

**SANTA'S SECRET**

**LOVE CHILD**

**REVEALED**

The Devizes Writers' Group

Through the Letterbox

Spring 2012

News from the  
borders, 500  
years ago

**THROUGH THE LETTERBOX**

Correspondence 1517—3011

**Mrs Rabbit—  
a new start**

School enemies  
Do we ever forgive?

**21 ORIGINAL PIECES OF WRITING  
FROM WILTSHIRE AUTHORS**

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### **DEVIZES WRITERS' GROUP**

*Our writers' group is a collection of people who meet together once a month to share our writing.*

*'Writing' in this instance is a word which encompasses a great deal. For many in our group it is the delight of experimentation, for hearing how words sound when put together and the sheer enjoyment this brings.*

*For others there is the serious matter of time devoted to shaping, editing and seeking to improve. There are too the aspirations of writing . . . the determination to find a publisher or an agent, win a competition, to blog or self-publish.*

*And so the group is constantly evolving, but always seeking to support and develop the writers amongst us in a variety of ways. We have published authors in the group who bring their expertise and experience, but we also believe that to call yourself a writer you need not necessarily have the great work finished and on shelves. You are a writer if you write.*

*This anthology is the result of just one idea, put forward in the Crown Centre one summer evening . . . the writing of letters. We hope you will browse, relish the variety and find things to enjoy.*

*You may be inspired to write more letters yourself.*

**Liz Light, Group Coordinator**

# A Letter from a Lady

by Simon Evans

Friday

**Dear Squidge**

I haven't heard from you for ages – or seen you since that ghastly wedding of Griselda's Damian in Hanover Square. How are you, what have you been up to? You used to write so often.

Nothing much has changed here. I seem to be sinking into middle age in a rather helpless way. When I find myself contemplating dowdy dresses in Bond Street I think of you and that sparkly look you always have, and how the men have always headed straight for you at parties. Not that I cringe in corners at parties myself, but you know what I mean. And you did OK catching Charles didn't you? Poor Charles, do you visit him regularly still?

I must tell you, because you are really my oldest friend – all the other girls at school were so frightful, weren't they – I really don't know what James is up to. You know he works frightfully long hours at the business and is always having meetings and conferences and what have you. That is to say, I thought he worked frightfully long hours.

On Tuesday, I was tidying up some of his clothes – you know how untidy he is, well you don't of course, but he is, and I found this letter. I couldn't believe it. And I don't know what to do, so I am asking you, because I think you're so very sensible about men. I didn't know where to look when you started talking about Damian and how could he have married that awful girl. And I think you are so right, it's not going to last.

Anyway, all this letter said was

*"Darling, life is a bit difficult here at the moment, but I will be with you on Thursday, promise. Usual place. Love James."*

But of course he hadn't posted it. So is his assignation on or off? Today is Thursday and he told me he was going into work early and was out to dinner with those Japanese he is always seeing, and not to wait up. I was in an absolute fervour (or do I mean ferment?); because of course he might have contacted her (whoever "darling" is) some other way, by email or whatever. But then, why did he leave the letter for me to find? Did he just forget, or was it deliberate? If it was deliberate, what on earth am I going to do? I'd rather he just walked out.

And if it wasn't deliberate, what now? I won't know what to say to him. But we've been so happy, Squidge!

Later. Here's what I did, because I had to do something. I called his office, which I hardly ever do, and spoke to someone called something like Carole Rainsford, his personal assistant, who rather grandly told me that he was in London, would be in meetings all day in the City and then was having a business dinner with a party of Japanese clients at the Langham, where they were staying. I know that the person he always deals with is a Mr. Sakimura, so I called the Langham to see if he was staying there. And Sakimura had checked in! So maybe James was telling the truth. Only I don't think so.

I really, really wanted to talk to you about this Squidge, so I phoned your house and spoke to someone who said she was your assistant. I didn't know you had an assistant, darling, how grand! I've just got Mrs. Rajevsky who helps with the housework, on her good days anyway. Your assistant said you were up in London all day doing various things and then she added, quite casually, "all I can tell you is that Mrs. Brownjohn has penciled 'Langham' on her calendar."

What a coincidence. So I'm wondering if you saw James yesterday while you were up there. If you did somehow run into him, could you let me know what he was up to? Was he with anyone? Do call and let me know, I'm paralysed with anxiety.

Yours fretfully,

**Brandybutter.**

## I write because...

*I live in hopes that my literary efforts will achieve fame and fortune. Until then I enjoy writing, which means much more than the physical entry of words to my computer, and reading what other people have published. I am fortunate in having a varied and sometimes ill spent past to provide me with subject matter.*

**Simon Evans**

# So Long Overdue

by Mike Williams



***My dear Grandpa,***

A huge, huge apology. This letter is 76 years late, but then I *was* only three when so sadly you died. You were the *ideal* grandfather, kindly, gentle and often laughing. In so many relationships myth replaces reality, in the telling - but NOT in *your* case! I remember so well your big white walrus moustache that I use to pull thinking that it was something attached to your merry face that I could tug off and stick under the nose of Old Bear, my beloved teddy.

The more I have learned about you, the more my very precious memories have been stirred and given so much more meaning. When I started to research your life I discovered that you were born in County Tipperary, close to the Kilkenny border. You later lived in Kilmoganny where I have stayed twice in the guest house that was once your school.

Your mother's family home, Kilmoganny House, lower down the hill from the school is charming and set in the most beautiful grounds. I learned that her father - your grandfather - was a farmer and the trees he planted, around 1850, are now enormous.

I've seen the cottage where you were born, in the slate quarries, on the banks of the pretty river Lingaun, in the parish of Ahenny. Though now a long since abandoned and overgrown quarry, the restored countryside is lovely. I visited your next house in Kilmacoliver, where you moved, when you were about three. It is at the end of a long leafy breen. Shooing his cows away from the front door, the present owner greeted me minus his teeth, which I later discovered grinning at me, in a glass jar on the mantelpiece! Grandmama and most *certainly* dear Aunt Mary, your sister, would NOT have approved! Aunt Mary's son, cousin Vincent, I discovered, served as an officer in the Artists' Rifles ("the Suicide Club") during the Great War. It was she, I learnt, who so generously paid for my father's education at the King's School, Chester.

The view from your former garden, of Carrigadoon Hill, where the remarkable green slate comes from, is just glorious. Taking in so much intoxicating scenery, I felt very close to you. It was as if you were there at my side. As I stood there I envied you your childhood, surrounded by so many beautiful hills and glens. Looking over your fence I could see dramatic Slievenamon and beyond, to the south, the Coomeragh Mountains where Dan Breen and the Tipperary Brigade operated to great effect. Bold as brass, he billeted his flying-column in Kilmoganny, under the noses of the Black and Tans! *Erin go bragh!*

Hanging on the wall in my office is an electric clock made of Carrigadoon green slate cut in the shape of Ireland and also a slate from the roof of your house. Cousin Eunice, in Canada, whom I discovered via the Internet, sent me wonderful photos of your father Thomas complete with Brunel-type top hat and a monstrous machine he invented, to fit iron rims onto wooden wheels. She also sent me pictures of you and grandmama, which I had previously not seen.

I've sponsored a William Rutherford Williams hurling shield in your memory, for Tipperary schoolboys. I was proud to present it. How I wished you'd been there. At the presentation a delightful little girl looked at me most accusingly and said - 'Mister, there's no shield for the camogie.' I promised there would be one next year. And there was, but horror of horrors, they named it the Mike Williams *memorial* shield!

With the help of a genealogist, I discovered that you moved to Pembrokeshire in the 1870's, where your father was appointed manager of the Porthgain slate quarries, Llannrhian, near St David's. What another beautiful spot that is, right on the Pembrokeshire coast.

I researched Grandfather Abbott Laker's lineage, too. What an extraordinary fellow *he* was and so different from you! There is a story of him trying to get past a woman who kept dithering left and right in front of him. Short on patience, he apparently roared - 'For heaven's sake, Woman, STAND STILL and let me pass - you're like a ship without a rudder!' I can imagine that in a similar situation you would have said - 'Sure now, just one more time, m' dear, then I really must go!'

Well grandpa, I'm up to my limit of 750 words. How good it has been to think of you. One thing's for sure; it won't be another 76 years before I write to you again! God bless.

Love you

***Mike***

***I write because...***

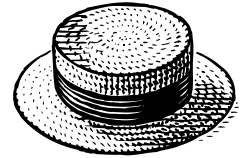
*After over thirty years of writing books in my academic disciplines of psychology and moral philosophy (mostly on leadership in management) I decided I needed a change. Having been both a sailor and a Royal Marine I turned my hand (and my PC) to writing historical naval fiction, which I enjoy immensely.*

***Mike Williams***



## Old Girls

by Rosalind Ambler and Ann Stevens



Dear Fiona

Such exciting news! Molly is coming over from New Zealand, and is going to stay here over the weekend of 12/13th. I absolutely know you will want to catch up after all these years, and thought maybe a girls' only weekend might be best. I can make Gerald push off somewhere, if Maurice can spare you.

Goodness, I feel I am back in the dorm at St Margaret's already! Such fun. Do say you can come.

Lots of love, Dot

Hi Dot.

*That weekend might be difficult - Maurice has a works do coming up and I need to get my roots done. Best count me out—I've suddenly remembered Patsy's pyjamas. Such a hoot!*

Love Fiona

Hi Fiona

Sorry for the delay, but I have managed to contact Molly, and we can reschedule for the following weekend – 19/20<sup>th</sup>. In fact, that might be even better, as if Maurice would like to come too he can join Gerald on his annual treat of doing maintenance at the Miniature Steam Railway. He is Vice Chairman of the Society, and it is a great boys' toys day out, with lots of dismantling and greasing! And, of course, your roots will be done by then, so you will be looking super. I've given up on colouring, after a bad experience with something called Tuscan Red that came out looking more Tinned Italian Tomato to me. Poor Patsy, did you hear what happened to her? So sad.

Love Dot

*Uh Ooh - Maurice has the car that weekend - a Sealed Knot battle at Kenilworth! Boys' toys indeed! Yes, I saw Patsy's case in the paper - how humiliating for her. Last I heard she was digging wells in India - (how Frumpy Frobisher would have approved). At least nobody will know her there.*

*Did you get the Christmas circular from Janice about those ghastly girls and their violins?*

*See you - F*

We can't let you be all alone for the weekend! There are very frequent trains from Paddington to Swindon. I think I have dropped off Janice's radar, but assume the daughters are now both Menuhin standard and passing every exam ever invented while being pursued by model agencies, if she is to be believed. I did hear from Paula last Christmas – her life seems as dull as ever. How on earth does Patsy manage the digging, now she only has one leg? I never realised pole dancing could be so dangerous. Let me know what train to meet on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

Love Dot.

*I can't **believe** you'd suggest I take the train! Have you forgotten Clapham and the terrible time I had? I swore I'd never travel by rail again.*

*Paula always was as dull as ditchwater, but her life can't be much more boring than mine. I actually used to look forward to Downton Abbey on Sundays! When I think - well, never mind.*

*I assume Patsy has a prosthetic leg. And it wasn't pole dancing - that was a malicious rumour put about by Molly (though we all found it hilarious at the time.)*

F

But Fiona, you weren't ON the Clapham train that crashed. You just missed a dental appointment, if I remember rightly, because of the 'rail chaos' as they say on the news. Anyway, if you are alone all weekend, and your life is boring, I am sure we can find a way to get you here. I am looking into National Express times, and if that does not work thought maybe I could invite Daffy as she lives in Kent so could pick you up en route. I'll get back to you soonest.

I'm surprised you watched Downton – I thought you might find it too gruelling.

If it was not pole dancing, then why was the naughty MP there?

D

Dear Dot,

*Okay - I'm beaten. While I appreciate your strenuous efforts, I have to tell you now THAT I DO NOT WANT TO SEE MOLLY. You never knew, but it was she that told Matron about me and Kev and the dope, and got me suspended. Ergo, I did not get to Uni: ergo, I am stuck in a dead end job while Molly runs a Marina in Auckland. She basically ruined my life - and seemingly Patsy's too. It was Molly who introduced her to the MP.*

*So - have a nice weekend!*

Fiona

Oh gosh, I am so sorry. I had no idea. But in any case, I came to the computer to tell you that Molly has had a frightful accident involving a boom, and is likely to be in hospital for some time, so will not be visiting Blighty after all.

Now she isn't coming, any chance you *could* now come, and tell me all about the MP?

Lots of love, Dot

*OK, will do. I have my own car, as it happens. Expect me around teatime. F*

Dot was written by Rosalind Ambler, and Fiona by Ann Stevens. For the story of Patsy and Paula, and information on the authors, turn to page 18.

## ***Letter to Helen***

by Shelagh Newman



Cherry Tree Cottage

### ***My dear Helen***

It seems impossible that a whole year has passed. All those newsy letters you have written to me sit on my desk. You could never imagine what a great comfort they have been and how just looking at that neat pile fills me with warmth and gratitude.

And then I remember – not one of them has ever been answered.

I know you understand though how difficult the year has been since Alfie died. We had been together for more than fifty years. He was my reason for living, Helen. I thought I lived for family, for friends, to watch the changing seasons and to find snowdrops for the first time each year. And you know how much I love our beautiful cottage garden with our seat under the blossom tree.

But I found that without Alfie all these things meant nothing. Nothing at all. I could find no joy in the world and even worse than that I had no words.

I was lost. Everything stayed inside me. At Christmas when the girls and the grandchildren came we all tried to put on brave faces but the grief was overwhelming for us all and we couldn't seem to help each other.

But then in early January some friends who had been worrying about my frame of mind introduced me to a lovely young man called Jamie. I can see now how it was all contrived, for young Jamie was a grief counsellor. Somehow he got me to start talking and I felt very safe and comfortable with him. He would ask me some seemingly trivial question and I could spend all week thinking about it and working things out in my mind. He has helped me through some very dark times and when I discovered the snowdrops at the bottom of the garden a few weeks ago I found I could rejoice in them and I

imagined, through my tears, how Alfie would have enjoyed them too. I'm improving all the time.

But, dear Helen, I can't let Jamie take all the credit for my progress. Your letters too played a huge part.

Hearing all your everyday news, the bridge club, Mrs Antrobus's antics, your trips to see the grandchildren, all these stories kept me connected to the world. And I could read them when and as many times as I liked.

So thank you Helen dear for persevering and never pressing for a reply. I look forward to your next letter and be assured it will be answered.

With much love

***Isobel***

**PS** Now the period with no words is over, I find I have an over abundance of words to express so have joined a local writers' group. But, more about that next time. x

#### ***I write because...***

*There's a bit of a buzz when an idea has turned into a story and it's been written down. But then you realise it's rubbish and have to edit, edit, edit. So I don't really know why I do it. Help!*

***Shelagh Newman***



# Last will and testament of Alfred Robert Haywood.

## Read by a representative of his Solicitors

To my damn relatives and motley staff

I have now departed this life to join my wife Sybil, who stood beside me as a tower of strength and fortitude. She also stood five inches taller and was a real fruitcake until her untimely death in that charity parachuting accident. Forever up to her neck in worthy causes and surrounded by barking and biting poodles including that mangy favourite of hers called 'Murphy'. It was sweet revenge to demand his stuffed remains were cremated with me.

To my younger brother Francis who spent his life in the service of others as a missionary in Africa or some other God forsaken place I can but remind you that if God Almighty chooses not to reward you in this life, then neither will I. Especially as you expect to be amply rewarded in the next one.

To my sister Rosalind. You have been an embarrassment to me for most of my life doing everything I wanted to do with reckless abandonment. Travelling and partying as if your life depended on it, whilst I toiled ceaselessly. To you I leave the freedom to go to hell and stay there for as long as you like.

To cousin Annie, the gifted one in the family who left these shores decades ago to find fame and fortune in the land of the free. Your face has stared down at me from advertising and cinema hoardings throughout the length of this country confirming that in fame at least you are far richer than I will ever be. So make do with that.

To my devoted gardener Hinders, the winner of countless prizes with his amazing rhubarb. A feat achieved by diverting the entire sewage output of this house to that ever-expanding compost heap. To you I leave that steaming mountain of pulchritude as that proverb says, 'where there's muck there's money'. If that proverb proves true you will be a very rich man, but don't forget to have a bath after shovelling your money.

Evans I know it was a mistake employing you as a one eyed colour-blind chauffeur. You drove you me everywhere and damn near mad as well. You get the Harley Davidson along with my sincere wishes that you succeed in killing yourself much more efficiently than all the times you nearly killed me.

As for Dobson my cook, I can but say how amazed I am to have lived so long after consuming all the foul and indigestible recipes you experimented with on me. Unknown to you I have already seen the manuscript of your latest cookery book. "Death on a full stomach."

Whilst on the subject of matters internal I will turn to my personal physician Doctor Stevens. A physician of the old school, one with absolute faith in enemas, blood-letting and all manner of bodily functions. In view of your

keen interest in that last item I have arranged for you to receive a preserved sample of my last--well sample.

Williams to you my intemperate butler and your wife I leave the remnants of my wine cellar, just the cheap bottles. That's all that is left after you drank the good stuff.

Moving on, my financial advisors, Light, Light and Light. Over the years they have lived up to their name to the best of their abilities. Not by being diligent with my stocks and shares, but by being extremely light fingered with those assets. Their reward is a few minutes warning before the Police arrive.

Now I must say thank you from the bottom of my heart to those delicious staff members I shall miss the most. To Melanie my chambermaid and Lucinda my nurse. Life without you two may have been longer but definitely not so sa-tis-fy-ing. Our cosy little chats and those amazing games we played while everyone else slept gave me some of my happiest memories, and my closest heart attacks. In return I leave you all those delightful clothes you wore to enlighten my nights. I also leave you that little hotel I owned in Soho. I'm sure you will find a worthy use for it.

Signed in the presence of,  
A Piper of Puper, Peeper and Piper (Solicitors)

Mr Haywood also left a sealed letter to be read after the will.

*This house and its contents have already been sold, as has every other piece of property or asset that I owned. The proceeds were presented to me shortly before my impending death in very large denomination bearer bonds. I should like to offer each of you a share of those proceeds, but alas they like me are now dust and ashes. I replaced the stuffing inside Murphy with those bonds.*

The author declares this to be a work of fiction, and any instance of a beneficiary bearing a resemblance to a real member of the Devizes Writers' Group is entirely intentional.

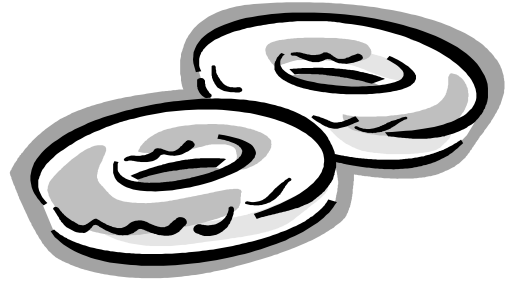
### ***I write because...***

*My head keeps filling up with characters and stories, if I don't empty them onto a page they stop me sleeping. I'm not sure I could stop them, even if I wanted to.*

**Alf Haywood**

## Charismatic Female....

by Francis Chadwick



### Dear Desdemona,

I must tell you about Agatha. She has been a devout member of the Fifth Avenue Charismatic Church for as long as I can remember. Her hands have been raised in praising the Lord since the age of three, though they have also accomplished many other less devotional achievements.

Her flat chested childish figure has matured from the stately curves of her youthfulness to the ample bosom, and even more ample posterior that now accompanies her on all her travels. To her grief, romance, other than the romance of her energetic hymnody, including her spirited rendering of Onward Christian Soldiers, has passed her by. In her time she made approaches to several previous ministers, but their devotion to the Lord always prevented them from acknowledging her in any other capacity than that of a faithful member of the congregation.

She then found employment as a waitress at Dunking Doughnuts, where the management, viewing her ample proportions, hired a designer label organisation to craft her a uniform in the shape of their chief product, with a little jam gently leaking from the bite on her left buttock, and peppered all over with silver sparkles to resemble a newly sugared specimen of their best selling line. Despite her valiant efforts no male customer so much as pinched her mouth bitten posterior, nor dipped his finger in the leaking jam.

Down in spirits she began to pray fervently to the Lord, whom hitherto she had only praised with uplifted arms. One quality with which her membership of the Fifth Avenue Charismatic Church had equipped her most generously was the ability to speak in a loud loquacious manner; in her case not so much 'speaking in tongues' but speaking with her tongue! Her fellow worshippers often couldn't get a word in sideways let alone edgeways! She possesses very few edges! And now for some time the Lord's ears were relentlessly, continuously and rumbustiously bombarded with her plaintive requests.

Agatha shared her ample proportions with a close friend. Recently they together mastered the intricacies of the Internet. Their single fingers stumbled across the keyboard, slowly dabbing at the ill-assorted letters of the alphabet to concoct an entry in the Lonely Hearts column.

"Two, not too devout, but vivacious, passionate, and sensually charismatic Ladies, would like to meet tall professional, assertive, honest, sincere, passionate gentlemen for summer smiles." After mature consideration they had omitted the words 'and winter cuddles', as that conjured up chilly evenings spent on cold park benches. They were both well past the age of being romantic. To preserve anonymity they gave the Fifth Avenue Charismatic Church as their permanent address.

One Sunday two tall, slim, rather severe looking gentlemen hesitantly joined the congregation of the Fifth Avenue Charismatic Church. Somewhat out of character they raised lost looking hands in their half-hearted attempts to praise the Lord. But their eyes, far from gazing heavenwards, furtively glanced at the more portly and most vivacious of the more charismatic looking ladies.

Agatha's arms were raised with their usual vigour but her concentration was also directed sideways rather than heavenwards. The two gaunt gentlemen caught her eye and her heart raced within her as one pair of eyes caught hers. Agatha's red hair gave her away. His furtive glances gave an extra sense of purpose and a renewed impetus to her hand waving. For the first time in her devotional life she felt spirit filled with a charisma of overwhelming proportions.

Like many congregations these days the time came for them to exchange the peace, which was accompanied by a wide variety of emotional contact; from the stately shaking of a hand, to people advancing upon one another, arms outstretched, in the offer of a warm passionate embrace.

Agatha and her friend advanced towards the two stony faced, rather embarrassed gentlemen, putting on their warmest summer smiles, even though they were experiencing the dank-est September since records began! They were ardently regretting the omission of winter cuddles from their description on the Internet. But was it not after all their plain duty to welcome strangers to the Fifth Avenue Charismatic Church?

The two professional gentlemen were invited to join them and their fumbling hands were guided through the hymn books, but such tactile fingering as there was aroused no emotions within the hearts of their would be gallants. Their attempted hymnody was halting, tuneless, and lacking all verve and vivacity. The Fifth Avenue Charismatic Church was just not their scene!

Later the gentleman who had caught Agatha's eye suggested that they all dunked a doughnut for light relief. Dunking Doughnuts had been their favourite dunking den for some time. Unbeknown to her, Agatha, her red hair, and her jam leaking half-bitten posterior, had been under close scrutiny for several months. Doughnuts duly dunked, despatched, and delivered to their destiny, she found herself sitting on a damp park bench being assaulted by the professional passion of a youth and middle age that had never known such freedoms, and she began looking forward to a season of winter cuddles, metaphorically throwing her heavily entangled arms high in the air, and praising the Lord with an exuberance she had never before experienced in all of her 51 years.

With much love from

**Sissy**

***I write because...***

*As an octogenarian clergyman I write both for fun and pleasure, but more seriously to try and present my life's experience of Faith*

**Francis Chadwick**



**July 26th, 3011**

by Annie Cooper

## **Dear Rainbow Woman**

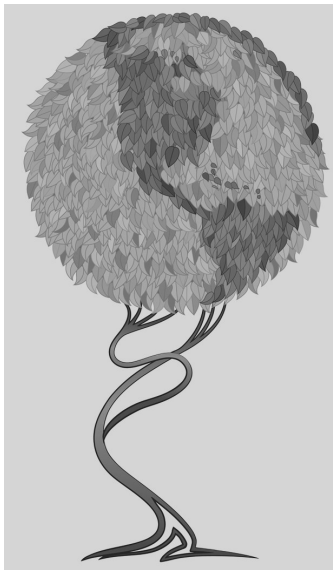
I don't know if you read or speak English, or even if you'll find this letter, but I'm hoping you do. I'm leaving it by the tree you hid behind and tomorrow I shall be watching for you.

I'm not sure that I really know how to write about today. I mean ... how do you write about something that you have long dreamt about, and suddenly it happens. All the time we were in the learning zone it was all we ever heard about – one day ... we must make sure it's safe first - and so you dream - I needed something to escape the banality of life.

My mentors of course would have sent me for re-learning if they were to read that last line. Life is not banal – 'life is an ever expanding process of evolution that we can now control and mould to our own requirements.' I challenged one of them recently and asked what had happened to all the other species and why we didn't control their evolution as well. It was interpreted as sarcasm which didn't go down too well and anyway they trotted out the same answer as usual - we were the only ones with the intellect to survive The Great Contamination. Huh, if only they knew! I was so tempted to say that with intellect shouldn't there be some compassion, but compassion seems to be somewhat lacking in the Biosphere. Anyway – having been taught everything else died in The GC there was no use wishing it was different. But today it was - amazingly, beautifully, incredibly different. It was there on the laserview this morning with my wake up call. 'Please be aware that from 10 this morning the doors to the Outside will be opened - it is now safe for all Biosphereans to leave the dome'. There were lots of warnings - the only one that caught my eye was not to go too far from the dome. As if having told me that I could go, they really believed they could hold me back.

At the main doors people were restless, bodies in constant motion like the ants in the Terrarium but when the doors finally opened everyone became quite still - there was a rush of air quite unlike anything I have ever felt. Not like the wind they send round the sphere – this made my skin tingle; it carried smells I couldn't identify and warmth that wasn't soporific, it was - bizarre to say but - it felt life giving. Is this what you breathe all the time? How amazing. I just ran. I think I was the first out – I just ran and ran. I could hear shouting, warnings from those who still feared – biosphereans who were still biosphereans. Me? I'm now an Outsider.

When I eventually stopped running I'd no idea where I was. I'd run using senses I didn't know I had; I'd run feeling the planet hold out it's hands to me and welcome me home, I'd run in a cloud of joy - but when I stopped I was suddenly me again. Surrounded by trees that are free to grow (they get so big!!!!) I couldn't see the dome. I could see nothing that was familiar. I know this may seem strange to you but it didn't feel real – it felt like I stepped into the laserview and they were just Holograms. And then from nowhere, well that's how it felt, there you were – were you hiding behind the tree? You were so quiet, just watching, not dressed in biospherean white but a rainbow of oranges, blues, so many colours I've never seen. And then you smiled - wow! You look my age but your skin – is that the weather or true aging? I hope you don't mind me asking - whatever the answer is you still look amazing. Why didn't you stay? I guess I was as much a shock to you as you were to me. I've been back to the dome (found my way!) and got some food and my journal. Please come back! I'm going to sleep now – what a day – an ant is crawling up my leg – it looks like they survived too. All this time we've thought we were the lucky ones – not quite so sure about that now. One thing I do know - for the first time in my life I feel alive!!!!



***I write because...***

*Because I always have stories in my head – actually it's more like I have different voices each with their own tale to tell. People constantly fascinate me and so what greater joy is there than to spend time trying to get into their heads!*

**Annie Cooper**

Your friend,

**Lilbeth**

## ***Letter to a five headed monster***

by Brenda Williams



### ***Dear Quinquecep***

How lovely to have lunch with you today,  
and how handsome you looked, if I might say.

I thought it remarkable, how with only two hands, you managed to feed five faces!  
I'm sure no-one noticed soup dripping down your five chins in different places.

Remembering which mouth to open and which to shut is clearly an acquired skill.  
And surely, if two heads had not slurped directly from the bowl, we would be there still.

It was pure bad luck your fork got stuck in your fourth nose during the second course.  
I could see it was painful from the way your other hand jerked so wildly - showering your first head in tomato sauce.

Such delightful conversations we all had, your five heads and I.  
Entirely my fault of course, that we could not always quite see eye to eye.

Being a Cyclop puts me at a disadvantage I suppose.  
But at least, I only ever have to wipe one nose.

But for you, my friend,  
the task of wiping noses, never seems to end.

I'm sorry I had to leave you with an unshared bill, and just be gone.  
I couldn't wait while you put all your glasses on.

I knew that donning all your hats would take you time.  
Especially with each head still drinking wine.

Let's meet again sometime and have more fun  
Six heads are much more entertaining than just one!

Yours

***Cyril Cyclop***

***Why Brenda writes is shown on page 21***

*Visit her website on [www.brendawilliamspoet.co.uk](http://www.brendawilliamspoet.co.uk)  
to share more of her work.*



## ***Mrs Rabbit's New Buck***

by Jim Kitchingman

The Burrow,  
Under The Fir Tree

***Dear Eartha,***

I am worried about Peter. Yesterday he came home in a terrible state. He'd lost his lovely blue coat, and his shoes.

After some shilly-shallying Peter finally admitted that he had been to THAT garden, where we lost his poor dear father. It seems he barely escaped with his life.

I think Peter needs to prove he is as good a rabbit as his late father.

He was upset and ill, so I put him to bed with a cup of chamomile tea. After the girls had settled, I am not ashamed to say that I sat and cried. Eartha, I had never felt so alone and helpless.

Today we had a visitor. Buck from the Clump dropped by. He brought some nice tender shoots and leaves for the girls. Then he took Peter aside, and had a serious rabbit to rabbit talk with him. I don't know what was said, but afterwards Peter apologised to me very humbly for disobeying and upsetting me. He promised to be more obedient in future. I was flabbergasted!

Then Buck asked me to come for a stroll round the meadow with him. He sternly instructed Peter to look after his sisters.

As we walked, Buck made me a Certain Proposal.

Now Eartha, I can hear your gasp, and see your look of disapproval. Our mother always told us to stay away from the Clump rabbits, we thought them lower class, with dirty habits. Buck himself is the first to admit he is not an educated or cultured rabbit. I however, think he is one of nature's gentlemen. He is kind to the girls, absolutely proper with me, and, of course, Peter worships him. It would certainly make life easier.

And oh Eartha, a doe has certain needs of her own. Since my late husband was so tragically killed, there has been a gap in my life. So, I accepted his offer. We told the children, the girls were happy, and, as you might guess, Peter was ecstatic.

Please Eartha, do not think ill of me, I have always valued your good opinion . When we are settled at the Clump, I will write again, and tell you how we are getting on.

Your Sister,

***Rosalind.***

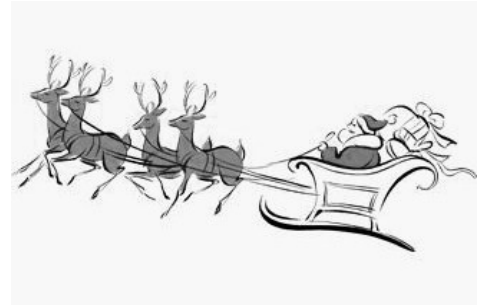
***I write because...***

*My profession required me to write a lot, reports, assessments, proposals, plans for future action. Throughout my entire conscious life I have made up little stories in my head to amuse myself. Now I have the time and leisure, I want to put my ideas into words*

***Jim Kitchingman***

# Christmas Present

by Annette Piper



## Dear Ben

This letter will come as something of a shock, but I think that at your age you are entitled to know the truth, so I hope you will be gentle in your judgment of me.

It was Christmas 1989. I was alone as Jo was away flying his aeroplane round the world, and no doubt enjoying the delights of Hong Kong or Shanghai on his days of rest.

I had just taken a dozen mince pies out of the oven, and was wondering, rather ironically, why I was so programmed as to repeat this annual performance of indulgence every Christmas when there was only myself to eat it.

Suddenly there was an almighty noise from overhead, a kind of sliding, grinding tearing sound which sent me running to the window in a panic, having visions of something falling out of the sky onto my house. Outside in the snowy dark I could just discern a tangled mass of debris which included a pile of broken tiles. I was more angry than frightened, so, grabbing a jacket, I rushed out of the back door.

Ben, this will be difficult for you to believe, but it's true, and I had not been at the brandy bottle. There was a lot of shouting and swearing coming from a shadowy figure who was bending over a recumbent animal. When he saw me he shouted "About time. I need some help"

He was tugging at the reins of a fallen reindeer, its antlers almost buried in the snow. In a daze I went up to him. "Who are you?"

"Well, you must know who I am" he said crossly while he went on tugging. "It was all that smoke from your chimney that sent me off track. And look where I am now — broken sleigh, one injured reindeer, the other scarpered and goodness knows what happened to the presents". "What about my tiles" I retorted angrily, pointing to the scar on the roof where they had once been. "And I'm not insured."

"Come to think of it, neither am I." We glared at one another.

The fairy story had got it right. He was a large man in a red coat and hat with a flowing beard in a jolly face, which at that point was not so jolly.

We managed to get the reindeer on its feet, shaky but otherwise unharmed.

"You better come inside" I said reluctantly. I didn't seem to have any other option. The reindeer (such a large animal) was limping by now. So I took it into the house and eased it down by the fire, giving it plenty of space for the antlers. Then I looked round for its master, who by that time had pulled off his red coat, tossed his cap into a corner and was in the process of pulling off his boots.

"Hey" I said. "What do you think you're doing?" He didn't answer, just gave an almighty yawn and threw

himself heavily onto the sofa. In two shakes he was snoring.

I was beside myself with impotent rage, but having nothing else better to do, went back into the kitchen and put the turkey in the oven, then I prepared the vegetables and put the pudding on to steam, after which I opened a bottle of wine, some of which I consumed which put me in a more conciliatory frame of mind. After I had got half way down the bottle, I was beginning to feel positively festive, so I went back to the sitting room and nudged my visitor awake. "Time for dinner" I announced and waved the bottle.

He sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Ho Ho Ho!" he chuckled. "What a splendid idea". So we sat down to a meal of turkey and all the trimmings, washed down with yet another bottle of wine.

"Pity about the sack of goodies" he mused after we had finished the meal and were sitting rather uncomfortably around the reindeer which was taking up most of the space around the fire.

"There were some boxes of chocolates amongst the toys — stocking fillers you know, you could have had one. Never mind, look for it in the morning!"

Conversation seemed superfluous after that, so by mutual consent we climbed the stairs and went to bed, together, I'm afraid.

The next morning I was woken by the sound of snowballs thumping against the window. He was standing outside in his red coat and hat waving a box tied up in coloured ribbon.

"For you" he shouted, a huge smile amongst the whiskers. "Found them in a snowdrift. Patched up the sleigh and the reindeer (which was standing rather shakily between the shafts) is fine." He gave it a resounding slap on the rump. "Thanks for everything. See you next year" He gave a roguish wink and climbed aboard. I watched as they lurched rather uncertainly down the snowy path and out of my sight.

So there you have it Ben. My CHRISTMAS OF 1989 which left me with more than a box of chocolates.

Love **Mum**

*On second thought I have decided not to send this letter after all, he wouldn't believe it anyway.*

### ***I write because...***

*Having a rather vivid imagination I find writing a way of expressing myself*

**Annette Piper**

**Reiver's Report**  
by Mel Humphries-Cuff

**Letter to the Deputy Warden of the  
Western Marches,  
The Castle, Carlisle**

12th November, 1517

**Dear Uncle**

I have the honour to send you my report on our recent raid into Byrecleuch to relieve the Scottish malcontents of their cattle and horses. I also crave your indulgence for the intelligence of my affairs of the heart.

In the chill of the back room we dressed in shirt, breeches and boots. Carefully we put on our leather jackets with plates of metal for protection. Armed with our short lances, daggers and cutting swords, we donned our steel bonnets and mounted our steeds. As the sun went off the tops of the trees four of us mustered at Bewcastle, Richie and Sim Armstrong, my brother and I. With a party of fifteen we set off up the hill through the Stones of Cree and into the wooded land beyond Oakshaw. We kept our progress steady and rode around Langstile so as not to be noticed. Then at Mintors Burn we met with Martin Elliot, Johnnie Armstrong, Robin Crozier and their party of ten. As the evening closed in our progress was veiled from prying eyes. Very little was said. Silence was important.

My mare led well as we headed for Liddesdale. Although only six she was already proving herself a very surefooted animal who could find her way through the toughest of wetland which can so easily bog you down. Now she picked her route unshod through the pebbly ground which heralded the edge of Liddel Water. Richie Armstrong came ahead of me on his taller gelding to navigate the route through the river which was low after the dry autumn. We entered the Tarras Moss, a confusion of marshy ground and thick bushes to the uninitiated, a haven of secret tracks and

hidden clips to the experienced. Martin Elliot now led us onwards as the moon began to rise. The light was helpful to our progress, but we would sooner have enjoyed low cloud to passage in the dead of night.

My thoughts drifted to Jane Armstrong, her blonde hair and gracious outline filling my mind. She was turning into a clever young woman, not always ideal I was told, but in Jane - oh yes. And had she not given me her troth last year under the ancient cross at the church of St Cuthbert? Was it not now time to make our commitment?

My thoughts were too far away from the present and my pony stumbled on a boulder that nature had carelessly strewn across my path.



"Watch what ya doin' laddie." Johnnie Armstrong, my superior in experience by ten years, said in a hushed tone. "I ken you're not concentrating properly on the job in hand." At the edge of the Tarras Waste we paused for breath before breaking out onto stark open moorland to the north. Presently we could make out the dark

shapes of the Langholm and Newcastleton Hills ahead and to the left of us. Sim Armstrong was now starting to push the pace as we travelled high into the valley of the Hermitage Water. He and my eldest brother were both veterans of Lord Dacre's victorious Border horse at Flodden. As we started to circle round behind Byrecleuch I could feel the presence of the stark, imposing fortress that was Hermitage Castle to my right. This

was the most crucial part of our journey, for to be caught now would mean imprisonment or death. I may have felt a slight strain on my frame with this forced journey across hill and dale, but still my mare travelled on, her stamina and that of her breed an inspiration to us all.

With one hand on my sword and the other holding my reins my senses were prepared for anything or any-one this uncompromising landscape could throw at us.

For the last time we stopped to regain our strength. The plan was known by all so we sat mute until our ponies' breathing had quietened. There were now enough clouds scudding over the moon to provide good cover for our final advance.

With the silence of an owl we swooped down into Byrecluch. All was quiet and with intuitive stealth we started to round up the cattle and horses from the settlements. A dog barked and a cry went up as someone had woken to our activities. People began to emerge, some bleary-eyed, some alert. Sim cut a man down and my brother attacked two individuals who tried to make for their horses. Others retreated back into their dwellings, shouting threats of revenge. Our work was carried out with great speed and efficiency for we had planned this as a short raid. Tonight there would be no burning or looting of the houses, or extensive slaughter unless necessary.

Soon we were heading south-east having lifted over a hundred head of cattle as well as seven horses. The beasts were not fast, but this was the best time of year for reiving. The quarry were still fit and well fed from their high summer grazing and they drove well as Martin Elliot now took us the complicated route over the tops in the hope of preventing anyone following.

At Scarry's Rock Sim Armstrong and Robin Crozier, with four men, descended into a depression to wait in ambush perchance anyone should choose to pursue us. On reaching Tarras Moss we stopped and, as the sun started to rise, we holed up for the day to let the livestock rest, feed and water while we took it in turns to relax or guard the cattle. For me it was good to lay down on a broad smooth boulder and slumber in as far as it was possible to do so.

Thoughts of Jane came back to me. There had been talk of her meeting up with a southerner from the Warden's office in Carlisle. At first I had thought them only rumours, but I had heard more mention of it recently and had felt fit to talk with her. For her part she had been upset at my lack of understanding.

"Surely Thomas Nixon," she had blurted out, tears of indignation pricking her eyes, "you must see how bad this life we lead is? Who wants to be always fearful of a raid from over the border? Do I want to bring up my children in this place we call home?"

All I could see was her pretty face and the surety that Jane Armstrong was a woman in a million with

whom I wished to spend the rest of my life, however short that may be.

There was a warm welcome as Sim, Robin and those who had stayed back arrived in camp. They had not been followed although they had remained three hours to give us time to get the livestock to Tarras. We changed the guard and waited until nightfall to continue on our way. The weather had now turned and in the dark my mare carefully picked her way through the heathland with ease, despite the rain and rough country. We successfully crossed the Liddel, skirted Blinkbonny and passed over the border. Now we headed to the wild fell and moor area of the Bewcastle Waste where we could hide up and divide our spoils. My brother and I were well rewarded with nine head of cattle and, accompanied by Richie and Sim Armstrong, we made our way back home.

With my booty I could impress upon my father the need for me to take a wife. Then I must impress upon Jane that she would never fare well in a household who did not understand her people's struggle for survival. I must point out how it would not be possible for her to be proud of a man who could not fight with the best of them..

She must understand that this was a way of life to which she had been bred. She must be convinced to banish these foolish plans and stay in the land of her forefathers where the bond of kinship is a quality her fancy man would never possess.

While there were separate kings on the thrones of England and Scotland, this lawless debatable land needed the good women who had been bred in it. Then, maybe one day for our descendents, there would be a glorious future.

I remain, Sir, your devoted servant and nephew,

**Thomas Nixon**

#### **The Border Reivers**

For almost 400 years from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century the 'riding families' - the Reivers - of the English and Scottish borders conducted a seemingly unending series of raids, cattle-rustling and bloody reprisals. Simply to survive, they murdered, stole, burned and kidnapped. They even ran protection rackets.

Reiver territory ranged from Carlisle to Berwick-on-Tweed and the wild, beautiful country up to 20 miles either side of a line joining those two towns.

**MW January 2010**

#### ***I write because...***

*I love it, but I usually get my inspiration at the most inconvenient times—when driving, walking the dog, or in the middle of the night. Never good times for note taking!*

**Mel Humphries-Cuff**



# **A Letter to Amy Winehouse**

by Warren Hinder

## **Dear Amy**

*How did a Jewish girl from London get that Southern accent for the song Valerie?*

*Of course you had the voice coaching and had been to acting school. Although I thought it was 'By the Bay' you were singing until I saw that tribute to you on tv, presented by Jools Holland.*

*As for Back to Black, did that bring back sad memories, of a relationship gone wrong . . . I wonder?*

*I never went to any of your gigs. I don't even possess a dvd of any of your concerts, and to be honest Glastonbury isn't exactly me. However, as I say, I've always admired your work. You had a great future ahead of you, but for people to say that you were your own worst enemy is a bit harsh to say the least. No one knows what the day to day life is like for others. You can be in a crowded room and be the loneliest person in the world. Amy I know what it's like. And when you stand there they don't even know you're there.*

*I know you lost yourself in drink and drugs, like so many before you, but sorry to say, I read in my paper shortly after your passing that so called fans placed bottles of vodka and cider by your shrine.*

*To me, dear Amy I would not give them the honour of calling them even fair weather friends.*

*From*

**A fan**

*PS By the way, what's with smoking Camel when you're supposed to be a vocalist? Having grown up in the trade I don't recommend it, given your game.*

*May your God be with you.*

**I write because...**

*I enjoy it, particularly detective stories and poetry.*

**Warren Hinder**

## **Con Brio**

by Liz Light



### **Dear Myrtle**

Thank you for sending me all the information about the forthcoming season with the Nantwich Singers. I am sorry that you have had to mail it to me, and no I have not yet got 'hooked up' as you so crudely put it. I am expecting an engineer from BT on Thursday next, because you are probably right, I wouldn't be able to follow the instructions even if written in English. I hope he will be able to spend time explaining things in one syllable. I shall make some of my shortbread in case.

No I would not like to start singing tenor. I am perfectly happy thank you to continue in the back row of the altos. I know we have two women supporting the tenors now but Sandra already shows hirsute speckling in the chin area, and Lydia's weight has helped her to a bottom G merely by altering her centre of gravity.

Our three tenor men are perhaps a bit unsubstantial in both voice and physiology. Flimsy is the word I'd use. In need of good steak and stiff whisky.

Added to which I like where I sit, immediately in front of the basses. They produce a wonderful profundo vibration which comes right through to the row in front and makes me quite misty eyed. In fact I sense the whole of our row beginning to quiver in part of Faure's Requiem.

However the excitement does not stop me reaching a top F when required. I would say that I can still produce a rich and unfaltering top F although I admit that after about four beats the breath is not always equal to the task. I am practicing in the car on trips to and from the Nantwich Sainsbury's but did receive a startled look at the zebra crossing opposite Starbuck's. Munsch's The Scream might have come to the mind of the young woman who was crossing with pram at the time.

After all Minnie Simpkins in the sopranos can't reach top F. Have you heard her? I'm glad she does have some awareness of the problem and keeps her mouth open but soundless when a vocal ascent is signalled. She mimes well....I will say that for her. It was most unfortunate two years ago when she strained for a top A in Handel's Largo, an experience most of the sopranos are struggling to forget. There is nothing as alarming as going for a top A with fear in your undercarriage!

If seating arrangements are to be altered at all might I request that Felicity Fumble be relocated to the end of our row. Felicity's dramatic and frantic personal life means that she always arrives late, all scamper and scarves, and then she hisses all the latest gossip rapidly through the prestissimo. It doesn't really matter as I can't synchronise lips, teeth and tongue in order to do the prestissimo justice, but I do like to look as if I have everything under control.

So we have a new conductor for the forthcoming season? I am sorry that Jim Golightly felt the need to abandon us and go to the Crewe Choral group but no doubt they offered him various inducements! Their secretary is Violet Hawkins you know....also of WI fame... and a very forceful woman. I'm sure he'll give their recitatives the rehearsal they deserve.

And we shall re-assemble on 4<sup>th</sup> September to meet our new maestro. I'm sure he will find us with vocal chords flexed and teeth shining ready for him to lift us to new and giddy heights.

I look forward to it immensely.

Yours truly,

**Bertha**

#### ***I write because...***

*I think it must have been my English teacher! He was young, Welsh and had a wonderful voice. He would read Coleridge to us on Friday afternoons. Ever since I have loved the way words sing, soothe or send sparks. It is all a question of choosing the right ones.*

**Liz Light**

# ***The Hardest Letter to Write***

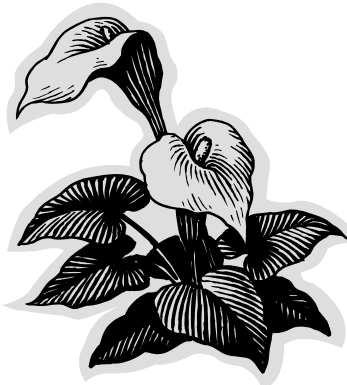
by Deborah Dobson

Devizes, 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2012

## ***My very dear Friend,***

It is hard to recall that just a couple of months ago you and I sat and contemplated how our futures would look as we wrinkled and aged. Over the coffee and biscuits you appeared confident in the knowledge that Jonty would always be there beside you. Life can throw some bitter shafts at us when we least expect them. No-one would have supposed that under his athletic and cheerful exterior there lurked a rogue cell that would expand to sap his energy and his courage. All your friends admired the bravery you displayed in caring so gently for him in his sudden illness, never complaining nor taking time off. You were completely selfless in tending to his every need and yet still listening to the woes of our circle, their complaints and moans over trivia. How trite and unimportant those troubles must seem to them now. I mention this because I am sure that this same resilience is what will see you through the future without Jonty and help you to continue to be the terrific person that you are.

Jonty was a wonderful man, so wise, so gentle and so talented. He was tolerant of other people's shortcomings. He must have ached to step in and do the jobs, he would have been so capable of doing, or taking over when he saw someone, a friend, or the children perhaps making a mess of something. Instead, he would encourage, and stand back and patiently wait. He must have known his help would be sought eventually and it usually was. As a result your children are fine, confident young people and very capable of tackling a problem where they do not immediately know the answers. In a way, he will be directing them, and you too, from his new vantage point. There will be many of us who will ask themselves 'What would Jonty do now?' or 'How would Jonty behave in this situation?' In a strange, but somehow logical way, Jonty has made himself indispensable and will probably never be far from our minds.



In other ways, too, Jonty will make himself present; your son, Tom, laughs in the same hearty way that his father laughed, his head back and eyes closed in total submission to the moment of mirth. I can see Jonty come alive in Tom in those moments. Gemma, too, when she is concentrating, has an endearing way of letting her tongue protrude, a very little, over her bottom lip whilst furrowing her brow in deep consideration of the subject in hand. When the memory of Jonty's passing has faded and the horrors of losing him subsided, your recollection of the Jonty you so love, will re-emerge in those little mannerisms that make your children Jonty's true heirs. You are grieving now, but in time I know you will learn to read Jonty fluently in your children's faces.

I was only privileged to have known your husband for a very short time but he was a treasured friend to so many in our community and one whom I shall miss sorely.

I'll have the coffee and the biscuits ready when you feel like a hug or a chat.

Always available for you, my dearest friend, in sympathy and with my love,

***Louise***

### ***I write because...***

*There is a story to be found in anything and everything. Writing is my form of private compulsive disorder but I get a hangover from early morning and late night writing that can only be cured by another hit.*

***Deborah Dobson***

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