

Back to the Garden

a frame of mind

Lying somewhere within a quarter of a mile from the coast of mainland Britain lies a granite island outcrop, separated by nature from the mainland for several millennia yet still connected by an ancient stone causeway. The island is a place apart, peaceful and unspoiled.

Unexpected evidence of late Neolithic communities have been uncovered on the island which indicate the inhabitants lived comfortable lives and enjoyed basic material wealth due mainly to creative and practical textile skills that rivalled anything across Europe. The islanders were sailors and farmers and it is highly probable that even in ancient times, all the earliest technical discoveries were the work of these seafaring people who were rather independent, having their own culture, who knew the world was round and who had great navigators. It was from these people these came such devices as the hoist and the crane, and that the first real houses had been overturned boats.

Trading brought the cross-fertilization of different civilisations and different cultures, and it was manifestly the result of sea-going that developed the necessary machinery for such maritime exchange. After all, they were dependent on technology developed by human beings and were the result of a very high form of applied intelligence since sailing is a direct example of mankind and nature in co-operation.

The islanders produced delicate fabrics made from processed natural plant fibres which were similar to modern cloth and once again, it was their connection with the sea that helped them develop trading which in turn enabled the island to connect with exchange routes that stretched across Europe as far as the Baltic, Africa and Asia and as a result this meant that whatever they could not make, they they could acquire.

They used sophisticated farming methods and remnants of metal tools such as

sickles, socket axes, leaf-shaped arrow heads and spear heads; pottery shards, woven goods, textiles, fishing nets as well as jewellery, necklaces, glass beads and even beads made from ostrich eggs have been unearthed by villagers. Gradually, complex, systematic ideas were developed which slowly transferred their struggling world into one of peaceful co-operation..

The present population approximates five hundred islanders living in gatherings of stone built roundhouses, each with a central hearth, slate or thatched roof, drainage and their own individual well. The main village thoroughfare is under ten yards wide and with the village being on a natural slope, unwanted water drains away with ease. To this day, families often encourage a natural shrubbery garden with flowers, vegetable and fruit cages. Some islanders live a little away from the village, in homes sprinkled about the shoulders of the slopes overlooking their mother, the sea, and like those who live in the village, they eat well on a trustworthy diet of vegetables, fish, fruit, oatmeal and a moderate glass or two of local red wine and in the main, are healthy and relaxed.

During the mornings islanders like to stroll along the waterfront mingling with the fishermen mending their nets and unloading their catches, sometimes they pause for a coffee, or perhaps buy fresh-from-the-oven bread, enjoying a breakfast then letting the day unfold. No one wears a watch, and most clocks are either fast or slow, or ignored. They enjoy a slower pace of life which allows them to linger over and savor family activities, long meals and small pleasures. The islanders love food, and they love gathering with family, friends and community members. So naturally, it's their tradition to bring people together for healthy meals, 'Eating dissolves the separation between strangers'. This is the island way, as it is with the family, to feed people, to show love and attention through dishes like Stargazey Pie and Squab Pie. At the table, the mother mends old differences and makes new friends. She reminds her family that excluding anyone is simply denying yourself an opportunity to grow, and to live.

They firmly believe in afternoon naps, an evening stroll through the village or along the seashore with an open door hospitality offering a meal and a bed to visitors. Over dinner, visitors are often advised to slow their pace of life to that of the locals, to chat, read a good book, bathe and snooze. The wise old elders believe stress and

unhappiness are not the result of external events, but rather the product of our own internal judgments, and that, therefore, happiness too, can only be found within. That the one way to happiness is to look within; to 'cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will'.

The most important community ceremonies, such as the celebration of the Seasons, the Equinox, the Solstices and Formal Joining Ceremonies are performed at the stone village circle, together with all country anniversaries, thereby helping the community to flourish by working together in a bonded relationship without strong leaders or forceful individuals.

Everything is managed within a communal sense of purpose. There are no temples or churches, no palace or pastoral ruling class. The people do not depend on a thorough definition of Good or Evil, much more upon remaining alert to happiness and sorrow caused by deeds, words and thoughts. As is the custom, the island is referred to as 'The Garden', although practically the farming islanders have been as successful as those who are sea-faring merchants, trading goods across the seas, socialising with other countries and civilisations. The typical way of life, its beliefs and customs continue to be founded in the complete acceptance that all islanders are interdependent.

The Garden island, including the people and the village, might at one time have been considered by the occasional visitor as not very advanced economically, although that may have been a concept not necessarily based on fact. It depends upon one's outlook, and there may even have been a certain amount of poverty, though no evidence of destitution or homelessness has ever been traced.

Nowadays, the inhabitants live scattered around a sublime landscape of roughly 800 acres and throughout the island settlements, every family has land, livestock, a weaving loom and can meet most of its needs. Education and health care are freely available, along with country walks, swimming, country dances, and all the usual pastimes where the people sing as they sow seed, reap grain, stroll the roads and tracks, all happy within and without, and sometimes just sitting on the hill slope behind the harbour and listening to the sounds and smells from all around.

The island has always had a small group of four or five elected villager guardians

who continue to supervise decisions as to the shepherding of the island's guidelines and one, Edlyn, is the most recent to be chosen as overseer and organiser of the most important gatherings, those of the Spring Equinox and the Midsummer's Day Celebrations.

Sean Flynn

Throughout his earliest years, one particular Garden inhabitant, Sean Flynn, was enchanted by his gifts from The Garden. He lived a carefree, happy childhood shared with his mum and dad, his Nanny and Grampa, several chickens and a cockerel; two beautiful apple trees, a variety of fruit trees, an allotment vegetable patch, flowering hydrangea and rose bushes, nasturtiums, day lilies, countless strange insects and all kinds of colourful and fragrant delights. And as he grew he became aware of the clusters of innumerable stars, of tame and wild creatures, of words, games, not to mention the small grassy area in front of their stone, slate-roofed cottage where he could play or sit on an old bench beneath an arbor of honeysuckle and read his books and comics in the comfort of its shade.

Sean came out of the world and into this life by virtue of the loving union between Lilian and George, his parents. George Flynn was born in Liverpool and moved south to work in London for a Fleet Street newspaper. It was during his investigations into the decline of the fishing industry, so essential to villages around the coastline of Great Britain, examining the prospects and possibilities of the island, that he met Lilian, the love of his life. They began going for long walks, exploring the island, and sharing their hopes and dreams until, step by step, they fell in love. They cherished each other's company so much so that eventually and naturally they were drawn into taking the next step, of coming together in the island's traditional Summer Solstice Formal Joining Ceremony. Then one fine day Lillian gave birth to Sean, their only child, and a short while later George was offered a job nearer home which meant he could retire from

working in the capital and instead become a family man in The Garden. He was able to relax, because after his initial flush of excitement from working in a city newspaper office, it didn't take long to register that the highly trusted media marketing bazaar was not all that it seemed, was drawing him in and clouding his moral judgement.

Gradually, he had begun to become aware that the sole ambition of almost all newspapers, was simply to enrich the owner by selling as many opinions and adverts as possible which was not quite the same as a desire to provide unbiased, truthful information. Eventually, George realised the media industry is not a charity and has no actual intrinsic value, and yet its readers succumb to the power of its owners and shareholders and pursue only those reports that reaffirm their own various prejudices and reassure their own particular points of view. In fact, all versions of media are transitory in the life of the average individual since we beings come and go then come and go again and again no matter what the headline in the news.

And so their life in The Garden became more positive, full of warmth and fun and on one rare occasion, after George left to visit his family in Liverpool, his mother told Sean that there was a surprise from his father on its way. However, he had first to go and stand in the shadows of the staircase by the front door, eyes tight shut, be silent and wait. He did as he was told for a while then, just as he was settling in to drawing faces on the wall, there came a loud rapping at the door. As soon as it was opened by his mother, and Sean had recognised his father's boots, instantly he yelled, "DAD!" and Lillian and Sean were swept into his father's arms, covered in kisses and hugs until they almost fell over with happiness amid squeals of delight.

Every day, Sean's gentle Nanna spent countless hours helping him make up jolly little tunes on his xylophone while encouraging him to draw and paint, read and write, show good manners when required, and how to hide behind the curtain in the living room when watching the neighbours and strangers walking by, guessing who was who and who did what. While, dear Gramps was an avid gardener who recognised the basic connection between all things and events and not just in their garden nor their allotment down by the stream but throughout the whole of existence. He would mumble and chatter his theories as he trundled along in his hob-nailed boots between the furrows, planting seeds with a

complaining Sean shuffling along behind, stumbling along with constant chatter and forever complaining about the drizzle or the mud, the worms or the bees. As for Gramps, their garden was more than an average plot of land, it was his heart and soul. Yes, Gramps was full of wonderful stories about Nature being in control of everything and telling of how he had once won a top gardening trophy to the acute envy of a jealous fellow competitor who had accused him of being a secret gardening professional. But as soon as Gramps looked upon the trophy as being Nature's way of showing gratitude for all his support, the accusation became a treasured compliment.

There was one day when Sean had been sitting inside the wicker hen coop studying the chickens when the cockerel came in, took umbrage, and chased him down the length of the garden until Sean slipped on some loose pebbles and was immediately pecked on an eyebrow by the cockerel. Gramps was furious with him, "You silly boy! Another inch and he would have blinded you! From now on - stay out of the chicken run!" And this essential piece of advice was to stay with Sean for the rest of his life.

However, over the days and months that passed, Sean's mother grew increasingly slight and weak as her health deteriorated more and more. Then one day, Lilly passed away after a lengthy fight with cancer when he was only nine years old. However, being so deeply loved by every member of his family and being so young, Sean found warmth and comfort, strength and courage from every member of his family which helped him ease the loss of his mother's love and special attention. His Nanna told him, 'Your mother will always be by your side, you know. She will never leave you.'

Then, following many a thoughtful and tearful family discussion, it was decided it might be best for Sean if he and his dad move back up to Liverpool where he could mingle among cousins his own age amid the warmth of a large and caring family and experience a wider range of opportunities. Just before he left the island, he wrote a message to his mother, 'I feel you with me', and wrapped it inside one of her scarves that he had found inside a drawer, then carefully buried it in the back garden to say something to her about her passing which to him had been so mysterious yet not so devastating as it was to everyone else. It almost seemed acceptable to him that now that she was gone her terrible illness was over and she could rest in peace.

Each Easter and sometimes for the duration of summer holidays, he and his Dad would travel back to their Garden, stay with his grandparents and for the time they were there Sean would surprise everyone by briefly losing all trace of his Liverpool accent.

One Christmas Eve in his Liverpool home, Sean decided to play a trick on Father Christmas. He had always wanted to meet his hero face to face but somehow he never woke when his presents came into his room. So that year, just before he climbed into bed, he jammed a heavy pillow behind the door so if anyone tried to come in they'd have to push hard to get the door open and the noise would wake him up and that way he would meet the magic man and maybe have a chat at last. He was fast asleep and dreaming when he heard the door pushing against the pillow. He sprang up in bed and turned to see but imagine his disappointment when all he saw was his Dad looking trapped and embarrassed. "Dad, Dad! Get out quick! Father Christmas will be here any second and you'll frighten him away!"

Sean was never at a loss for things to do or places to go. Sometime around his eleventh birthday he met and befriended a local lad who was to remain his closest friend for the rest of his life. The boy's name was Jim Dempsey and although Sean was never at a loss for things to do or places to go, Saturday afternoons were always saved for him to join Jim in music and singing. Jim played guitar and slowly his music encouraged Sean to sing along and join with him in the harmonies, even if they were sometimes a little off-key. But that didn't matter because the main mark of their friendship was their infectious Liverpool humour and their growing confidence which helped Sean develop his flourishing personality.

Sean made lots of new friends and every time there was a school trip, he'd plead with his Dad to let him join expeditions with his chums, and these in turn became several camping trips in Wales and at least twice, a school pilgrimage to the Catholic shrine at Lourdes in the Pyrenees. One of these trips was in the horsebox belonging to a local garage owner, known as a country gent and school benefactor. The other was by train when he slept in the luggage rack.

And he loved his school, except for the controlling punishments and the physical beatings doled out by the monks using canes and leather straps which always seemed

rather excessive since he was supposedly a pupil under the supervision of a caring educational religious brotherhood. Gradually, he began to regard religion as just another school subject and the last time he tried to show interest by asking where exactly was the eternal home for human bodies, the very place they had told him his mother was living, he wasn't at all surprised when they wriggled out of a direct answer by promising to explain some time in the future, "When you're a little older and the explanation of Heaven will be a little less complicated for you to grasp." That same night in bed, a flash of enlightenment woke him with a start, one which made him sit bolt upright and say out loud, 'Ha! They don't know! The whole thing's an invention!' And from then on, along with a growing group of fellow students, he grew more and more convinced that all religious anecdotes were inventions and a simple means of controlling the masses.

Nevertheless the rest of his schooling was fun. He wasn't a genius yet he enjoyed his classes and was very popular. His school chums lived scattered all over the city and its suburbs and he would take bus rides to visit them on Saturdays before his music session with Jim. Sean was unlike the average city teenager in that he was not the slightest bit competitive or ambitious and so had little interest in sports and games except, like every other teenager, he began to develop a taste for music. Yes, he was inclined to be naive and gullible, yet he had a sharp sense of humour which helped when making friends. Music was his real love, and not just TV and radio pop but music from all around the world. His father's brother, Uncle Freddy was a sailor, and he would often come home from sea with several records under his arm and sometimes an occasional musical instrument like a banjo, an accordion, a ukulele and once even a pair of maracas. Sean learned to play along with each of them, then plonk away for hours on the piano in the parlour. He would try to write words to explain his feelings and so his music became the definition of his life.

On a visit to The Garden for his sixteenth birthday, Sean sat with his grandparents in their back garden, and while his grandmother trimmed his hair and his grandfather potted some plants, he let his eyes wander and take him back to when he was a boy. Across the back of the garden he could see the chicken coop still there but no

longer any sign of chickens. As usual, on the left were the two sheds and two greenhouses. He could see a small pond he'd never noticed before but there were the apple trees, one either side of the path, and the eucalyptus tree, now taller than ever, and then the grassy area where he used to play, with its benches, table and chairs all still neatly arranged next to the vegetable patch with its huge boulder in the corner of the garden. Occasionally, as Nanny clipped away, from somewhere in the sky came the indistinct mutterings of pupils answering questions and the voice of their teacher commenting and sometimes even laughing with them at their replies.

Suddenly a man appeared through the gate, smiling and waving a large bottle of wine and carrying one of orange juice for Sean. 'Hello everyone! It's me, Barry,' and into the garden came the man Sean recognised as the local publican.

'Mr. Briggs, Hello. Hello. Good to see you.'

'Hello. I heard you'd be here for your birthday, so I thought I'd pop over and wish you all the best. Have some orange juice.'

But it was Nanny who took over and soon they were adding memories to life's solutions and enjoying the mood in the garden.

'I don't know how you grow so many poppies, Barry. Mine all die away with the frost.'

'Oh Lucy, it's not just the frost, poppies need poor, sandy soil or better still, a couple of acres of scrubland. Add to that a dead cat and an old rotting tractor covered in bindweed and there'll be poppies growing everywhere.' He beamed at Sean, 'You've grown haven't you, boy. You were the smallest and youngest drinker in my pub,' said Barry, 'and it was always good to see you there with your mum and Dad in those days. We were all so sorry when she passed away.' Sean told of how he'd drag his parents in for some soft drinks whenever they walked by. He began to recall one particular walk with his parents where they were speculating on the life of bees and ants and how superbly organised they all seemed. He thought for a moment, then asked, 'Nanna, do you think there are still people who believe human beings are superior to everything else on Earth?'

His Nanny inhaled deeply, 'Well, an awful lot of people think they are although I'm sure our cats would disagree.' She had two cats, a brother and sister, Theo and Ebby,

and they were lying fast asleep on the grass until she spoke and that's when together they sighed, yawned and rolled over. 'But people do think like that, although I've no idea why, considering the way some of them live. It's not very superior just to make money the sole purpose in your life, or to create wars with people you don't even know, or to destroy the very atmosphere we need in which to breathe, or to poison the oceans with discarded plastic or allowing the media and self-appointed people to completely control your life as though they had inherited some kind of moral superiority. But that's exactly what we do. I think we're evolving into subjective and controlled robots.'

Barry nodded as he filled the glasses placed on the table by Gramps, 'She's right. When we talk of evolution, I think we mainly talk in terms of what we regard as the most advanced forms of life and the status inherited by different sorts of beings,' he said. 'Some people think that above us there are angels, and then gods, then the rich and famous and all sorts of echelons inheriting our wonderful human establishment. And that below us are inferior mammals, perhaps demons, tiny monsters in bacteria without even considering plants or rocks, right down to the murky depths. So they pack themselves on the back and tell each other how great it is to be a human and not to be a cat, not to be a rose, and not to be a fish. Some even try to imagine how much better it will be once they become angels. They can't wait! Yes, some humans either completely lack faith in themselves or are very conceited and think they can get up there and be gods.'

Grampa joined in, 'Know what I think? I think we think we know everything but all our thinking depends on what we know and, believe me, I think that's all out of focus so we can't know everything. We think we do, but we don't.' He moved a little further into the shade of the Fuchsia hedge, stared at the vegetable patch and wiped his forehead, 'But how do we know we're superior to spuds, say? What do we really know about spuds anyway? We probably have never really studied spuds beyond knowing how to cook and eat them. That's probably about it. But have we ever thought how a potato feels? Most people would say it doesn't feel because it's only a potato, because it has no feelings. But someone once proved that if you put a lie detector on a potato, it registers, and its readings change when you do certain things. If you prick the potato, or swear at it loudly, you'll make it jump. As a matter of scientific fact, and this was on the telly, once we

learned how to turn on our alpha waves, then went and sat beside a plant, we found it could pick up those alpha waves, so maybe plants are not so stupid after all.'

Nanny smiled. 'Some would disagree and argue that because potatoes don't have houses or cars, computers, or iPhones, and definitely no religions, then they can't possibly be part of a civilization. But the potato might argue that humans are the poor, uncivilized beings because we have to have all this rubbish around us so we know who we are and what life's all about. The potato might point out that we are messy and inefficient, cluttering up the planet with our culture while, in fact, they have it all built into them already. Of course, most people would say that's impossible because potatoes are stuck in one place all the time so how can they know what's going on in the world? But the potato doesn't need to go running around because its sensitivity extends all over the place and they might even offer to introduce us to a few other things like their neighbour, the dandelion seed. The dandelion gets around because it has tiny seeds with white down sticking out at the top like a flower, and when the wind comes these seeds float off into the air. Then there's the sycamore tree with its little helicopters that it sends off to spin in the air and fly away. And what about the apple tree with fruit so delicious birds like to eat it. They eat the apple and swallow the seeds, then they fly away and in their poo is the seeds which is then plopped on the ground below.'

Nanny sat back, blew some hair from her comb and smiled at Sean, 'Keep still and listening. It's Grandad's turn.'

And Grampa could hardly wait to get a word in on his favourite subject, 'That's not all,' he said, refilling the glasses. 'Nature is full of incredible evolutionary wonders. Apart from the potato, others have burrs that stick in the hides of deer, and the deer carry these seeds around. Perhaps it is one of the ways they get about and spread their people so they aren't all crowded together and don't strangle themselves. But, Sean, this is only the beginning of their extraordinary evolution. They all have vibrations going on inside their fibres that are quite as good as anything invented by Mozart, Bach or The Beatles and I'm convinced they enjoy their vibrations, and although we may think they are not doing anything because they just sit around all the time, they are vibrating and they are in ecstasy, humming to the great hum that is going on everywhere.'

I believe that all vegetables understand this, and so from their point of view they are simply very highly evolved. They probably don't consider us as inferior beings at all but just something different. In general most people are very prejudiced when it comes to veggies.'

Nanny took over, 'It's true and it just shows a lack of compassion we have towards them. If we can show compassion for vegetables, or for flies, or mushrooms, or viruses, what it means is that you have put yourself in their position. Then when you begin to really sympathise, you see they think of themselves as people, and they have just as much right to think that they are civilised and cultured as you or I do.

Yes, plants may be in such an advanced state of consciousness that unknown to us, an incredible source of wisdom may be growing in the flower pot at your door and unbeknown to you, they may have a great deal to do with the way you think.'

Barry stood up, 'I wouldn't blame people for thinking it ridiculous to consider the humble fly as extremely intelligent too. With all those eyes, it must see through a window of different shaped glass pieces and different angles, and along with their ability to walk upside down on the ceiling they might have lots of different points of view, too. Who knows? Why do flies buzz? What is that all about? We don't know because we don't even know how to begin to study them.'

'Exactly,' said Grampa. 'It took years and years for us to find out that bees communicate with each other by dancing, and then that was such a shock to some so-called *learned* people that they chose not to believe it at all.'

'And it's a shock to find out that dolphins may be more intelligent than people,' said Nanny.

'Or that the so-called *killer whales* are a very intelligent kind of dolphin,' said Gramps. 'Look at those creatures. They are mammals and it is said, although we are not quite sure it's true, that they once lived on the land. On the land! Believe me! Apparently they decided that being on the land was a pretty stupid way for a mammal to live, and so decided to go skin diving.'

Barry gave a loud belly laugh. 'They probably realised they didn't have to do much for a living, so they might as well dance and and sing and play. That must be why

dolphins spend most of their time simply messing about – and they mess about in very complicated ways. If we were dolphins, we would call this entertainment!

'Aye,' said Nanny, 'Even when humans practise art, in a way we are just messing about.'

'Wow! This amazing! So what about the astronomers' idea of an organised universe?' asked Sean.

'Think about it in human terms for a minute,' Grampa took a deep breath. 'For one thing, most people we call primitive are far less vicious and cruel than we are in our so-called advanced society. They live more peaceful lives, and even though the tools they use are not as developed or as complex as ours, they are very dignified, civilised people. They are certainly not savage.'

Nanny took over, 'Most primitive peoples look upon us with deep concern. They don't regard us as civilised at all. Instead they regard us as a very, very serious menace to the planet, and that's because we ignore the ecology of nature and tend on the whole to be pretty miserable.'

'That's true,' said Sean. 'Sometimes when I'm wandering around the city I see all these so-called businessmen and merchants all looking so serious and down in the mouth because even with their loads of money, they are always worrying about their health, their taxes, riots, politics, or losing their bankrolls.'

Barry stood up, 'You can always worry about something if you are the worrying type, and it doesn't matter how well-off you are or how broke you are. But mark my words boy, there is absolutely no reason to assume any of us are superior to other forms of life.' He looked up at the sky, 'Gosh, the day's flying by. I'll have to get going. Sean, see you next time you're here. You could come out to my place on the beach with these two. You may not have heard but I've handed the pub over to my lad, Barrington. He'll be running it from now on.'

'Well, thank you Mr Briggs. I'd love to come and see you. I'll pop over next time.' Then Sean put his arms around his grandparents, 'I love it here. Hey! Is it OK if I make us all a pot of tea for before Mr. Briggs leaves?'

Only two months later Sean's grandfather passed away peacefully, followed a few

days later by his Nanna, diagnosed with having died of a broken heart.

The Pikkins

Sean's father, George, was a keen dancer and it was at the local Grafton Ballroom that he met Antoinette and following many a gentle, but deepening, romance on the dance floor, she became Sean's step-mother, a lovely lady and someone he loved dearly. She was a nurse who would later be diagnosed as having diabetes and there were times when Sean would help with her insulin injection which was more scary for him than for her.

Straight after their wedding Toni and George set up home with Sean in Orrell Park, a part of town where, by pure coincidence, he found himself living around the corner from some of his classmates. The main thing they had in common was a love for music. And because there was very little work about, by the time Pip, Wally, Ged and Jim were in their middle teens they would all gather in whoever's home had a little spare space to sing and practise music almost every evening for the next half dozen years. Sean sang the the melodies while Wally played lead guitar, Pip played bass, Jim played rhythm and Ged played drums as they all sang tight harmonic backings.

Every few weeks Sean and Jim would go to the barbershop when school let out to have their hair trimmed and styled, not that it was necessary just a part of their 'thing'. The barbershop was also a meeting place for a few retired 'gents' and as the boys sat beneath the snap and crunch of scissors, watching tufts of hair join the refuse gathering on the floor, they became included in the chatter and listened to tales from the old boys' life memories, "No one goes to Wales these days. Too wild. Far too dangerous. Up in the mountains the men have tails and they all eat babies." "Aye, and down in the valleys whole families live and work in the coal pits never seein' the light of day." These tongue-in-cheek murmurings would be accompanied with winks and nudges as they all began to chuckle.

During one particular session at the barber's, just before their Easter break, an

excited Jim and Sean agreed they owed it to themselves to get a tent and go hitch-hiking into Wales and take Wally and his guitar along too for safety, even though Jim had found an engineering job in a factory and was about to start work. As soon as half term arrived they took off, first by ferry across the Mersey and then south on foot hitching down the Wirral then on into Wales.

They were away for a week and when they got back Jim was first to say he would never forget the 'thumbs-out-trudging' along the edges of roads in single file with quarter-to-three feet Wally leading, then pigeon-toed Sean behind and bringing up the rear, himself, bow-legged Dempsey. The one thing about their trip they valued more than anything else was the warmth, camaraderie and kindness shown by absolute and trusting strangers who gave them lifts in all sorts of vehicles, business, private, old and new, over miles and miles asking nothing in return except friendship, companionship and often just silence.

They returned to Liverpool full of ideas about their music and during one practice session in Wally's front room, Pip mentioned that his cousin had arranged a booking for the band at a factory club in just two weeks time and that perhaps they had better give the band a name. Was he joking? No he was serious. Sean was stunned. Then even more stunned when Wally suggested he change his name from Sean, 'It's so uncool for a Rock and Blues singer. Think of something else.'

Ged suggested Sean call himself Fly, short for Flynn. 'What?' said Sean and from that moment on he was known to everyone, even himself, as Fly. 'And we need a name for the band,' he looked at the silent faces. 'What shall we call the band?' Once the whoops and screams of laughter at the various suggestions had died down, at last they picked, 'The Pikkins', inspired by an old US country song called '*Pickin' Time*', and from then on they were in showbiz.

On stage they just did as they always did and let the instruments play themselves and the voices do the singing. There was no choreography, moody poses or fluttering arms, and their appearances always went down a storm. Their first booking went so very well that they were re-booked for six more weekly shows and that is when the ball started rolling. Even when they began to find jobs, they would continue to play in clubs several times a week under the close scrutiny of at least two hundred and fifty other rival

Merseyside bands throughout the Northwest including North Wales and even as far south as Solihull Ice Rink. Then one day, they passed an audition in London to cross the channel and tour France and Germany. They did it for fun, without any egotism or expectation and floated along on the time of their lives. Over the following six months they lived as they travelled, squashed like sardines in their tin can of a van until there came the day, as the result of being so continually close, that they realised they had just enough confidence to take the most obvious next step, they had to make a record. So they moved to London and one of the last things Fly's dad said to him before he left Liverpool was, 'Good luck, boy. Enjoy yourself and remember – the only time is now.'

In the capital they were not at all successful in finding a manager they could relate to until, out of the blue, they were introduced to a Sicilian business man called Signore Antonio Vincenti, a friend of a friend of a friend and someone who seemed not a great deal older than themselves. He took control and within weeks they had made their first record entitled, 'I'm More Alone Now Than You're Home (Than When You Were Away)', written in a moment of hilarity by Sean and Pip. Vincenti put it on the internet, and even gave it away to anyone who wanted it. Somehow, he had it played on local radio stations all over the country and day by day it became a favourite towns and city clubs. It was even picked up by a new record company executive, an associate of Vincenti, who was looking for fresh talent and suddenly they were everywhere and their record was even released in Europe and played on Radio Nova of Paris and Radio Rouge in Italy.

Once again, they toured France, Italy, Hungary and Germany, which gave them their first European hit and one morning they woke up in their tiny flat to the news that they had made it into the US charts and were being played on Rock Radio USA.

Signore Antonio Vincenti signed them up and became their official manager. He polished and prepared them for bigger things until the day came when they realised they had a string of hit records, promotional deals, world tours and fat bank accounts.

Now, they were cool.

For almost two decades the band enjoyed successes large and small and could do no wrong until, as anticipated by some, their lives on stage became rather repetitive and even monotonous on some occasions although not so much to their fans, more to

themselves. Often, while singing, Fly's thoughts would drift to other things, to childhood memories, favourite movies and TV shows, to one night stands and dates with girls he'd loved and lost. He was like a child absent-mindedly singing ditties while playing with his favourite toy, the audience.

For many years The Pikkins had been a highly successful and influential group of musicians until individual members became so obsessed with their ever growing bank balances that the music became secondary and life became a contest to see who could make the most shrewd and successful investments. There grew secrets, suspicions, envy and even jealousies as gradually, they sold their solidarity for cash. Repeated lethargic performance brought an inevitable withering of interest which in turn brought apathy and restlessness within the band until inevitably after a time, The Pikkins began to disintegrate and in the end, Fly and his old school friends, went their separate ways.

Vincenti

Gazing across the London skyline from the balcony of his thirty-fifth floor executive penthouse office stood Antonio Vincenti, CEO of Vincenti Productions, renowned Sicilian business agent and wizard music entrepreneur. Elegant, suave, charming and highly regarded by most businessmen, on that particular day he was balancing on the tip of a dogged problem.

With the break up of world renowned musical group The Pikkins, Vincenti had devised a simple plan that would restore his losses and even expand his riches. The only problem was, he would have to persuade Fly, the band's lead singer, his demoralised protege, into becoming incognito in order to provide the perfect opportunity to announce Fly's death to the world media and thereby make a fortune by re-releasing his back catalogue of popular music. However, in spite of the subsequent guaranteed treasure trove, he was convinced Fly would be outraged and horrified by the idea of deceiving his fans and unconditionally reject the scheme outright. Vincenti had always considered Fly

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