitting in the back seat.

My night with the Beatles

Michael Elcock

2014

Renfield Street is packed solid with people. I fight through the crowd to the stage door and bang on it with my fist. Jimmy Murray is already inside. Jimmy is training in Aberdeen along with me. We're both still in our teens.

'They can only get 3,000 people in here,' Jimmy explains when I'm safely inside the theatre. 'All these punters outside want in, but they haven't got tickets.' 'They seem to be getting quite wound up about it,' I tell him. The crowd stretches for blocks, filling the surrounding streets, stopping the traffic.

The theatre manager explains what he wants us to do. A security man stands at his side. About 30 of us trainee managers have been drafted in from all over Scotland and the north of England to help run the evening's event, a gala live show with the Beatles – as it turns out, one of the last live shows they'll ever do indoors in Britain.

'You've got tae keep the wimmen off them,' explains the security man when the manager has finished. 'Stop them frae stormin' the stage.' Both Jimmy and I are over six feet tall, and so we're directed to stand right in front of the stage, facing the audience, with our backs to the performance.

'We've got time to nip across the road for a pint before the show,' says Jimmy, checking his watch. 'There's a good hour yet.' We check with the bruiser at the stage door so that he'll recognise us when we return, then let ourselves out into the crowd, and force our way across the street. The crowd is thicker than ever, but the bar opposite is surprisingly empty. We sit up at the counter and order beer. A young woman slides into a seat next to us at the bar, a dark-eyed, brown-skinned girl. She glances at us.

'You with the show?' she asks, eyeing the tuxedos that all Rank's management people have to wear. Her voice is cool, her accent unmistakeably American. She's barely in her 20s. 'Yes.' We introduce ourselves. She tells us her name is Mary Wells, and we realise that she's one of the stars in the show – she'll be singing on stage just before the Beatles. She's just had a big hit in Britain and the United States called *My Guy*, and she is quite lovely, with a level of assurance and sophistication we're not used to finding in a woman who's virtually the same age as we are.

We don't know what to say to her at first; don't know how to speak with someone like this from another world, sitting with us in a Glasgow bar. Our beer arrives and Mary says, 'I'll get them. I'd like to buy the drinks. Everyone's been very kind to me since I came here'.

Neither of us realise then just how big a star Mary is in the United States. She was one of the first singers to bring an evocative mix of folk and gospel and blues to popular

attention, and many consider her the true founder of the famous Motown sound. She's a close collaborator of the legendary Smokey Robinson, and the Beatles have specifically invited her to tour with them. But Mary doesn't say anything about these things; she doesn't speak about herself at all. Her gentle humility and interest in her surroundings opens us up and we pass half an hour with her, talking about the United States, about Detroit where she's from, about ourselves.

She's unusually unassuming for someone in the theatre business, but when Jimmy and I compare notes later, we both find that we're left with a small, almost imperceptible impression of sadness about her, an air of loneliness. We put it down to homesickness.

When it's time to go back to the theatre, we push our way to the stage door, shielding Mary from the crowd. There's a smell of burning in the air, and the crowd is crammed across the street, from one side to the other. We hear the sound of breaking glass from somewhere nearby. A parked car has been rolled on its side and set on fire. Police and fire bells fill the air, and the Glasgow Polis move in on horseback to patrol the street and push the people back.

It's just as wild inside the theatre. The stalls and the dress circle are overflowing with young girls. There's hardly a man in the place. Jim and I move out and take up our stations in front of the stage, to the right of centre, at the foot of one of the main aisles.

Sounds Incorporated are the lead-off group. They come on stage, and they're good. Not every group plays well live; some of them are simply products of the recording studio. Sounds Inc are better than most, but not quite as good as their records. Mary comes on when they're finished, and sings with a voice full of character and soul. She is lovely and talented, but somehow out of place in this setting, with an audience of crazy girls who only want to hear the Beatles.

Then the Beatles come on, the four of them bouncing onto the stage, with John Lennon in the lead. They pick up their instruments, and the place erupts. Young women flood into the aisles and surge in a wave towards the stage. The Beatles begin to play. The screaming starts and we're right in the middle of it; a thin, black line in our monkey suits, standing in no man's land between the stage and 3,000 frenzied women.

The Beatles launch right in to *Twist and Shout*. And the songs come belting out without a break. *Can't Buy Me Love*, *If I Fell In Love With You*, *A Hard Day's Night*, and the others. The sound man cranks up the volume to combat the noise of the screaming, and the women charge down on the stage like a manic tide, and fling themselves, weeping and crying and screaming, at our thin wall of defenders. The Edinburgh Academy never prepared me for this.

The Beatles are good – very good – much better live than they are on record. The sound they make is extraordinary. It blasts out of massive speaker stacks that reach up to the proscenium, and I find myself staggering under the onslaught, temporarily unbalanced by it.

I catch one girl and try to push her back up the aisle, and four more launch themselves

at me. They climb over the seats, and throw themselves over the top of the other patrons like a medieval horde, while the Beatles play on, moving seamlessly from one song into another, each one sending the audience into fresh paroxysms of ecstasy and hysteria. Girls further back who can't reach the stage begin to throw things; combs, lipstick, and pieces of underwear sail over our heads, onto the stage. Lennon kicks a brassiere back into the audience, laughs, and plays on.

We try linking arms for a few minutes, but it's hopeless. The women burrow under us, try to climb over us, dart between our legs, threaten to overwhelm us with a crush of massed bodies. I catch two more of them, one on each arm, and struggle to hold station. The music powers on, louder and louder, the volume so high that I'm starting to feel dizzy, the heat excruciating under the lights. But I know that if I fall down I'll be trampled.

The Beatles change to a softer instrumental piece from *A Hard Day's Night*. Another girl flings herself at me in an effort to reach the stage. She is utterly distraught, weeping uncontrollably, her face and hair wet with tears. She falls against me, too exhausted now to scream. I hold on like death, and suddenly she relaxes. 'Oh, this is nice,' she says.

Her eyes close and she holds my arms about her and rocks backwards and forwards. I catch a glimpse of Jimmy beside me, his bow tie askew, one sleeve of his jacket torn off. Two girls are beating at his chest and face with clenched fists, trying to climb over him onto the stage. He looks as though he's been in a Glasgow brawl. Except that there is lipstick on his cheek, and a huge grin on his face.

It goes on like this for an hour, and then the show is over. I feel like a piece of blotting paper, saturated and then wrung out. But we'd all been invited at the briefing for post-show drinks upstairs in the theatre restaurant, and now we're just about ready for it. After the curtain comes down, we wait until the theatre is empty and nothing is left onstage except for the speaker stacks and Ringo's drum kit. We find that the madness has shifted backstage; it's pandemonium, as if half the fans from the front of the house have somehow found their way to the back of the theatre.

Paul, Ringo, George and then John push their way through the crowd, and sweep two steps at a time up the wide staircase, Lennon making faces and tossing out quips. Girls grab at the Beatles' clothes, trying to tear off souvenirs. Jimmy and I muscle our way through the crush, and climb the stairs. Everyone is packed like pilchards into a huge room. The Beatles are at the front, guzzling cakes and hors d'oeuvres, but we find ourselves stuck at the back behind a sea of heads. We each grab a bottle of Carlsberg and look around for Mary Wells, but we can't see her in the crush. So we hang around for as long as it takes us to drink the beer, and then we head off in search of a pub.

It's the night before my 20th birthday, the night I take a drink with the Beatles; sort of. It seems like a long time ago.

Crumbs! All scones fresh this morning

Tom Morton

2014

Ayr was the glamorous Big Town for me growing up in the late 1960s and early 70s. I was reared in Troon, just along the coast, with its green-domed Deathstar of a school, its harbour, shipbreaking yard, Ballast Bank, beaches and strange, aerial-heavy wee ship lurking off the coast, apparently housing something called Radio Scotland ('so beat the ban/and join the clan/on Station 242').

Troon was equipped with an electrical shop which sold records (Fairbairns), and later the wild and crazy hippy hotbed called Speed Records – logo: a mushroom. There was McGuigan's for books, a Menzies, the shell of the closed George Cinema and an unheated seawater swimming pool.

Getting out of Troon was of paramount importance. So we would cycle to Prestwick Airport and beyond, or sometimes be driven in my mum's Morris Minor to the sprawl of Ayr, which had a really massive Odeon picture house, site of my first exposure to the cinematic arts in the form of Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds Are Go*. There was the Record and Card Centre, a viciously unfriendly musical instrument shop in Sandgate called Thomson's, and the forbidden neon threat of Bobby Jones's dance hall, its massive sign promising hell and damnation to wee gospel hall boys like me.

Ayr was the scene of so many crucial, growing-up moments: The first kiss (post-debate dance, Mainholm Academy). First guitar (bought at long-lost Cuthbertson's). Not being allowed to attend Rory Gallagher's Caledonian Hotel gig. Hearing that Jimi Hendrix had died. Buying Richard and Linda Thompson's *I Want to See the Bright Lights Tonight*. My first performing gig (Victoria Hall, now Riverside Evangelical Church). First long-distance cycle (to the Heads of Ayr).

What, and where, did we eat? My mum liked The Coffee Club, which had a branch in Kilmarnock, but my favourite for family outings, anywhere, Ayr, Kilmarnock or the vast smoke-blackened megacity of Glasgow, was a Stakis steakhouse. Two courses or three. Prawn cocktail. Mixed grill. Black Forest gâteau. Coffee with cream that you poured carefully over a teaspoon so it floated.

This week, we're back for a family wedding, and we've rented a flat on the seafront, where I can contentedly sit with a pair of binoculars and my laptop, watching ships and identifying them on AIS. I've been helping my dad clear out his loft and garage, which has meant two visits to the Heathfield Recycling Centre, where presumably the world's supply of Soylent Green is made from the county's rubbish. And I've wandered around Ayr like a hungry phantom.

Ayr Town Centre. Legendarily photographed by a press snapper on the occasion of

the famous racing driver's tragic death, when a picture editor shouted 'get me a shot of Ayrton Senna'. It's in a bit of state, with mouldering malls leading off the High Street, and one airy, pristine one near the station full of the usual suspects – Debenhams, H&M, Primark. Marks and Spencer is still down by the Auld Brig, but rumour is they want to move out of town – to Heathfield, in fact, where there's a retail park full of shiny, pre-recycling electrical equipment.

That would devastate the already ravaged ancient end of High Street, which is awash with charity shops, barbers, pound emporia and the other short-term renters of long-empty property. Attempts are being made to renew and refurbish the area, which is home to some of Ayr's oldest and loveliest buildings. Lurking in an alley near the Anchor Bar is the lovely, 16th-century and fully-restored Loudon Hall, and further down towards the river mouth you can find the dangerously teetering remains of Cromwell's Citadel wall.

What's left of it encircles the upmarket Fort area of the town, where gracious sandstone terraces and large villas gaze not out to sea (too plebeian), but onto serene parkland. There you will find the remains of St John's Tower, where in 1315, just after Bannockburn, Robert the Bruce arrived to check out the charity shops. Other visitors included John Knox and Mary Queen of Scots. Doubtless they were well fed and watered.

Finding somewhere to eat and drink in today's Ayr is not a problem. There are dozens of pubs and coffee shops, of varying style and quality. Alas, bad cappuccino has become the curse of Scottish communities, often accompanied by something even more distressing, the microwaved stale scone. Over-sensitive to the risks, in unfamiliar establishments I now question thoroughly before consumption: do you grind your own beans? Who roasts them? Do your lattes come with two shots or a measly one? And crucially: when were your scones baked?

This almost caused my ejection from the excellent Pandora's in Sandgate. Eyes glinting, the uniformed waitress informed me that *all* scones were fresh *that morning*, and I could have a choice of treacle, cheese, plain or fruit, with butter or jam. In the panelled back room, I settled down with *The Herald* of Glasgow, Scotland, to read about unilateral declarations of independence. Crumbs.

I have also discovered the delights of Su Casa, a bean-roasting and flat-white serving establishment in the Lorne Arcade. The rosewater, rhubarb and cardamom cake sounds appalling, but is magnificent.

And Su Casa is expanding, deep into the oldest part of Ayr's centre. The Artisan Lounge is opening in an Old Bridge Road basement. A 'bistro-deli' may sound worrying, and there is a risk of acoustic crooning. But as a tiny sign that bohemia may be blooming among the Semi-Chems and moneylenders, it's heartening.

Later, I head for the station and on the way pop into Big Sparra Records, which combines second-hand rock and folk rarities (Amon Düül II, £70? Anne Briggs' first LP, so sought-after it's unpriced?) with, of all things, a Post Office branch. Vinyl delivery.

Nearby is a music shop, successor to Cuthbertson's and Thomson's, called Ayr Guitar. I pass the Gaiety Theatre, which I performed in earlier in the year with a real guitar and is a jewel in the old town's somewhat tarnished crown.

Train to Glasgow, a business meeting, and then back, for a late-night perambulation through virtually empty streets to the flat. I pass the thatched kitsch of the Tam O' Shanter Inn, from which the strains of a band wrestling heavily with Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Sweet Home Alabama* emanate. I wonder what Robert would have made of it?

At the flat, I can see Arran twinkling in the distance, and, if I look right, Troon. Time for a snack. I have one carry-out treacle scone left, slightly stale. I stick it in the microwave. Tomorrow, it's back to the recycling centre. There are plenty of memories still to dispose of.

Reflections on turning 50

Gerry Hassan

2014

I knew from an early age I would turn 50 in 2014. It was simple maths. At age eight, reading the *Tell Me Why* encyclopedias of facts and figures, I became aware of a sense of time. Apparently, the sun would explode in around five billion years wiping out all life on planet earth and any chance I had of immortality. And at around the same time, confronted with this reality, I worked out that I would be 36 in 2000, 50 in 2014 and 86 in 2050. Plenty time, I thought, for lots of plans and dreams.

Often the concerns of an over-bright boy or girl confronted with the mysteries of life and universe, are about trying to place yourself and idea of self in it. Whereas, in actual fact, these are deep, timeless and philosophical questions which have taken up the time and efforts of some of our greatest thinkers.

I grew up as an only child with a palpable self-consciousness, large amounts of time and space for reflection, and a constant curiosity and hunger to find out more about the world. It was, as a young boy, a big positive not to have siblings. I had no-one I had to share a bedroom with, or be bullied by, or look out for and protect from bullying at school or in our neighbourhood. And I had both quiet and room for contemplation, and my own private world when I wanted to retreat to it.

I have always been very sociable and outgoing, as well as shy and reserved. From my childhood, I loved blethering with friends: my parents' house in my teenage years was often filled with neighbours and acquaintances dropping in for a chat or advice. This balance between space and company is one which has shaped me into my adult years: of wanting to be part of collegiate discussions and happenings, but never sublimating my whole identity to them. It is part an insider/outsider thing, and always wanting to retain some critical detachment.

Politics interested me from an early age. My first ever political memory is of my parents bemoaning the dogma and insensitivity of Ted Heath's Tory Government in the early 1970s. To my parents he was 'the most right-wing Tory you could imagine,' a frequent trope of the time on the left, ludicrous though it sounds now.

Life was always more than this. There was the tension between action and words inherent in how my parents saw the world. My dad was an armchair activist communist, whereas my mum was a genuine community organiser and feminist. There was, to put it mildly, quite a degree of difference and disagreement between the two.

There was also the world of books, ideas and culture. To my parents, these were the pathway to enlightenment and knowledge, and thus, a better life. None of this was ever articulated, but implied, and what it was never reduced to was money and status.

Instead, the better world they invoked and hoped they could be part of bringing into being was about not working in a job which didn't draw on your talents, and the liberating power of education and greater opportunity. This was the good side of the British post-war dream before it all went sour.

Talking about my and your generation

I suppose I am implicitly talking about generational stories. The need and importance for us to carry collective memories and political and cultural imaginations across the ages, and hear and understand those without being a prisoner of the past or one era.

One set of conversations missing from the recent independence referendum was the connection and listening between different generations. There were many examples of this. There was the rather offensive comments of some disappointed Yes supporters after the vote that their side could just wait for the older voters 'to die off', giving the impression of wanting to bring it on as quickly as possible.

Another and one more nuanced was that of older, pessimistic voices from a generation who found their voice in the 1960s and 1970s. These were often once radical currents, associated with feminism, the new left and scornful of the worst aspects of the Labour Party, but which now seems in places, out of despair, to advocate that people should turn to voting Labour.

This is the Scotland which benefited the most from the British post-war dream. Yet, the world did not turn out the way some people wanted it to, and for all the chances they have had and opportunities, they now feel a sense of defeat and disappointment. These are perfectly understandable responses, but they then turn to the new young radicals thrown up by the indyref, and dismiss what they see as their naivety and idealism. In many senses, this seems a conversation going on in this older generation's head – between their older and younger selves – but one that they don't recognise as such.

But such views should be heard and respected, no matter how unreflective some of us might think them. Loss, confusion and even self-denial are powerful human emotions and it is important to listen to and understand this version of a generational story. And as important, this spirit of '68 should reflect on the long retreat from its bright hopes of youths to its insular, defeatist pessimism today.

One of the positive developments I have experienced in the last few years has been the eruption of a new generation of diverse voices, who it has been a real joy to get to know. Some of Scotland just do not want to see the different country being created and emerging in front of our very eyes, preferring to cling on to conventional and out-dated labels.

Thus, the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) has grown from nowhere in a couple of years to being a force in the land, and last weekend put on an impressive and wide-ranging conference which drew 3,000 people from all walks of life and backgrounds. But for Michael McCann (Labour MP for East Kilbride) this could be

dismissed as a gathering of 'Trots: extremists, infiltrators, ppl who follow a revolutionary agenda'.

An important reason for RIC's strength is that they have an awareness of history. They recognise that the lefts which came before them have been defined by defeat and retreat, and critically, an accommodation with the forces of neo-liberalism. They surmise, correctly I think, that this path is a road to nowhere, and that a younger, more educated and political savvy generation do not want to repeat the mistakes of their parents and grandparents. That doesn't mean, as I think they are aware, that they have all the answers.

Living through actual history

As one grows older, the difference between lived history and learned history becomes more apparent. When I was a young man in my late teens and twentysomethings I knew off the top of my head every World Cup final and who played, the result, and where it took place. That is no longer true, but something more profound happens with the passing of time, namely, the creation of real memories.

Instead of lists, what can be recalled, what is more vivid and rich, are particular moments of a specific occasion, time and place, and with it a whole panoply of emotions, hopes, fears and disappointments. As you grow older and develop a more potent awareness of lived perspectives, some of this falls more into place. The nature of timescales, and your place and emotional understanding of them, emerge more prominently, which made less sense when you were younger.

Thus, the year I was born (1964) was only a short period in relative terms (19 years) from the end of the Second World War. It did not feel like that at the time in my young head. I can vividly recall in the 1970s a whole generation of young people saying to their elders things like, 'Stop going on about the war'. I know to my embarrassment I said something along these lines several times, and amazingly never got a 'thick ear'.

This was a generational revolt against the stuffy, fusty, nostalgiafest, *Dad's Army* loving, Battle of Britain referencing legions of older folk, who had actually stood up to and defeated Hitler, built the welfare state, and endured great sacrifices in the process.

This throws up some difficult questions about today. The fall of Thatcher was a generation ago. However, when she died in 2013, the battle over her legacy, pro and anti, was as if this was a struggle over the present. To some she had 'saved Britain' and single-handedly 'won the Cold War'; to others she had 'destroyed everything of worth there was in Britain' and worse. There was something both revealing and rather alarming in the strength and partisan nature of each set of claims, given the distance in time.

The passing of time and the age of the self

Understanding the importance of all of this is sadly missing from most of public life, whether in Scotland or the UK. One writer who consistently explores this is *The*

Guardian's Ian Jack, who looks back on past ages and his own personal experiences. He does so while attempting to put his views and life in the context of how the rhythm of life has changed, from industry to Empire and class.

A specific Jack piece explored the memory of his father through his bookcase and books that he inherited. The case in question had come into the family in the 1930s, and by dint of accident more than design, Jack had left his father's book collection as it had been in about 1944. This preserved a window into the learning of his father's self-educated 'curious mind' and the young man who brought Jack into the world.

This brings us to the subject of ageing and the idea of the self. Lynne Segal has written with insight and sensitivity about growing older as a woman in her recent book *Out of Time*. But in this, the experience of men is mostly missing or dismissed, reduced in places to a near caricature. This has been the fate of older men in many feminist tropes such as Susan Sontag's writing, no doubt feeling the need to correct the seismic imbalance and centuries-long effect of sexism and double discrimination which older women endure.

The shifting of time leads to contemplating the fundamental notion of the self. The writer Ursula Le Guin in *The Wave in the Mind* makes the contentious point that cats have an innate sense of what they are, whereas dogs have no such insight. Le Guin goes on from this premise to map out the confusions of humanity:

A lot of us humans are like dogs: we really don't know what size we are, how we're shaped, what we look like... We're like dogs, maybe: we don't really know where we begin and end. In space, yes; but in time, no.

So here I am having turned 50 in 2014. I am in good spirits and health, particularly so for a Scottish man from a working-class background. I am optimistic, hopeful and motivated in life, but like many, also have periods of doubt and blueness. What I don't have is any feeling of Scottish working-class fatalism which hangs over many men I know, including some of the middle-class men who come from working class backgrounds. Some of these men say things like, 'It is amazing I am 63, I could drop dead at any point,' or 'I will be happy to get to 70. That will do me'. That seems to me a very peculiar self-limiting outlook on life.

This was a milestone of a year for Scotland and myself, and in a small way, at least from my perspective, the two were deeply intertwined. While many focused on the big happening of the independence referendum, life goes on in ways both more universal and personal.

This year witnessed my 50th birthday party, publishing two books, undertake Scotland's first ever 'Festival of Ideas' with Roanne Dods, and running the last Changin Scotland at the Ceilidh Place, Ullapool, after 12 years and two-dozen weekends. I even had the pleasure of doing a DJ set in the Commonwealth Games cultural programme;

and on the night of the referendum, I spent part of it with the impressive folk of National Collective, witnessing a whole gathering of young people identify with a cause, hurt and grow up in front of my eyes.

There was another side to the year: my partner Rosie's dad, Cyril, dying at the age of 89; my travels around Scotland with Eddie visiting small towns and football grounds; my friend Eileen become seriously ill; another friend with deep connection, Jean, re-enter my life; and a whole host of special moments from late night conversations with Fintan O'Toole to the wonderful, evocative Billy Bragg play two acoustic numbers in the closing session of the 'Festival of Ideas' at Govanhill Swimming Pool on Glasgow's southside.

What underlies all of this is the search for the good life: any answer to which has to include a range of experiences and enjoyments, from amicable connections to long-term friendships, stimulating ideas, intimacy, empathy and love. There are issues of material security, physical mobility, and as we get older, the perilous navigating of choice and autonomy. Laughter is important, as is joy and sadness, the frivolous and fun; and quiet and solitude. In an ageing society, where this is often posed by politicians as a negative, and where increasingly more of us live alone for longer periods, there is an acute need to get the balance right between all of these.

In the long sweep of history, this takes us back to the memories of the Second World War, the story which has almost become a foundation myth of modern Britain. My father-in-law, Cyril Ilett, fought and was nearly killed on Anzio beachhead, south of Rome, in January 1944. He survived, injured, and led a full life, working all his adult days, and raised three children. He epitomised the best and the most understated characteristics of his generation: hopeful, curious about the world to the end, and with a quiet anti-establishment sensibility which meant it was apt that his last words this summer were 'Sod the buggers'.

One of the most powerful undercurrents in the story of Cyril and his wife Joan, who survives him and now lives in Sheffield, is that their post-war British dream has been trashed, diminished and destroyed by the political classes. They will say in their defence they were only trying to reform and adapt it in light of big challenges whether globalisation or the need for austerity. There are still good politicians in Westminster, including in the three main parties, but the system and its class, have long ago stopped representing and giving voice to decent people like Cyril and Joan.

The writer and thinker Stuart Hall towards the end of his life looked back on his achievements and work, and posed that increasingly he had come to the conclusion that 'life isn't primarily a self-project', and went on:

The first thing is, as I've got older I believe less and less in the language of the independent self, personal achievement, the autonomy of the individual... Secondly, I'm less and less impressed by the singularity of my own contribution but value more

the many collective occasions when I've worked together with others, whether in intellectual or political activities.

We are not the sole authors or writers of our own lives, but socially interconnected and interdependent; the idea of the sovereign, independent self making their own decisions in life is a deception of recent times. It is also true that there were many expressions of this from the 1960s onwards: a progressive selfish individualism of the baby boomer generation, alongside the asocial individualism of hyper-market capitalism.

The challenge of the good life and good society is finding ways to express the balance between individualism and collective expression, and to do both in ways which are not damaging or suffocating. I am instinctively an optimist, as well as a bit of a contrarian, and at my point in life I feel that in Scotland, our society, culture and politics are posed at a crucial crossroads, where we can address making new forms of coming together and living well.

When I turned 50 in March, Rosie had, without myself noticing, removed from the house my father's tattered 1963 NCR Coronation Shield that he was awarded for winning the company's annual national golf tournament, and had it lovingly restored. The surprise and warmth I felt opening it on that Friday afternoon was immense. Here was something that really mattered given back to me: an act of thoughtfulness, generosity and love. It was the nearest thing to Ian Jack's father's bookcase: emblematic of the passing of time, connecting father and son, and a generational story. I can think of no finer symbol in my year of the importance of the big and the very personal.

The woman who ran towards the fire

Laurie Gayle on Jo Cox

2016

The following article was written in the immediate aftermath of the murder of the young Labour MP Jo Cox on 16 June 2016

The most important people in life are the ones that end up defining for us what certain experiences feel like. They all matter. They become the moulds we cast around feelings like love, admiration, courage. They're the prototype for friends, lovers, heroes. We will forever spend our lives trying to make everyone else who succeeds them fit into the margins they've drawn. It is our blessing and also our curse because, sadly, we often don't know who these people are until they're gone.

Jo.

Just two letters. Such a small name for a person who was so very much larger than life. Ten years ago, that name was quite formidable when I began working at Oxfam, a novitiate at the altar of humanitarian work. She was then one of Oxfam's brightest – the sort of colleague everyone knew of and wanted to know. She was a force of nature. She was magical. She was a hurricane.

She was a template. The embodiment of everything I grew to love about the people who choose humanitarian work of all shades and gradients as a career. Adaptable, quick on the uptake, independent, wickedly funny, analytical, open, accepting, intellectually curious, principled and kind. Traits made all the more impressive when you consider the chaotic, dangerous and stressful context in which most are asked to live and work. These are the people who run towards the fire. A mishpocha of individuals who, repeatedly seeing the world at its worst, love anyway. It is not the type of work that lends itself to poetry or screenplays but it's been said that, far and away, the best prize life still offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.

When she left the world of aid work and entered the world of politics, she kept these values at her centre. In the 13 months she sat in parliament, she was one of the most outspoken and vociferous advocates for refugees and the harshest of critics against the conflicts and regimes which dispossess them of their homelands.

I remember checking the news this past autumn whilst working in a Balkan refugee camp and seeing her photo pop up. Among many callous, ill-written articles deriding the people who sought safety on our shores, there she was – just Jo – holding a sign reading 'Refugees Welcome'. I didn't know then why it meant so much to know she was 'on our side', but it did. Surely if someone like her was leading other decision-makers on this issue, there was hope that others would really see the people at the heart of this 'crisis' and not the propaganda.

And then, this May, when the government was to vote on the Lord Dubs' amendment to bring 3,000 unaccompanied child refugees to the UK, she stood in parliament and passionately said that she would 'risk life and limb' to extricate her own two children from anything close to the hellholes child refugees have fled.

But what I didn't realise – what so many of us didn't realise – is that compassion isn't just a noun. Compassion is a revolutionary act. By standing up so fiercely for the most vulnerable, she appears to have in fact risked her life. I don't know how or when the world got so complacent and comfortable with this current style of politics. It has been normalised that our politicians take a sort of moral diuretic, watering down principles and values that have long defined us and instead flood our political landscape with suspicions and blame transference. All of the important attributes that underline political courage are so diluted that they now seem imperceptible and gathering it all up seems as impossible as emptying the ocean with a teaspoon. But this is where opportunity can present itself out of tragedy.

After my grandmother's death, I read Joan Didion's astounding *Year of Magical Thinking* – a book that anyone going through grief should read (and one I re-read every now and again). It's essentially about how we continue a story after an ending; how we continue writing someone's story after their ending. For Jo, this work has only just begun and it is something anyone who has been affected by her life or her story can contribute towards.

Compassion is a revolutionary act. But it is also a necessary act.

Waitressing tips for life

Eloise Vajk

2016

I was a waitress for 10 years until I got the job I have now, and not a single minute of it was easy. But service jobs are simple to pick up, and taking home a wallet full of cash tips is a lot more appealing than an unpaid internship, which is why I probably stayed in that line of work for far longer than was advisable for my own mental wellbeing. That said, I learned a huge amount of transferable skills in my decade of food service.

There's nothing like serving and cleaning up after other people to teach you about human nature. If you really want to test yourself, stand between humanity and its next hot meal. As a waiter or waitress, you're exposed to people from all walks of life, and you're expected to make every single one of them happy. I find the lessons I learned helping me every day in my work now.

My first lesson: Communicate

I learned this lesson hard, and I learned it fast. Whether it's the whole kitchen shouting at you, or a customer vowing never to return because they didn't want ketchup and you should have known that via your psychic powers, communication is key in any fast paced, stressful situation. I can't tell you how many times a little communication would have gone a long way. I'm not a mind reader, and neither is anyone else. Don't expect people to know what you need from them – ask them for it. And ask questions. If you don't know, don't pretend you do. It's going to take a lot less time to have it explained to you than for someone else to clear up your mess after the fact.

Lesson two: Pull your weight

Being on time and ready to work is paramount in the restaurant trade. Working with people who aren't there because they're too hungover, their alarm didn't go off, or they left a uni deadline too late – waitressing is the kind of job that people often don't care about, so they don't care about calling in sick. But this impacts hugely on the team they've left behind. Likewise, when someone turns up but isn't taking responsibility for their workload, there is no room for sulking and refusing to take on the extra work. Hungry people aren't patient people. If a job needs done, take it on. Working in a restaurant throws you into a very intense community of people, and you need to know how to be part of that community.

Lesson three: Be organised

To work as a server, you're the point of contact between so many people – the manager, the customer, the bar staff, the maître d', the kitchen. There's nothing like keeping an

ever-changing rotation of demands in your head for 12 hours straight to strengthen your skills in mental organisation. You learn how to adapt any natural multitasking skills you have to a higher level of efficiency, because in a restaurant, everything needs to be done right now. Food gone cold, drinks after starters, missing menus – nothing can afford to wait. Instead, you learn to never walk anywhere with empty hands, always anticipating the next 10 minutes. Throwing yourself into the fray without an action plan is only going to leave you flustered and panicky. Working under pressure hones your multitasking skills – something that never goes amiss in an office. These days, I have the luxury of a written 'to do' list that I can delegate to 'tomorrow', 'next week', 'sometime in November' – not a chance when your deadline is the three-hour lunch rush.

Lesson four: Attitude matters

My grandpa told me that life is 10% what happens to you, and 90% how you react to it. Waitressing was never my dream job, but I made a point of going in with as much enthusiasm as those who had chosen this as their career. Arriving at work every day expecting it to be bad will only help ensure that happens. When the wattage of your smile determines the total of your pay check, you literally can't afford to be in a bad mood. I couldn't change that the pay was bad, that the hours were long, or that my schedule was the opposite of my friends – none of that would be made any different by sulking. But how I approached my job determined whether my day was long or it flew by.

Lesson five: Diplomacy

This is the last one, and probably the most important. I learned diplomacy by dealing with the public all day, every day. I learned it by managing hungry parents who were even more badly behaved than their toddlers, relaying horrendous off-menu orders to the kitchen and getting three separate sittings done on a Saturday night and still making people feel like they had four hours at the table when they only had 90 minutes. I also learned when I should stand up to my manager for rounding down my tips to make up his own pay check, when it wasn't okay to be shouted at in front of a packed restaurant, and when I should stick to my guns because the customer actually isn't always right. Not everybody is going to treat you with respect, but you should always treat yourself with respect.

Waitressing taught me a lot of skills I used going into my first 'proper' job. Hard work often goes unnoticed, and that generally means you're doing it well. You never know how someone else's day is going, and it costs you nothing to be nice; so often these things come back to you. I learned to read people and adjust my behaviour accordingly, to anticipate needs, and to toughen up.

Mostly, I learned that if I can handle a room full of tired, grumpy, tipsy people on a bank holiday Monday in a heatwave, two chefs down and a new start behind the bar, I can handle anything.

The stuff of legend: Gavin Stamp

Eileen Reid

2018

I first clapped eyes on Gavin Stamp – a towering, imposing figure – standing on the landing of 1 Moray Place at the inaugural launch of the Alexander Thomson Society. Over 100 people were crammed into the dining room for a recital by a distinguished Scottish mezzo-soprano. An ingénue to this social and cultural milieu, I had never experienced anything quite like it.

To me, Gavin was a slightly terrifying man in his waistcoat, striped shirt and polka-dot tie, footering constantly with his renowned pocket watch. And he was a conservative, to boot. Or so I thought. I avoided him, nervous of saying something stupid. From that landing he seemed from a distance pompous and somewhat aloof. How completely wrong I was.

Gavin Stamp was a lovely, gentle, kind, often shy and always thoughtful man who never, ever, patronised. He was also great fun. But he also had that rare, enviable characteristic of not caring what other people thought of him – a characteristic that courted controversy publicly and sometimes privately. He could ruin tedious, pretentious, dinner parties and occasionally, but always amusingly, he did.

If someone had told me that night in 1991 that Gavin Stamp would become one of my closest friends of over 25 years, I would have laughed incredulously. That was the first of many lessons I learned about life from Gavin: never make judgements about folk you don't know. He was not just a great writer, artist, historian, photographer and campaigner, roles which he dutifully undertook with passion, commitment and principle. He was a good man, and he lived a good life.

Gavin's connection with Scotland began long before he moved to Glasgow. He and his then wife the writer, hilarious and vibrant wit Alexandra Artley, bought a semi-derelict house a few yards from King's Cross Station. With Euston close by, they were at the twin gates to Scotland. This was a fitting location given his great love of the railway (matched only by his loathing of the 'ghastly motor car') and his justified rage over demolished buildings such as the Euston arch. In fact, one of his first conservation projects was to assist his mentor John Betjeman in saving St Pancras.

Gavin and Alex kept an open house where Scottish friends would arrive late for whisky and architectural gossip over the hissing gas fire. This led to a joke about the Stamps' place being the best waiting room for travellers to and from Scotland. With their two young daughters tucked up in bed, the fun and laughter went on until midnight when the sleeper departed for the auld country.

The Stamp family left London for Glasgow in 1990 when Gavin was offered a post at

the Mackintosh School of Architecture in Glasgow School of Art, a position he was honoured to accept. Soon after arriving, Gavin began his evangelism to preserve and restore the buildings of the great architect, Thomson. Gavin not only lectured, wrote and spoke eloquently about architectural conservation, he lived it. The Stamps spent tens of thousands of pounds of their own money restoring the roof alone and made sure it passed into the hands of the present owners who have restored it admirably.

Typically, he decided that spreading the news about Thomson should begin locally. The garden of 1 Moray Place backed on to the Sammy Dow pub on Nithsdale Road. One afternoon, with the landlord's permission, he stood up in the pub and delivered a half-hour impromptu lecture on the merits of Thomson and his importance to the Glasgow economy. Startled bewilderment of the afternoon drinkers soon gave way to rapt attention then uproarious applause.

Gavin hoped that the new Alexander Thomson society would inaugurate a wave of conservation in Scotland. And it did. Almost single-handedly he revived Glasgow's other great architect and rescued many buildings during his 13 years here. He was particularly concerned about the magnificent Egyptian Halls in Union Street. What a fitting legacy for both men, Thomson and Stamp, if at long last the halls were restored to their former glory.

Gavin's GSA lectures are the stuff of legend. Gavin's were the 'go-to' lectures for students who wanted to learn from witty and knowledgeable experts who could cover everything from railroads and buildings to phone boxes. And this was at a time when the prevailing elitism in art schools installed a managerial sniffiness at anything whiffing of history. But Gavin didn't respect a view just because it was fashionable.

For most of his life, Gavin lived in a permanent state of restoration. His idea of decorating homes was, well, eccentric. Most of us just bang pictures up on newly-painted walls. But not him. There are arcane rules for doing it well, I discovered. To cover raw plaster and torn, shabby wallpaper, he hung architectural drawings (including a seriously good collection of Schinkel prints) in beautiful, mathematical clumps.

A brilliant architectural draughtsman whose drawings were exquisite, Gavin was also a superb photographer. He was so excited by the good buildings in Glasgow when he arrived that he actually ran with his camera from one built masterpiece to another. His architectural photography as well as portraits of his acquaintances, have yet to be fully discovered and published. Even in his final, exhausting days, he was trying to take photographs from his home overlooking a magnificent garden and St Giles' Church where his funeral will take place.

Gavin and Alex were devoted to their two talented daughters, Agnes and Cecilia. As soon as they could walk ('I don't know what to do with babies!') Gavin took them to every museum and art gallery in Scotland, and he took them (and my own daughter) every Saturday morning to the Glasgow Film Theatre. He read stories to his 'splendid' girls every night when he was home. Cecilia and Agnes would hang on to his deformed

thumb that he had battered as a youth, and from which said thumb had never recovered.

Sadly Gavin and Alex's marriage did not survive the crippling financial burden of restoring 1 Moray Place, family illness, and a yearning to return home to his old stomping ground, London. In 2003, Gavin eventually returned to his first love, South London, to a tiny flat that yes, required decorating.

At Cecilia's wedding in March last year, he kept his worsening illness under wraps and delayed the beginning of chemotherapy so as to keep his full head of hair to give away his beloved daughter. In his last days, despite his now perilous state, he was overjoyed to hear that his eldest, Agnes, got engaged on Christmas Day. It is a blessing that he lived just long enough to see both girls settled with two wonderful Scotsmen.

Gavin introduced me to all kinds of interesting people over the years but none more so than the woman he married in 2014, the writer, historian and biographer of Pugin, Rosemary Hill. Their relationship was a meeting of souls. There was not much I could tell Gavin that he didn't know already apart from a few arcane or detailed aspects of academic philosophy. But I remember telling him about Plato's bizarre explanation of the origins of love. He giggled in that inimitable fashion but acknowledged that Plato had a point.

Gavin and Rosemary were very much in love, and very happy in the house they shared in Camberwell. The last year of his life was in his own words 'grim'. His sheer frustration with the 'tiresome' illness that brought the big man down, was palpable. But Rosemary was a constant presence by his side, cajoling, nursing and loving him to the end. It really is difficult to imagine how, by his own admission, he'd have coped without her.

Gavin's wife, daughters, his brother and sister, wider family and friends, colleagues and students will celebrate his life at his funeral in Camberwell. But there's no avoiding the fact we lost him too soon. His daughters have lost their 'rock', his wife her devoted husband, his profession their greatest critic. His extraordinary life was cut short. His funeral is on 25 January: Burns Night. I had a wee smile that his connection with Scotland, though unintentional, remains to the end. He was a true, loyal and wonderful friend. I shall miss him terribly.

Off the rails

David McVey

2018

I'm fascinated – even besotted – by railways. It's no small enthusiasm but I'd stress that this does not make me a trainspotter. Not that I'm one of those who mock trainspotting – to me it seems like a perfectly understandable and legitimate pursuit. It just isn't mine.

No, I grew to love railway travel because I was introduced to it early, nearly on my doorstep, and then had it stolen from me. To explain – it's summer, 1964. I'm three-and-a-half and standing on the sunny southbound platform of Back o' Loch Halt in my home town of Kirkintilloch. A hot sun beats on the tracks and there are warm, drowsy smells of diesel and creosote. The rails gleam in the sun like channels of mercury. The town centre isn't far away but all is peaceful here; we're deep in a cutting that's lush with greenery and alive with buzzing and butterflies. An occasional motor vehicle does intrude, growling over the road bridge that crosses the north end of the station – but not often.

And then comes a touch of magic: the rails begin a sweet silver singing.

'The train's coming,' says my aunt.

Less than a minute later, the yellow-painted face of a green diesel train, with two windows like eyes, emerges suddenly from under the road bridge and gasps to a halt. My aunt wrenches a door open and we find a seat – dusty, springy, radiating heat even in summer and with a warm friendly smell like a pew cushion in church.

The train judders into life and begins the next step, the short mile to Lenzie Junction Station. I look out of the window and then, as the train screws tightly to the right, I watch the swaying and rippling of the folds on the corridor that links the coaches. When you walk between coaches – an unsettling experience – the corridor smells strongly of rubber, like the mask the dentist puts over your face to send you to sleep.

Ten minutes later we're in Glasgow, under the great curving glass heavens of Queen Street Station, on the doorstep of the magnificent George Square. What a way for a child to travel to the city! A sensory explosion, an adventure and just a little magic. I'm glad I wasn't born 50 years later when I would probably have made my first trips to the city by car and motorway; technical prose rather than poetry.

It wasn't long after this, the beginning of September the same year, when I was told that, within a week, we'd no longer be able to get the train to Glasgow. No doubt there were bad words said about Beeching and Labour letting its people down, but I don't remember those. I just remember the terrible realisation that our trains were being stolen from us, and I also remember bursting out crying.

Monday 7 September 1964 was the day the axe fell, and the last passengers clattered

up the covered wooden walkway that led to platform level at Kirkintilloch's main station, or down the narrow asphalt paths amid luxuriant greenery at Back o' Loch. Some trains did still pass through the town, though, as the line remained for goods until April 1966. It was as if our railway had stepped back in time; no more modern diesel passenger trains, just short rakes of rusty wagons hauled by dirty old steam locomotives.

During that last stage in the life of our railway, I remember being told to wait as we crossed the magnificent aqueduct that carried (and still carries) the Forth and Clyde Canal across the railway, between Kirkintilloch and Back o' Loch. 'We'll see a train in a minute,' I was told.

'Train' – the word still conjured up the little green diesel caterpillars on which we'd travelled to Glasgow. But what emerged from beneath the aqueduct was a roaring fire dragon that propelled noise and heat and smoke and grit vertically towards us. Actually, it was just a little old steam locomotive hauling a few wagons but it seemed terrifying to me. More tears. That's another way, I suppose, in which I'm different from trainspotters; they generally despised those little green passenger trains ('diesel multiple units' to give them their Sunday name, or DMUs for short) while loving the steam locomotives they had replaced. Me? The diesels had enchanted me, but steam had scared me.

Those DMUs lasted well into the 1990s. Whenever I travelled on one in later years, from Lenzie to Stirling, say, I reflected that it might have visited Kirkintilloch when it was just a young train.

There are few traces of the railway left in Kirkintilloch. One atmospheric relic did survive a surprisingly long while – just into the 80s, if I recall correctly. A massive brick arch that had once supported Kirkintilloch Station itself remained long after most of the rest of the bridging and embankments had been demolished. It crossed and sheltered part of the roadside footpath along the broad street of Eastside. As you came under it, your footsteps echoed and resonated. This Sherlock Holmesian artefact deserved to have Hansom cabs clattering through it, but it was demolished and there's a roundabout there now. Just the fate you would expect Scottish councillors to choose for a thing of beauty and character.

Nor has the rest of the line fared any better. New roads follow much of the former railway formation and one has been driven right through the site of Back o' Loch Halt. There's little magic there now, no singing steel rails. Just a steady roar of traffic.

But if my own railway was snatched from me, I sought out others, their serpentine steel writhings, their towering Victorian terminals, their surviving sleepy country byways. I travel by rail as much as I can and still enjoy the precise percussion of the wheels over the points and the unspooling countryside or cityscape at the window. I could stand for hours at a quiet country station (standing in, perhaps, for Back o' Loch) watching the world go by, and even more so could I waste days in absorbing the teeming, throbbing, glorious life of a major railway station.

I've travelled far and wide by rail and I've used the Gare du Nord in Paris, Budapest

Keleti, the Hauptbahnhofs in Vienna, Berlin, Frankfurt and Cologne, as well as York, St Pancras, Newcastle Central and Edinburgh Waverley. I can stand amidst the abundant life of Glasgow Queen Street and inwardly recite the placename-poems on the departure boards:

Stirling
Perth
Dunkeld
Pitlochry
Blair Atholl
Dalwhinnie
Newtonmore
Kingussie
Aviemore
Carrbridge
Inverness

And, yes, there are still the trains themselves, whether the miserable 'pacers' and 'sprinters' or the gleaming sleek pendolinos and Eurostars. So much of the railway draws me that I suppose I can't deny a certain kinship with trainspotters. Mine is a mania fuelled by loss, but it's a mania nonetheless.

There were no chauffeurs and no limousines

Iain Macmillan

2019

Last week, we received sad news of the death of occasional contributor and Friend of SR, Iain Macmillan. The following is an extract from his book 'I Had It From My Father', which was published by Standfirst in 2011:

The newspapers like to amuse their readers by telling them how our sheriffs and judges have all been to public school, all aristocrats, with no understanding or sympathy with the common man. This varies a lot of course. If the press disapproves of the sentence the judge has just pronounced, it's because he lives on a different planet. If, on the other hand, the judge has been heard to criticise the bungling bureaucrats in the Home Office, then he suddenly becomes a paragon of virtue. Four sheriffs were already in place in Hamilton (I made the fifth) – of these, Len Lovat was an accomplished mountaineer; Sandy MacPherson, a judge of piping; Andrew Bell, an Edinburgh solicitor; and James Fiddes... I'm not sure about James, who didn't talk about himself much... but otherwise there was not a public schoolboy among us.

There was quite a heavy work-load at Hamilton. It is not always realised that in addition to the customary civil actions for damages and the like, and the criminal trials, whether by jury or with the sheriff sitting alone, we also conduct fatal accident inquiries, and much domestic work such as divorce, custody, children's hearings etc, as well as a wide variety of administrative tasks – commissary practice (trusts and executries), liquidations, bankruptcies, appeals, licensing, special marriage, and even closing graveyards. Our jurisdiction in Hamilton covered some heavy industrial areas, particularly Motherwell with its Ravenscraig Steelworks (as it then was), as well as Hamilton itself and many smaller towns and villages. In addition we took in an extensive rural and agricultural area. So there was plenty of work.

It has to be acknowledged that some of it was boring. One spent tedious hours sitting in the Fines Court, giving offenders further time to pay their fines, or making an eviction order for some tenant who was in arrear with his rent. It was dull routine work, and a waste of manpower, since that sort of work could have been done just as well, possibly better, by the clerk of court. I read with some amusement a comment by an American politician who said – 'We have to find ways to clear the courts of the endless stream of "victimless crimes" that get in the way of serious consideration of serious crimes. There are more important matters for highly skilled judges and prosecutors than minor traffic offences, loitering and drunkenness'.

The commentator? – Richard Nixon!

But otherwise, I found the work absorbing, the criminal jury trials especially, when it was up to the jury to decide what the verdict was to be, and the civil litigation, often involving nice points of law which I enjoyed wrestling with, sometimes until a late hour in the evening. With the experience of Reggie Levitt in mind, I tried to get my judgements out in reasonable time.

The only part of the work that really troubled me was the family disputes. I found it difficult to keep my patience with parents who put their own selfish interests before those of their children. A mother would invent all sorts of spurious excuses to prevent her husband, or former husband, having the access to the kids that she had earlier agreed to. Sometimes, after a divorce, the woman would re-marry, and she and her new husband would then apply for an adoption order for her children for no other purpose than to deny their father, her former husband, any legal right to the children. We all found these cases particularly distressing.

But there was a lot of fun too. Sometimes when I had to impose sentence on a youth who repeatedly offended, I would ask if his mother was in court. A stout wee woman would then make her way from the public seats, but instead of standing in front of me as expected, she would laboriously climb up the steps and sit beside me on the bench, despite the vigorous protests of the clerk of court and my bar officer. She would sit there, placidly telling me that she 'didnae know whit tae dae wi' that boy' and 'maybe I should jist gie him the jile'. It was disarming. More effective than the most heart-rending plea in mitigation that any solicitor might have urged.

Sentencing in criminal cases could be difficult of course. The difficulty lay in balancing the various and usually conflicting factors that had to be taken into account – the seriousness of the offence and its effect on the victim; the circumstances of the offence, whether there had been provocation; the circumstances of the accused, his age, parental responsibilities, loss of employment, which would affect his whole family; whether he had a record; whether there was any reasonable alternative to custody; and of course the expectation of the public to see that criminal offences were 'properly' punished.

So it was not easy, although newspaper comment often suggests otherwise. On one occasion, I told a young man that I would give him one last chance. He had been stealing cars, and had done so on many previous occasions. Everything had been tried – probation, fines, community service, and finally custody. He had served short sentences of three months, six months. I could not understand it, and neither could the social worker, whose report I studied closely.

He was a fine, upstanding young man, only 19 as I recall, with his whole life before him, which he seemed bent on ruining. I told him I could not bring myself to impose the heavy custodial sentence which the case clearly demanded, if there was any hope of helping him to break out of this cycle of offending. I put him on probation for two years with the condition that he would return to court at six monthly intervals when I would

have a report from the procurator fiscal. If he had re-offended he would receive a substantial sentence; if not, he would be dealt with leniently.

I was surprised to see him in the dock three months later, charged with a succession of further motor car offences, to which he pled guilty. Surprised and disappointed; but the public are entitled to expect that sheriffs mean what they say. I sent him away for two years. Maybe it was three, I can't remember. I never saw him again.

Shortly after I was appointed I bumped into that delightful judge, Lord Dunpark, who asked me how I was getting on. I must have said something fatuous such as that I hoped I wouldn't make too many mistakes. 'Just do what you think is right' was his monosyllabic and wise advice, which I tried to follow. That's really all you can do.

I hope I never lost sight of the honour conferred upon me by allowing me to sit in judgement on my fellow men. Joan Ure once wrote a very funny and very moving monologue called *The Hard Case*. In it the anti-hero, an old lag, appears before the court charged with breach of the peace. He addresses the judge thus:

Judge, I know it is not easy, a job such as yours is, that only through a deep sense of responsibility to the community, would a thoughtful man like yourself take it on. I know it's not just because of the sense of importance. I know that the wig is weighty, the robes no sinecure. I know all that. Over the years, I have not been slow, sir, not slow to have pity for the likes of you all who have to bear the burden of a seat on the bench in judgement over your fellows.

The heavy irony was not lost upon me. As a sheriff you are deferred to, addressed as 'Your Lordship', and preceded into court by your bar officer. Everyone has to rise in your presence. You are given the power, not of life or death, but certainly of liberty or restraint. You are made to feel that you hold an office of importance, as indeed you do. It is tempting, in these circumstances, to allow yourself to suppose that you have become important, as the 'old lag' insidiously suggests. If you are to be any good at the job it's as well to keep your feet on the ground. I'm told that one English judge used to keep a chamber pot on the ledge below the bench to remind himself of his common humanity.

Shortly after my appointment, a lady astonished me by asking if I had a chauffeur. In truth we had no chauffeurs, and no limousines. We did not even have a dining room at Hamilton Sheriff Court. We ate lunch seated at our desks in our own rooms. We also had no secretaries or assistants. Instead we wrote our own reports and judgements, and we did our own research often, at least in my case, quite late at night. I provided myself with a word processor (this was before the days of computers) but I had to pay for it myself.

Peter Hamilton, one of the 'temps' whose visits to Hamilton we regarded as a treat, because he was a superb raconteur, told us one day how, as a newly appointed temporary sheriff, he had been asked to sit in the Sheriff Court in Falkirk. At lunchtime, in need of some toothpaste, he set off for Boots, still dressed in his 'blacks' – pin-striped trousers, black jacket and bowler hat. At the cash desk the lady standing next to him remarked to

her little girl with a knowing glance in Peter's direction – 'That's something you don't often see nowadays'. Peter preened himself a little. 'Madam?' he enquired. 'Yes,' said the lady, 'a butler!'

The months and the years flew by. Hamilton was a good place to work. The Lanarkshire people were decent, friendly folk. Three more sheriffs had joined us by now – Frank Lunny, Vincent Canavan and Will Gibson – James Fiddes having retired. We had a wonderful working relationship and a very close personal connection. The solicitors who appeared before me remained polite and respectful, no matter how much I berated them for being too slow, or too late, and they even invited me to their dinners and their golf matches. I enjoyed my work, and felt that I was not wholly unfitted for it. It almost never occurred to me in these days that I had really intended to be an author.

And then, at age 68, I decided to retire. I sat on the bench for the last time while the court lawyers said some nice things about me, and I bade them farewell. The local Society of Solicitors took me to lunch and presented me with my portrait. My fellow sheriffs gave Edith and me a farewell dinner, and they also gave me the three-volume *Oxford Book of Poetry*, handsomely inscribed. The secretary of state sent me a very nice letter explaining about my pension.

My leave-taking coincided with the closure of the Ravenscraig steelworks, and I could not but reflect on the contrast between the circumstances in which the steelworkers were giving up their employment and those in which I was leaving mine. I had worked in this courthouse for 12 happy years, and thought I was a very lucky man. I looked forward to my retirement.

PHILOSOPHY

On common sense

John Haldane

2002

In July of 2001, the University of Glasgow awarded Billy Connolly the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. About 30 years before, he scandalised some and entertained others in the city with his adaptations of biblical narratives: providing a Glaswegian translation of the story of Moses, beginning 'Nip hame and get yer peepil...' and offering a sketch about The Last Supper taking place in Gallowgate, not Galilee, and being held in the Saracen's Head Inn ('Sarrie Heid') '... near the Cross'.

The voice of Billy Connolly is immediately recognisable and, once heard, unforgettable. Even as he begins a story, hearers prepare to laugh at one of his memorable tales rendered in the currency of Glaswegian language and life. Indeed, for many his is the voice of Glasgow; and for some, perhaps, even the voice of Scotland. If the first fact is not universally welcomed within Glasgow itself (honorary degree notwithstanding), the second possibility is likely to cause distress to many Scots, who would want to think of their land and people in more elevated, cultured and refined terms.

The actress Maggie Smith tells of how, when she was preparing for the part of Miss Jean Brodie, and was having difficulty mastering the precise prim tone of the character, she was advised to spend the afternoon with some genteel woman from Edinburgh's Morningside district. Phoning such a lady to invite her to afternoon tea, Maggie Smith complimented her on the fact that her accent was a perfect model for the Scottish type she wanted to perfect: 'Accent!' ('exent') exclaimed the lady – 'I most certainly do not have an accent!'

The vocal contrast between her and Mr Connolly is obvious enough; but behind and beneath it lie vast volumes of cultural difference. You could mark these by a series of textured oppositions: rough and smooth, coarse and refined, granular and creamy, pitted and polished; but these are all fairly gross generalisations and fail in any case to go very deep. Approached from another direction you might say that while Glasgow is unashamedly Scottish, and only nominally British, Edinburgh exhibits an Anglicising tendency to the extent of hoping not to attract attention to itself as conspicuously lying over the border.

This distinction is connected with diverse attitudes to physical labour and material production. Although Glasgow in the west and Edinburgh in the east are separated by only 40 miles, their efforts and achievements are markedly different. The first is home to two of the most famous football teams of all time, Celtic and Rangers; the second is host to the largest arts festival in Europe. The one was for long a place of manufacture and

trade; the other a centre of law, medicine and administration. Each city is set close by water's edge, and each grew in consequence of foreign trade. But whereas Edinburgh's wealth came early on, and established it as the royal capital of Scotland from the 15th century, the period of Glasgow's affluence and growth began in the late 18th century, and continued up to the First World War.

The sea passage from Glasgow to America was the shortest, by far, from any British port across the Atlantic. As the colonies in Virginia and Maryland grew, so did the transatlantic trade, bringing tobacco and cotton eastwards, and carrying manufactured goods, including finished cloth, west to the Americas. Scotland's first millionaires came from the group of Glasgow's tobacco lords. Cotton and textile industries were later joined by ironworks and shipbuilding. In 1802 the steamship *Charlotte Dundas* was launched on the Forth and Clyde Canal, and within 30 years another 100 steam vessels had been built, mostly on the Clyde. For more than a century following, shipbuilding was a main source of employment, and it was in a Clydeside shipyard in the Govan area that Billy Connolly first went to work.

Two centuries earlier, in 1762, one Revd Thom, the Church of Scotland minister of Govan, wrote to the University of Glasgow to complain about the uselessness, for what he described as 'an industrious and commercial people', of the classical education which the university was proud to provide. That early pragmatist demand for a useful and vocational training came at a time when in Edinburgh clerics were worrying about the corrosive effects of intellectual speculation upon religious faith. People are generally familiar with the distress caused among the Victorians by Darwin's theory of man's natural descent; but less well-known are the 18th-century speculations of Lord Monboddo who was made a Scottish judge around the time of Revd Thom's letter; and who advanced the view that men were related to monkeys.

Monboddo was one of a group of intellectuals who formed the Scottish Enlightenment, and whose other members included the philosopher David Hume and the philosopher and economist Adam Smith. It would be wrong to suggest that these gentlemen had little interest in practical matters of commerce and economy. In fact, Hume was at one point a counting-clerk in Bristol, and later turned to diplomacy and administration, being secretary to the ambassador in Paris, and under-secretary of state in London for what was then known as 'the northern Department', the precursor to the Scottish Office. Smith, of course, was the author of the founding text of economics *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), and he ended his life as Commissioner of Customs in Edinburgh.

Their primary interests, however, were speculative and theoretical; and the drift of their thought carried them away from the dour, gritty Calvinism of the Kirk, into a realm of humanistic enlightenment: a bright world of detached reflection on the workings of the human mind. Seventeen years before publishing *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith produced his great work of moral philosophy, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

In this he followed his friend Hume in arguing that judgements of right and wrong, good and bad, virtue and vice, are not founded on reason, or rooted in religious revelation, but are expressions of human emotion – as Hume had put it in the *Treatise*: 'sentiments of approbation and of disapprobation arising within the human breast' as men contemplate actions of one kind or another.

Just as for Hume, morality lies in the human mind, not in a world of moral facts; so our beliefs about the world itself are human conjectures fashioned on the basis of impressions of colour, shape, sound, odour, taste and texture. Hume's account of knowledge as based in experience is in the tradition of British empiricism, but Hume was much more radical than John Locke had been in the previous century.

Generations of philosophers going all the way back to Aristotle had emphasised the importance of sense-experience as a source of knowledge; and the scholastics of the middle ages had even formulated the slogan 'there is nothing in the intellect that was not just in the senses', but until the 17th and 18th century philosophers assumed that what was 'in the senses' was experience of the world itself. The open eye looks upon the world; the ear attends to the tread of the foot, the rustle of the leaves, the tinkle of glass.

What Hume from his Edinburgh study insisted upon, however, was that all that we can really claim to know are mental impressions themselves. The blurriness of the world as seen by the short-sighted, or the intoxicated, is not a perception of a blurred world; but the experience of images within the viewer himself. More generally, the proper objects of experience are features of, and in, the mind. Hume allowed that from them we naturally infer the existence and condition of an outer world of objects related in various ways. We naturally form beliefs about the existence of others, about the furniture of the world, and about the various relations and processes that cement it all together. But these are all conjectures, constructed out of internal impressions and the mind's own tendency to project order and regularity outwards. And then, this done, it appears to discover them as external facts, from which all sorts of scientific and even theological conclusions might be derived. If Hume were right, however, this whole edifice of seemingly objective knowledge would have been shown to be no more substantial than a dream.

Immanuel Kant wrote of how reading Hume's sceptical philosophy awoke him from his own 'dogmatic slumber' where hitherto he had taken the world for granted; now he saw that it had to be proved to exist. Whether Kant was ever successful in producing such a proof is a matter of some debate; but I want now to bring on to the scene Hume's greatest domestic critic, and perhaps his greatest and most effective critic ever, namely his contemporary Thomas Reid.

Reid was born in the Aberdeenshire manse of his father. For generations since the Reformation the family had numbered ministers of the Church of Scotland, and that was also to be Reid's own vocation. Like Kant, however, he took flight as a philosopher upon being startled by the implications of Hume's philosophy.

Reid had two arguments against Hume: first that the implications of his philosophy were so extensive, so radical, and so disruptive of scientific, moral and religious thought, as well as of common sense, that any principle or premise from which they derived must itself be suspect. His second argument was that Hume's starting point is itself wholly unwarranted. Where Hume claims that what we are acquainted with are visual and other sensory impressions, Reid insists that what we know are how things themselves look. Seen through weak eyes, things appear blurry, heard through failing ears, sounds seem muffled; but if we are to make any sense of this, then it must be on the basis of distinguishing between things themselves, and the ways in which they are experienced. And in doing this, we see that far from the world being constructed out of the mind, it is the mind that is informed and filled from without, as we come into contact with the world.

This philosophy of common sense was first fashioned in Reid's native Aberdeenshire, but in 1763 he was appointed to the professorship of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow in succession to Adam Smith and it was from there that he published his responses to Hume's sceptical philosophy, beginning in 1764 with his *Enquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, and continuing for another 30 years until his death aged 86. A couple of years ago, I had occasion to edit Reid's last piece of philosophical writing, an essay on the subjects of agency and causality entitled *Of Power*, and was struck by the strength of his hand and the clarity of his prose. (A facsimile of the first page of the manuscript together with the edited text, and an account of Reid's life and work appears in *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*, edited by John Haldane and Stephen Read, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

It was also from Glasgow that Reid's philosophy was carried across the Atlantic to the Americas where it had enormous influence right up to the 20th century. The pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, sometimes described as 'America's last public intellectual', and who died in 1952, recounts how as an undergraduate he was educated on the philosophical principles of Scottish clergymen. Those principles were versions, sometimes confused, of Reid's philosophy of common sense.

Besides the stark opposition in their philosophies, there was also a marked contrast in the character of Hume and of Reid, something of which emerges in two contemporary portraits. We know from correspondence and contemporary accounts that both were gentle and amiable spirits, but the portraits show a difference that marks the two Scotlands of the period. Alan Ramsay's portrait of Hume (on display in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh) shows a somewhat soft-faced, sensual-lipped, fleshy figure, dressed in brocaded scarlet coat with lace cuffs and cravat. It serves to confirm Hume's account of his life and style while living in Paris, of which he wrote: 'Here I feed on ambrosia, drink nothing but nectar, breathe incense only, and walk on flowers'.

Sir Henry Raeburn's portrait of Reid (which is held by the National Trust for Scotland

at Fyvie Castle, Aberdeenshire) shows a very different figure. Where Hume is seen full face looking contentedly at the viewer, Reid is set at three-quarters and looks seriously, if not severely, into empty space: his mind directed upon some religious piety of philosophical rectitude. The lips are thin, the nose long, the bony contour evident. Like his philosophy, Reid's life stayed close to the realities of the world as he encountered them in an increasingly mercantile and industrial Glasgow.

In 1773, he was visited there by Boswell and Johnson on their way back from the tour of the Western Highlands. At that time mail coaches arriving at the Gallow Gate in the east of the city would be met by waiters dressed in embroidered coats, red breeches and powdered hair sent from the Saracen's Head Inn. Here it was, two centuries before Billy Connolly imagined *The Last Supper* being held there, that the weary travellers entertained the distinguished and well known professor, along with two of his colleagues from the university of which Connolly is now an honorary graduate.

Boswell notes that the hospitality ran to both breakfast and supper, but of the day's conversation he records nothing beyond remarking that 'the professors...did not venture to expose themselves much to the battery of cannon which they knew might play upon them'. Reid may have judged that this was not the occasion for philosophical discourse; or perhaps he engaged in it but it passed Boswell by. Certainly, Dr Johnson did not find it easy to absorb philosophical opinions that seemed to strain his sense of the ordinary. Famously, he once sought to demolish a philosophical theory related to Hume's (that of Bishop Berkeley) by kicking a stone and announcing 'I refute it thus!' Perhaps he also had difficulty with Reid's view, for although Reid's philosophy many have been technically commonsensical, being philosophy it may yet not have been all that obvious. It would be interesting to hear Billy Connolly using his plain talk to communicate this sort of common sense. Were he to do so, the setting of the Saracen's Head would be doubly ironic in just the sort of way that should appeal to a Doctor of Letters.

Perspectives

Sheila Hetherington

2008

I'm in that seat by the window in the cafe again. I enjoy the perspective from here – the wide green landscape, the waywardness of hills, the gean trees, the careless scattering of dandelions and daisies, all stretching out towards the vanishing horizon – that point at which all objects cease to exist. This window is a viewpoint: a point of view.

Plato tells us that within perspective 'every sort of confusion is revealed within us'. We are surely right to feel confused. We find ourselves circling the sun for a limited number of journeys, perched precariously on a fragile, unpredictable piece of rock. Our universe is approximately 4.54 billion years old. Beyond it – what then? Billions of other universes, some probably much older, others perhaps young (in space time), all rushing away from each other at unimaginable speed. Where are they going to and why? Astronomers on our own planet are making huge strides in our understanding of space/time, but ultimate truth may always escape human knowledge.

It is probably pointless to wonder. Was it the ancient Chinese who said 'Large things are large, but small things are also large when seen close up'? So Plato's 'sort of confusion' compels us to take refuge in the 'large-seeming-small' (Which football team will win the cup? What did the Prime Minister say and do? Who is this year's *American Idol*? Who will win Wimbledon? Will Harry marry Chelsy? How is the FTSE doing today? What shall we eat for dinner tonight? Have you fed the cat?). But whilst meandering pleasantly through life, we are constantly aware of an undercurrent of tragedy, of terrible events, and of our personal helplessness. As always, Shakespeare summed it all up – lives full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. And what did Rick remark at the end of *Casablanca* – something about a 'hill o' beans?'

It all depends on perspective: these few precious trips round the sun abound with delight: friendship, music, art, poetry. Love, too – and that's another mystery.

The good life?

Robin Downie

2009

From time to time, newspapers print league tables concerned with which city in the UK offers the best quality of life. And medicine has widened its traditional aims of prolonging our lives and repairing our bodies to include improving our quality of life. The term has become so familiar that it is easy to forget that its frequent use is quite recent. Indeed, in the period 1961-65, there were no entries at all indexed in Medline under the key term 'quality of life', whereas in the period 1996-2000, there were a staggering 12,749. Presumably these articles were concerned mainly with attempts to define and measure quality of life. But can it be defined for the individual or the community, or must it remain entirely subjective?

To try to answer this, let us go back to the Greek myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus was King of Corinth and got into trouble with Zeus (over a woman). His punishment was that he had to push a boulder to the top of a mountain. When he reached the top, the boulder would roll back to the foot creating huge clouds of dust. This process had to go on through all eternity. Some European writers, such as Camus, have taken this as the paradigm of a life with no quality or meaning.

Let us try to develop some lessons from the myth. We shall suppose that Asklepios (the demi-god of medicine) negotiates with Zeus to improve Sisyphus' quality of life. Suppose he gets the place of punishment moved to a decent Munro. Has his quality of life been improved? Yes! Clean air and attractive surroundings are surely improvements for the individual and the community. Suppose further that Sisyphus is allowed visits from friends. Again, this helps a lot – we need company. Suppose Sisyphus is allowed to push up different boulders and make a shelter or a cairn at the top. This would surely add something important to quality of life because the labour now has a point to it, or is given a meaning.

Readers can add their own improvements – perhaps every weekend off – but the point is that we seem to have a reasonably objective way of looking at quality of life, a way which might carry over into the life of a city. Unfortunately, however, some people will say that I have omitted the one factor which is of supreme importance for a good quality of life, at least in the eyes of successive governments and perhaps the public too. The life of Sisyphus has been improved by the advocacy of Asklepios and the agreement of Zeus, but Sisyphus himself has had no choice. But choice, it might be claimed, is the supreme factor for a good quality of life, so important that it must spread from the supermarket to education, healthcare, and whatever else.

Is there a problem with choice as a key to a good quality of life? Well, suppose

Asklepios says: 'Okay, you can come down from your Munro and tell your friends to go home because instead of these benefits I am going to offer you choice!' In reply, Sisyphus says: 'Great, I'm going to choose to go right back to the casinos and brothels of Corinth'. Has his exercise of choice improved his quality of life? Some might say 'yes' – indeed, if choice is the supreme good it is currently depicted as being, they must say 'yes' – but I would prefer to argue that, whereas choice might be a necessary condition for a good quality of life, it is not sufficient – it depends on what you choose. There is some evidence (what J S Mill calls 'the accumulated wisdom of mankind') on what factors in the long run improve quality of life. Whether in the life of the individual or the city I'd back friends and attractive surroundings over brothels and casinos.

I have looked at quality of life in terms of what we might call 'objective properties', and in terms of choice, but there is yet another way of approaching the idea. Suppose there is an outbreak of swine flu on Mount Olympus and Asklepios has become incredibly busy so that he hasn't time to negotiate the changes in the life of Sisyphus mentioned earlier. In the six minutes of consultation available to help Sisyphus, all Asklepios can do is to put him on a course of pills, with the result that Sisyphus now enjoys what he is doing. He sings as he pushes the boulder up and shrieks with laughter as it rolls back down. Has his quality of life been improved?

I asked some young doctors this question once and they thought his quality of life had improved. The elderly doctor training the younger ones immediately shouted: 'Anyone who thinks that is going out of my practice!' Well, that produced a re-consideration of the issues. The elderly doctor had got the point that I had been telling them a political story. The typical patient in his deprived community was a single mother living in damp housing with no friends or support. His view was that a course of antidepressants would simply compound her problems. He suggested that the doctors should look for and encourage support groups and community action. He was suggesting that medicine, at least at the GP level, should not be separate from political and social action. Was he right?

I have suggested three ways of looking at quality of life and they each have implications for what it is to be a flourishing human being, and what makes for a good society. The third idea – that the human self is a kind of empty bucket to be filled with pleasurable feelings – was well worked out in Huxley's *Brave New World*. But the idea is still around in the 'enhancement technologies' of Prozac, Viagra and Botox injections (and more to come).

The second idea – currently dominant in our society – that choice is all-important depicts us as essentially individualistic consumers. The US is further down that road, and its nature and the social isolation it brings, can be seen, for example, in paintings by Edward Hopper. The first view depicts human beings as essentially social, requiring a community, meaningful activity, an aesthetically pleasing environment and absorbing leisure interests for their fulfilment. Are these just my middle-class values?

What makes us laugh?

Robin Downie

2009

Entries in the dating pages of newspapers and magazines (I speak from hearsay, of course) use abbreviations, not all of which I claim to understand. But one is 'GSOH', which stands for 'good sense of humour'. Everyone seems either to have it or to want it in a partner. And certainly, there is nothing more dismaying than to say something one thinks is really funny and to be greeted by a blank look. Over the breakfast table that would be intolerable, but perhaps attempted jokes over the breakfast table are not a good idea anyway.

Sometimes, of course, the blank look means that the joke is disapproved of. As we say, 'That's just not funny', meaning that actually it is but we ought not to laugh. So perhaps laughter is not entirely spontaneous but can be inhibited. Certainly, it can sound false and artificial, as for example the loud laughter from groups having their annual night out. But, alcohol aside, what makes us laugh?

The theory put forward by the philosopher Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century is that what he calls the 'passion of laughter' is a 'sudden glory' which arises when we suddenly see ourselves as eminent in comparison with the 'infirmity' of others. This is what we might think of as the 'banana-skin' view of laughter. It clearly covers many cases where we feel superior, or just relieved, when we realise that a lot of people are even stupider than we are ourselves. Hence, the term 'sudden glory' is apt for this sort of situation. But it doesn't fit many other types of case.

Francis Hutcheson, who was professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow University (1730-46), argues that Hobbes' account does not fit burlesque or parody, and also that there are 'superiority' situations which do not produce laughter, as when a healthy man sees a sick one, or a rich man (we might think of a banker with a bonus) sees a poor man (a bank employee made redundant).

Hutcheson's own view is that laughter is produced by the perception of incongruity. This view will cover many more cases than the 'sudden glory' view. It can cover, say, the common kind of humour when the language used is incongruous. For example, the high theological debate as to whether women should be admitted to the church as priests was summed up in a tabloid headline as 'Vicars in knickers!' The incongruity theory can accommodate the 'sudden glory' of banana-skin situations, seeing them as a set of specific cases, as when, for example, the vice-chancellor trips over his gown at the graduation ceremony. Here we have the incongruity between the dignified occasion and the undignified behaviour, but also a 'banana-skin' situation.

Hutcheson makes the further point that humour can have a moral purpose. This is

often behind political satire. But to be effective as a moral critique incongruity must be almost plausible. Good examples of this can be found in the mock interviews between John Bird and John Fortune in the Rory Bremner shows. When one of the two plays the interviewer and the other the banker, speaking with a complacent self-satisfaction about his 'golden hellos' and 'golden handshakes', we laugh but are chillingly aware of the plausible reality behind it all.

Sometimes, the point of view behind humour is neither morally good nor bad but simply cultural, regional or national. I once had a mature postgraduate student who did not show up for a month or two. When he finally appeared, he apologised for his absence saying that his mother-in-law had recently died of cancer. I made appropriate responses of commiseration. But he went straight on to add, 'My wife has just died too,' and before I could say anything he continued, 'There's been quite a clear out!' There is incongruity between language and events here, but the language is also expressing an attitude to death which some might say is Scottish. It is sometimes called 'black humour' and it is a common type of Scottish humour, not always intentionally funny.

This kind of incongruity between language and situation can have a psychological point, perhaps as a way of coping with grief, stress or anxiety. In this context, black humour (as with my student) merges with the 'sick joke'. Medical students are notorious for making sick jokes about diseases, and this may well be a way of coping with psychological stress.

Jokes can get you into trouble these days. Jokes about an Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotsman going into a pub are just about okay still, but substitute other nationalities or races and you might be in serious trouble. You can still get away with jokes about bishops or ministers (provided they are not sectarian jokes) but jokes about non-Christian religions are absolutely out of bounds, unless you want hate-mail or a policeman at your door. Why are such jokes prohibited? The answer is that some people find them offensive, and being 'offensive' nowadays carries much moral condemnation.

The best kind of humour works if it implies a broad perspective. It is a means of stopping us taking ourselves and our problems too seriously. It can cut the pompous down to size and also bring out the comic absurdity of misunderstandings in language and situation.

Counsel: Doctor, did you say that the victim was shot in the woods?

Doctor: No, I said he was shot in the lumbar region.

Enjoy your crackers!

The cave

Eileen Reid

2011

Worry and anxiety about the economic crisis of the European Union, personal debt, redundancy and unemployed young people, are accompanied by a less outspoken and, in my view, extremely worrying fear: our economic and political leaders, their advisers and expert commentators, are not in control of this global crisis of finance capitalism.

To be sure, Osborne, Merkel and the rest sound as if they know what they doing, but there lurks a gnawing, growing suspicion there is too much fiddling, and that ineffectiveness is in part due to the fact that our political leaders and representatives know little more than the broadly educated rest of us. As for the experts, agreement as to how the global economy works and how political institutions ought to be organised in relation to it seems beyond their ken.

Perhaps naively, most of us hitherto believed that our political leaders have at least some expert knowledge in virtue of which they are fit to make informed decisions on our behalf: that this commonplace belief may be false renders our current predicament a frightening one indeed. For the first time in my adulthood I have heard people from all political persuasions and none, discuss with genuine anxiety, how our way of life with its aspirations and 'growth' must be curtailed.

Fear of an uncertain future combined with leaders who seem paralysed by the unknown, puts me in mind of one of the most powerful images in Western philosophy, Plato's allegory of the cave in which he depicts humanity's profound ignorance. But haunting as it is, the image of the cave is a rather beautiful picture of the human condition, and moreover, optimistic.

Plato asks us to imagine prisoners in an underground cave bound in such a way that they can only see directly ahead at the cave wall in front of them. Between them and the wall there is nothing. Behind them is a fire which casts their own shadows on the wall which mingle alongside shadows cast by puppets behind them. The prisoners believe these shadows are all there is to see, and inevitably believe that these shadows are reality.

However, one of them eventually succeeds in freeing himself of his fetters. On turning around, he discovers his shadow world is nothing but deception, and he begins the difficult journey of liberation that leads past the fire and right out of the cave and into the real world. Outside it is dazzlingly bright, and the released prisoner can hardly bear to look at the real objects; but eventually the prisoner manages to look at them directly in the light of the sun, and can even look at the sun itself.

Excited at the discovery, the prisoner returns to the cave and attempts to convince the others to turn round to the fire and the puppets; but they become confused and are

happier left in their original state of ignorance. They even become angry with the prisoner who tries to persuade them that their lives are not genuine and prefer to remain in their shackles.

The prisoners are 'like ourselves' says Plato. We are all in the cave, or at least most of us dwell there. It is the human condition. The most widely held interpretation attributed to Plato is that prior to philosophical reflection human beings live lives dominated by appearance rather than reality. The philosopher, the lover of wisdom, is the prisoner who by his own efforts manages to escape from the shadow world of appearances and discover reality as it truly is. A corollary of this tale is that the freed prisoner, who now knows the true plight of human beings, is the one person best suited to the role of educator, and, perhaps most importantly for Plato anyway, to the role of ruler in his ideal state.

Julia Annas in her *Introduction to Plato's Republic* writes that 'The cave is Plato's most optimistic and beautiful picture of the power of philosophy to free and enlighten. Abstract thinking, which leads to philosophical insight, is boldly portrayed as something liberating, breaking the bonds of conformity'. Philosophy, on Plato's account, is about thinking for oneself, rejecting conformity, and thereby taking active responsibility for one's life.

But if the image of the cave is optimistic about the powers of philosophy, it has its darker side. Less optimistic is the prospect Plato believes is in store for the philosopher's efforts to help others to understand. The prisoner who returns to the cave full of stories of what the world is really like is not well received. In fact he is subject to jeers on his return to the cave since he stumbles blindly, his eyesight failing him as it readjusts to the gloom of the cave.

But these temporary embarrassments are just the beginning. The other prisoners are not interested in the philosopher's help. They are satisfied and comfortable with their passive existence and its miserable light show. Plato suggests that they are unable (or unwilling) to distinguish truth from falsehood, and the important from the trivial. And as such they are easily manipulated, passive and profoundly ignorant. Nowhere is Plato's contempt for the unthinking more apparent.

The image of the cave relates to a perennial theme in Plato and philosophy generally: the distinction between appearance and reality, and the distinction between those who know reality as it is in itself and those satisfied with mere opinion. It is also sometimes interpreted as a religious image – escaping the cave is to find God, to see the light, to have found truth. Christ is the escapee.

Other atheistic interpretations claim quite the opposite: 'God is dead,' said Nietzsche, 'but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown'.

Finally, if Plato has grasped a profound truth about the human condition, would we recognise wise political leadership if we saw it? For example, to most of Europe,

Berlusconi is an idiot. But then in this country, Michael Foot also appeared as a bumbling fool. Maybe global political and economic order is simply too complicated for any one mind or set of minds to master (that's why we are ignorant), but ultimately it does not matter because order can and does arise spontaneously. This is the hope behind 'the invisible hand'. Or is it a shadow?

Evil and us

Robin Downie

2011

Recent happenings in Norway and Somalia have brought to the foreground the idea of evil. The term 'evil' is properly reserved for actions or events which are dimensionally different from the bad things which happen every day. For this reason, the idea of evil seems alien, and we react to its occurrence by viewing evil-doers as possessing a state of mind which is beyond our comprehension.

But there are two dangerous tendencies here. One is to concentrate on whatever dreadful case is current and to ignore the various forms of evil which take place daily, and the other more dangerous tendency is to view evil-doers as mad and therefore not like us.

It can be a help in understanding evil to classify its various forms and to consider what gives rise to them. As a start it is helpful to distinguish what we might call 'natural' evils from moral evils. Natural evils are such events as earthquakes or droughts or incurable diseases. The suffering they cause constitutes a serious and unresolved problem for Christian theology. But I want to concentrate on the moral evil caused by human choices.

The first kind of moral evil has as its primary motivation a set of sincerely held beliefs, such as political or racist ideologies, or religious fundamentalism. This is the evil of fanaticism. The common thread in all fanaticism is the belief that individual suffering is unimportant compared to the righteousness of the cause. This may well be the motivation of the Norwegian killer. Christian fundamentalism through the ages has been a fertile source of this kind of evil. Consider the Inquisition, the witch-hunting, the religious wars. Despite the sincerity of their beliefs the perpetrators are still evil-doers.

The pursuit of self-interest or national interest is a second source of moral evil. The pursuit of self-interest at the expense of others is a very common form of moral wrongdoing, but where others are made to suffer in outstandingly bad ways, then we enter the sphere of moral evil. This is the evil of organised crime, such as drug-pushing and human trafficking.

A third source of moral evil lies in the enjoyment that some people obtain from the infliction of suffering for its own sake, such as the humiliation of captives, as recently happened in Iraq.

The various types of motivation to moral evil can combine. For example, the pursuit of commercial or national interest, as with the armaments industry, can block the imagination of how the weapons will be used and the consequences of their use.

Fourthly, evil can lie therefore in the will of political rulers. Sometimes regimes

actively encourage terror, and they remain silent for political reasons in the face of known perpetrators of evil. Or they have delusional beliefs about national self-interest, and sanction the killing of thousands of civilians allegedly for national defence. Britain and America are no exceptions here.

A fifth source of evil lies in the failure of moral imagination. It is well-known that a psychopath is unable to imagine the suffering he will cause, but the same can be true on a large scale at the political level. Examples here might be the use of napalm, or nuclear weapons, or cluster bombs. Since the victims are remote it is easy to fail to imagine their sufferings. This failure of the moral imagination happens more easily if the enemy has already been humiliated or can be depicted as in some way subhuman, as happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany, or to the Vietcong in the Vietnam War.

The various types of motivation to moral evil can combine. For example, the pursuit of commercial or national interest, as with the armaments industry, can block the imagination of how the weapons will be used and the consequences of their use. Or the commercial self-interest of slave-traders combined both with a belief about the racial inferiority of the slaves and sometimes a desire to humiliate inferior creatures.

It must be stressed that those who commit evil of these types (there may be others) do not have the excuses of ignorance of what they are doing or compulsion. It is too easy to say they are 'mad'. They are like us in that they have choices and are morally responsible for what they do. But they are like us in a more specific respect.

R L Stevenson in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* brings out in fiction the chilling truth that we have a dual nature, and may be capable of committing or allowing moral evil in certain circumstances. How can moral evil be stopped? Some forms of it might be thought to be blocked by democratic systems. But enthusiasts for democracy should remember that Hitler, usually portrayed as a dictator, was democratically elected with a huge majority, and that Stalin is to this day popular in Russia. Perhaps the upsurge of pressure from advocates of human rights might help to combat other forms of moral evil. But there is a risk that human rights will be trivialised by their use in minor legal grievances.

The truth is that moral evil is probably ineradicable.

Picking our teeth, and other small morals of our life

Robin Downie

2013

The philosopher Thomas Hobbes in his great work *Leviathan* (1651) speaks of what he calls 'matters of the small morals, as when a man may pick his teeth'. A good example. Perhaps I am squeamish, but tooth-picking across a dinner table can be off-putting, unless between consenting adults.

Nowadays there are many matters of the small morals. For example, perhaps it is my age, but I feel uneasy when the unknown lady beside me on the bus pulls out her compact, studies herself in the little mirror and works remedially on what she sees there. She doesn't mind but I feel that my privacy has been invaded.

A complex set of new problems of small morals has been created by the mobile phone. There was the recent case of the shop assistant who wouldn't continue the check-out procedure because the customer was engaged with her mobile phone. The firm (Sainsbury's) took the side of the customer, as one might expect, but I wish that Sainsbury's had stood up for the shop assistant.

We are often told that employees have a right to carry on their work without abuse etc. Well, this wasn't exactly abuse, but rudeness is certainly a matter of the small morals. In this case talking to someone else on a mobile when you have face-to-face dealings with another person is a kind of snub. It conveys the message that you are insignificant in the scheme of things. The self-importance of the customer is borne out by the fact that she then went on to complain about the assistant.

More generally, the mobile phone has a cultural dominance which seems to make claims on the attention of users to the exclusion of face-to-face conversation. A GP friend tells me that she has had patients interrupt a consultation because they must answer their mobiles. Now there's a categorical imperative.

Gum-chewing while conversing is also a matter of the small morals. I had occasional experiences of that with students. Mind you, gum-chewing and conversing involves two activities at once and not everyone can manage that. The US President Lyndon B Johnson said of Gerald Ford that he was 'so dumb he can't fart and chew gum at the same time'.

Perhaps 'small morals' are just matters of etiquette and not morality proper. Perhaps, but there is a fine line between etiquette (let's call it courtesy or good manners) and morality proper. Both involve sets of rules and conventions which have evolved to assist the smooth running of society. Rules of etiquette, or good manners, can of course change more easily and vary more widely in different cultures and social settings than rules of morality. For example, the practices of shaking hands or using first names vary a lot, and

my parents would have been shocked by the amiable custom which has reached Scotland in the last couple of decades of friends kissing each other on either cheek, not to mention males hugging each other. Again, the wearing of ties is a sartorial convention perhaps on the way out.

I was struck by two recent examples. The photo of the G8 leaders, wearing their business suits but all of them tie-less and looking slightly ill at ease in their open neck business shirts. They contrasted with well-known politicians and others who were wearing jackets and ties and seemed a bit hot and equally ill at ease in the high temperatures at Wimbledon. These examples are clearly on the etiquette side of the line.

Turning now to morality proper I suggest that it changes much less than rules of courtesy. For example, what we now regard as human rights – or at least the basic ones – have been around for a long time. They can be identified in the writings of the ancient Greeks. But there are borderline examples in which the case for etiquette or the case for morality could be argued. Here are two debatable examples:

A young woman wrote to the papers that she had been suspending her obviously pregnant form from a strap on the London Underground. A young man spoke to her from his seat to say that she should stand near him because he was getting off after the next three stations and she could then have his seat. She commented on the gallantry. Well, at least he noticed. A second example involved an experience I had when I was fighting my way along a crowded corridor to a lecture theatre in Imperial College, London. I held a swing door open for a young woman coming after me and she said, 'Sexist bastard!'

It is not really a serious problem that matters of good manners overlap with the small morals. The really serious problem is that politicians and other public figures, indeed perhaps all of us, tend to restrict moral responsibility to the small matters, especially sexual ones. The big issues, those involving life and death or serious hardship, are depicted as merely matters of policy, things that belong to a non-moral category. It follows that if these policies go badly wrong then it is only that a 'mistake' has been made.

A mistake can express regret, it was unfortunate, but no moral responsibility is involved. Politicians and church leaders are good at this use of words. Killing hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq, or covering up child abuse, have been described as policies based on mistakes. More recently the hardly believable abuse of patients at North Staffs and elsewhere has been described as unfortunate, there were regrettable mistakes from which we must move on. No one is morally responsible. But if a cabinet minister is caught having dinner with his mistress then this is denounced in every headline as an example of serious moral decline, even if he doesn't pick his teeth after the steak.

I'm not a Jung man

Gary Dickson

2013

When I was a young man, I was never a Jung man. I'm afraid it was Freud – that submariner of the psyche – all the way. For me as an adolescent, he was the explorer of unknown realms, who dived into the depths of the unconscious mind as if in a bathosphere.

Indeed, I've dredged up from my own memory bank a conversation I had on an Edinburgh bus about matters psychoanalytic with a bright, female undergraduate, she championing Jung, while I counterblasted with Freud. She left the bus loudly exclaiming for all to hear: 'You can **** your libido theory!' (or words to that effect).

I decided to read Jung, realising that I had swallowed the case for the prosecution without letting the defendant speak for himself, a patent injustice.

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) met Freud in 1907, having already published substantial papers on psychology, and was impressed by Freud's work. He became president of the International Psychoanalytic Society in 1911 before breaking with Freud in 1912. For me, Jung was the supreme example of an apostate – a disciple, an apostle, who turned away from his master. Now I'll admit that this was prejudice. So I decided to let the turncoat speak for himself.

Two essays in *The Collected Works of C G Jung*, Volume 9, part 1, immediately caught my eye because of their focus on the key concepts of Jung's approach: *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (1954) and *The Concept of the Collective Unconscious* (1936-37).

Jung argues that Freud's 'personal' unconscious is based on conscious experience that is either forgotten or repressed, but driven by biological instincts, such as sexuality. But there is also the 'collective unconscious' which is 'universal, and impersonal in nature... identical in all individuals'. It, too, is instinctive. It is composed of archetypes. Scholars of aboriginal myths label these archetypes 'motifs'.

Maintaining that his concept is empirical, not mystical, Jung admits that his archetypes 'can just as well be derived [from] language and education'. That is a powerful admission. His archetypes can be likened to our stereotypes – so recognisable, so standardised, that they are found almost everywhere as, in the conclusion of a romantic novel, the perfect soul mate. As for motifs, especially in stories, they have travelled over such distances as to seem almost universal. Take the Cinderella story, for example. Crucial to its happy outcome is a test: Cinderella's foot fitting the shoe. That points to what the folklorists claim is its Chinese origins, where female foot-binding insured female beauty. This motif has clearly been transmitted, not inherited.

In Jung's earlier, more expansive essay, archetypes are thought of as 'universal images that have existed since the remotest times'.

Myths and fairytales submit the archetypes to 'conscious elaboration' and alter them in the process. So do esoteric teachings. Jung is drawn to arcane lore. Even if myths reveal 'the nature of the soul', only in dreams and visions do we receive the unaltered, unconscious archetypes. Dreams or visions reveal the archetypes.

Jung cites an instance of a delusion by a paranoid schizophrenic who saw the sun's penis. Jung then traces this vision back to an ancient text in the worship of Mithras in which a tube issues from the sun. This is offered as evidence, though not as proof of his theory. Just how plausible is this? His statements are dogmatic. A person writes to him, puzzled about always dreaming of water. Jung replies: 'Water is the commonest symbol of the unconscious'. Jung does not lack self-confidence. Well, count me out. I shall not be applying for membership in the C G Jung Appreciation Society.

On my shelves are 12 paperbacks by Freud. I have not yet read all of them. Of those I've read, his strongest book is *Civilisation and its Discontents*, a tragic view of human history. Because of mankind's instinctive aggressiveness and self-destructiveness, civilisation is only possible by repression followed by guilt. The super-ego imposes its authority. Custom and law – agencies of repression – necessarily follow. In a 'mood of anxiety', his book ends in 1931. Already Hitler, civilisation's arch-enemy, was beginning to cast his shadow.

Justin Trudeau must reflect on the skin he's in

Eileen Reid

2019

We humans are all flawed to a greater or lesser degree. I was reminded of this when the Canadian prime minister got himself into a spot of bother when it was exposed that he dressed up on at least three occasions as a brown man, faking an Indian accent. The younger Justin Trudeau had a predilection for 'blacking up' to get in character for various parties he attended. I'm sure most of us can remember doing things in our youth we would rather forget.

I have a friend in her mid-30s, a former heroin addict, who was imprisoned in her youth for drug-related offences. She is an intelligent, remarkable and wise human being. But the pain and shame she endures as a result of her deeds and incarceration are sometimes overwhelming, despite her being a different person now. Her current employers, friends and colleagues don't know of her past as she's learned that telling the truth makes her unemployable and terrified she'll be shunned. She has difficulty getting insurance and a host of other barriers which she'll face for the rest of her life. Society has punished her but won't forgive her. Until it does, her sense of self is fragmented. It's heartbreaking. 'O wad some Power the giftie gie us. To see oursels as ithers see us!' is the worst line in Burns' poetry.

How should we think about 'oursels' and our past misdeeds? When historic evidence is splashed across social media, what can we do but apologise, offering excuses like 'I was young and stupid' or 'I was drunk at the time' and so forth. But we usually fall back on Trudeau's response, which is to say: 'I'm sorry. I know it's dreadful; but that's not who I am today'.

Something is obviously right about this reply. Although there's a sense in which we are the same people we were 20 years ago, which is why past misdemeanours return to haunt us, there's also a sense in which we are not, or at least potentially not, the same people we are now. People can change. Yet there are problematic implications that are currently playing out in our identity-riven politics. Should we 'see oursels as others see us', or do we get to characterise ourselves on our own terms?

Historically, these basic issues to do with 'the self' arise when we ask: who am I? Am I the same person today as I was 20 years ago, particularly if I indulged in embarrassing, wicked or even illegal behaviour whose motivations, as a mature adult, are now inexplicable to me?

In philosophy, the popular sense of personal identity is a matter of identifying those properties to which you have a special attachment. I have lots of properties, to most of which I am indifferent. But some are particularly important in that they give me the

sense of who I am. It might be that I'm a combination of a woman, a mother, a music-lover, and so on.

Interestingly, these important properties are changeable: they are contingent in that I might never have had them all. They can also be false. My identity might involve my believing that I am the messiah. Particularly important in the current context of self-identity politics is that your sense of self might not be fully grounded in reality. And this is the heart of the matter concerning self-identity. I cannot demand that you believe of me what you take to be false. For instance, I have no right to demand that you believe that I am the messiah just because I believe I *am* the messiah. But in the current climate, liberal of hyper-individualist liberalism, just this sort of demand (not this particular example, you'll understand), is commonplace.

Fascinating as it is, the question of characterisation is not the heart of the philosophical or moral matter. Because what we really want to know in the context of understanding our past misdeeds is whether we are the same people we were before. And this depends not on what we find interesting about ourselves, but on what it to be a person.

A person is usually defined as a human being with certain properties, or the capacity to have those properties. What are they? The popular answers are the following: Being a biological organism; being a living brain; being an immaterial soul; being a bundle of perceptions or mental states and memories; or the denial that there are such things as persons at all.

So, if you are the same biological organism as you were 20 years ago, say, then you are the same person (DNA samples, fingerprints). If you have the same brain as you did back then, you are the same person (this leaves open that changes to neural activity, brought on by medication, therapy or experience, leave you the same person despite undergoing changes in personality and behaviour). If you have the same immaterial soul as you did, then you are the same person. If your bundle of perceptions and memories overlaps with those of 20 years ago, then you are the same person. And, of course, if you never *were* a person, then you can't now be the person you never were. Favoured answers shapes attitudes to past misdeeds. Deciding which of these accounts of personhood make sense: the challenging part is which of them lets us truly say: 'That's not who I am now'.

Philosophy does not offer definitive answers, which is why religion and its cultural residues in secular societies plays an important role in cultural and moral life, with forgiveness at its core. This means we must reject the idea that there is no self, no person. Whatever we are needs to be able to change in important respects while remaining fundamentally the same. Otherwise forgiveness makes no sense. My friend, for example, deserves forgiveness. She has paid the price, she is transformed in significant ways, and she now makes a valuable contribution to society.

As for Trudeau, he may be a super-woke liberal, but there's a smell of latent racism in a country once ranked among the most racially tolerant in the world. Canadians perceive

themselves as inclusive and free of racial prejudice. Yet, according to the Canadian legal scholar Constance Backhouse, white supremacy is still prevalent in the country's legal system, with blatant racism created and enforced through law. In an article called *The Skin I'm In: I've been interrogated by police more than 50 times – all because I'm black*, Desmond Cole describes a Canadian racism which 'contributes to a self-perpetuating cycle of criminalisation and imprisonment'. Mr Trudeau would be well-advised to reflect on the skin he's in before he can be fully forgiven for his juvenile pranks.

Two cheers for democracy? That's rather generous

Robin Downie

2019

There are quite a few words from the language of morality in current use, such as 'promise', 'pledge', and 'vow'. In the past all of them would have indicated a solemn commitment, and would not have been made if there were impossible impediments in the way of fulfilment. But now they are used quite lightly and carry no assurance of fulfilment, even if backed up by other colourful expressions dripping with sincerity, such as 'dying in ditches'.

Gordon Brown's favourite was 'vow', but surely he wasn't so deluded as to think he was in a position to bring about what he vowed. I suppose he spoke of his 'vow' because 'I would really quite like it if...' hasn't got the same ring to it as 'vow'. In any case, 'vow' is much shorter and snappier for a tabloid headline. Manifestos are an especial problem. They are drawn up to please the faithful and perhaps to attract the wavering so they usually involve commitments to huge amounts of spending which are not likely to be available. It would be more honest (what?) to say that these are aspirations, or indicate a direction of travel. But we do not like uncertainty.

There is currently an interesting version of all this, and it concerns the meaning of 'democracy'. I was privileged to attend a debate a few weeks ago in Glasgow University Union in memory of Charles Kennedy. The motion was something like: *This House holds that Scotland should support Brexit*. Not a motion likely to be carried in that venue. Anyway, one of the speakers argued that there had been a democratic vote in favour of leaving the EU and that you cannot mess with that. In other words, even if the post-Brexit situation is worse in every way than it was before the vote that is something to be managed. You cannot modify, soften or dilute a democratic vote. Call it 'crashing out' if you will but that is what democracy requires. This is an interesting position, but it seems to me to be elevating democracy to the status of an absolute value.

When I was a tutor in moral philosophy in the long ago, students never tired of telling me that there were no absolute values, that morality was just a matter of opinion. Indeed, the more learned students who had read some Nietzsche told me that God is dead so everything is allowed. I would ask them: If everything is allowed does that mean it is okay if I nick your wallet or if someone molests your girlfriend? No, it didn't mean that. What came out of it all was not a return to absolute values but a view that some kinds of conduct are wrong because they harm others or they break faith. And it was usually agreed that sometimes there could be problems if two things that were right conflicted with each other so you had to make decisions that not everyone would agree with.

Now, I am not going to get into the much more that needs to be said here, but perhaps

enough has been said as background to the question of the moral status of a democratically-reached majority. Democracy is certainly a moral value but is it an absolute value? It is often said, but worth repeating, that Hitler was democratically-elected with a much greater majority than there was for Brexit. J S Mill in his essay *On Liberty* speaks of 'the tyranny of majority opinion'. If democracy can be a tyranny, it can hardly be an absolute value. I suggest that the value of democracy should be weighed against other values, such as ensuring workers' rights, having safe food, environmental standards, and keeping the peace among quarrelsome nations.

There is another point. It might be said that what is at stake in the current situation is not just democracy but a commitment to obey the outcome of a democratic vote. But that is contentious. There was a view at the time that the vote was advisory, a view which is consistent with a representative rather than a direct democracy. But that view has since disappeared in the shouting which has followed. And even if we agree that it was a 'commitment', has it to be taken more seriously than the 'commitments' of manifestoes? Perhaps, but there is yet another issue: what counts as a democratic vote?

There must surely be more to it than putting a cross on a ballot paper. An analogy might help here. I am currently on the (long) waiting list for a cataract operation. I have received a preliminary examination in hospital to ensure I am an appropriate patient. But I have also been required to sign a document which lists all the many things that could go wrong. In other words, consent for a serious medical procedure requires information as well as agreement. Without an understanding of the relevant information, agreement does not count as consent. Is there an analogy here with democratic voting? Far from being warned of the dangers, we were told that leaving the EU would be the easiest thing. We could have the benefits of the Club without being members.

It is sometimes maintained that to take this line is to suggest that many Leavers were too stupid to understand the disadvantages of leaving. No, it doesn't (although listening to some interviews with random members of the public suggests to me that some were). All it does is to suggest we were not adequately informed so could not give a valid consent. E M Forster entitled a collection of essays *Two Cheers for Democracy*. Granted the system of voting we have, I think two cheers are generous.

Contributors

Bella Bathurst is a writer and photojournalist

Bob Cant is a writer and activist

George Chalmers is a retired bank robber

Catherine Czerkawska is a poet and writer

Gary Dickson was an Honorary Fellow at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh. He died in 2020

David Donnison was an academic and social scientist. He died in 2018

Robin Downie is Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow

Michael Elcock is a writer and former CEO of Tourism Victoria, Canada

Rose Galt is a former President of the Educational Institute of Scotland

Laurie Gayle is a humanitarian worker who left her native Texas to live in the UK

John Haldane is a philosopher, commentator and broadcaster

Ian Hamilton QC is a lawyer. He is known for his involvement in the capture of the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey in 1950

Gerry Hassan is a writer and commentator

Sheila Hetherington is a former political consultant and widow of Alastair Hetherington

Walter Humes is an Honorary Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences at Stirling University

Ian Jack is a journalist, writer and former newspaper editor

Bill Jamieson is a journalist, writer and former newspaper editor

Arnold Kemp was a journalist, writer and former newspaper editor. He died in 2002

Ena Lamont Stewart was a playwright. She died in 2006

Marista Leishman was a biographer and daughter of Lord Reith. She died in 2019

Andro Linklater was a writer and historian. He died in 2013

Magnus Linklater is a journalist, writer and former newspaper editor

Bet Low was an artist. She died in 2007

Bridget McConnell is CEO of Glasgow Life

Cathy McCormack is an anti-poverty campaigner and community activist. Her autobiography *The Wee Yellow Butterfly* was published in 2009

Vice Admiral Sir Roderick Macdonald was Chief of Staff of Naval Home Command. He died in 2001

Alan McIntyre is a Senior Managing Director and Head of the Global Banking Practice at Accenture. He is Patron of the Institute of Contemporary Scotland

Lorn Macintyre is a poet and writer

Ian Mackay is a retired chartered accountant

Ian Mackenzie was Head of Religious Broadcasting at BBC Scotland. He died in 2006

Jack McLean is a former journalist and writer

Donald Macleod is a theologian and former Principal of the Free Church College

Iain Macmillan was a sheriff and lawyer. He died in 2019

David McVey is a poet and writer

John Millar grew up in a Lithuanian family in Stevenston, North Ayrshire

Tom Morton is a writer, broadcaster and funeral celebrant

Peter Murphy was Rector of Whitfield High School, Dundee. His book *The Life of R F Mackenzie: a Prophet without Honour* was published in 2001

Donny O'Rourke is a poet, songwriter and critic

Eileen Reid is a writer

Kenneth Roy was a journalist who founded and edited the *Scottish Review*. He died in 2018

Allan Shiach is a film producer

Gillean Somerville-Arjat is a writer and critic

Paul Tritschler is a psychology lecturer

Eloise Vajk was a Scotland Young Thinker of the Year in 2016

Francis O Young was a Professor of Pathology at the University of Miami, Florida