The New Issue_

Issue #5

Spring 2021

Welcome to The New Issue

We had to pause briefly on the day we were due to send this edition to the printer.

In a joint statement India and Pakistan had just said they would now respect the ceasefire along the disputed Kashmir border that they had ignored since 2003. Syed Shahriyar's story would need updating.

Operating in and around Srinagar amid a crackdown by Indian security forces, the photojournalist has bravely and movingly documented one father's quest to get back the body of his 16-year-old son killed in February.

How the ceasefire between the two nuclear-armed rivals plays out remains to be seen. Mushtaq Ahmad will continue his struggle to have his son's body brought back to the grave he has dug in his village. But it could end the civilian deaths caused in recent months by the border dispute. Could the pause bring conditions for a more lasting solution?

Conflict respects neither boundaries nor pandemics. In another continent, Nigerian villagers are learning how to recognise the threat of landmines and improvised explosive devices left behind by the shadowy jihadi terrorist group Boko Haram. They are doing it largely by themselves, even managing to get kids singing, laughing and dancing while they learn life-saving messages, but have been aided by the Manchester-based charity Mines Advisory Group. Photographer Sean Sutton vividly captures how.

This is the fifth edition of *The New Issue* – which continues to support vendors of the weekly magazine *Big Issue North* – but the first with a new American president. If the threat of conflict has subsided slightly in the US since Trump's impeachment, it's a pause for reflection. How did they get there? Matthew Baker's short story speculates on the origins of anti-vaccine sentiment. Wayne Koberstein roots a strand of rugged counter-cultural individualism in his home state Oregon.

The pheasant, when you get there, is pausing to look at one of the most northerly vineyards in the world.

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As a freelance photographer Sean has been documenting the impact of conflict across the globe since the late eighties. Landmines were tragically always part of the narrative. Since 1997 he has worked with the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) to document the humanitarian impact of conflict. Putting this into the broader context of refugees, internally displaced people, water and food security, agriculture, and aid delivery, the resulting material has helped form MAG's multimedia approach to informing decision makers and public education

Una
An artist and writer based in Leeds, Una's first graphic novel about her complicated early life, Becoming Unbecoming, was published in 2015 after many false starts as an artist. It has been widely translated, featured on BBC Open Book and BBC Woman's Hour, in Newsweek and the New York Times magazine, and adapted into a theatrical work in Brazil. Una's other graphic novels are On Sanity: One Day In Two Lives, Cree and Eve, a new apocalyptic story set in a small northern town, coming out in May

Stanley Chow
A freelance illustrator since 1995 and based in Manchester, Stanley has worked in many aspects of illustration. His career started as a storyboard artist and fashion illustrator but now he specialises in portraits and caricature – he's probably best known internationally for his work with the New Yorker and New York Times. More recently he has illustrated children's books Who Was Martin Luther King Jr? and Who Was Ruth Bader Ginsberg? He has two cats called Mikey and Ginger

Syed Shahriyar
An award-winning independent visual journalist from Indian Administered Kashmir, Syed's work focusses on humanitarian and conflict issues. Growing up in Srinagar, his exposure to military presence in day-to-day life prompted him to begin documenting it. His work has been widely published, including in Witness: Kashmir 1986-2016: Nine Photographers, a photobook that featured in the New York Times among the best photo books of 2017. Syed channels his love for his land into his work

Plus

Jessica Brown, John Anderson, Lee Brown, Roger Ratcliffe, Rebecca Lupton, Wayne Koberstein, Matthew Baker, Steph Coathupe, Ed Caesar, Gary Ryan, Hilary Hinds, Ryan Ashcroft, Mary-Ellen McTague, Neil Tague, Lisa Blower

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Year of being dormant

Winemaking in Derbyshire is like life, writes Jessica Brown
Photos: John Anderson

Working on the vineyard is more challenging than it looks. Atkinson recommends people looking to work in the wine industry first consider gaining a formal education. "You can learn it all practically, but underpinning the experience is the knowledge of why and how. I'd always recommend getting a formal education. It's like the difference between a cook and a chef – you can be a great cook and make really nice meals but you don't necessarily know what's behind it."

When he was learning about wine, Atkinson trained for two years at Plumpton College, commuting from his home in Derby to Brighton every week. After completing the course, Atkinson worked as a contract winemaker for three years. "There aren't that many winemakers in the world – only a few thousand – so it's quite a small global community, and there are only three or four schools in the world. It's nice to meet up and exchange notes."

Keiron Atkinson spends a lot of time doing things he doesn't really need to be doing.

"There are some things where I know I'm not making any money out of the process, but it increases the quality of the wine," says the winemaker. "I can't necessarily sell it for more money but I'm trying to do my best for that product.

"Like on the vineyard when I'm leaf-stripping around the fruiting zone. That's a week's work. If everyone just made things for efficiency, if food was just about calories, it'd be terrible."

Atkinson's journey into the wine industry wasn't exactly the most efficient one either. He'd been enjoying the sea air in the south of France when an encounter confirmed what he'd been wondering about for a while: should he leave his 10-year career in the British Army to work in the wine industry?

On a visit to a vineyard in Roussillon, he listened to its founders, a couple from the UK, explain how they'd been living and working within 500 metres of the Twin Towers in New York City, and were driven to follow their passion after witnessing the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Atkinson saw parallels with his own life in the army, which included tours of Iraq and Afghanistan. He resigned.

Soon he was helping out at his local vineyard. Enclosed in a 300-year-old stone wall a few hundred metres from the country house, Renishaw Hall, in north Derbyshire, was the most northern vineyard in the world for its first 14 years, after being planted in 1972.

After two years training at Plumpton College in Sussex – English wine's heartland – via a weekly commute, he became responsible for looking after the site and producing the wine. But it wasn't making any profit. In fact, it was costing the owners to make wine. Atkinson decided to invite the public in and give them tours.

"The only way to get someone to buy direct from you is to give people a good time and get them to understand provenance, and that they don't need to buy German or French wine.

"There are millions of people within an hour of Sheffield. When I talk to other winemakers from New Zealand, for example, who have the same amount of people in their whole country as I do within an hour, they'll ask me: 'Why aren't you selling more wine?'"

Atkinson has been selling more wine, however, since lockdown started last year, thanks to people spending more time at home and shopping online more. He also sees more people starting to want to understand more about wine and where it's grown.

A decade ago, the public was a tougher critic – the quality of English wine wasn't as consistent. Now, Atkinson says people drinking English wine expect to like it. He's set up the English Wine Project to support winemakers in driving up standards.

But there's a way to go before the industry is a global competitor. The UK is still a micro industry, producing around 15.6 million bottles of a wine in 2018. "If you put every bottle of English wine into a wine tank, it'll look like one Jacob Creek's wine tank," he says.

Since March 2020, Renishaw's vineyard tours have had to stop but he believes they are vital to his wine's success.

"With wine, people think they have to overanalyse it. But once people come and see it growing and understand the concept of provenance, that's a powerful message, as opposed to buying something mass-produced."

Atkinson knows visitors on his tours have to buy into him, too – but he doesn't feel any pressure.

"If you're authentic and you do the best you can for the product, that's always a good thing," he says. "I've done a lot of interviews over the last 10 years and before, I'd be thinking about needing to say the right

thing so the interviewer writes a nice article. In the back of my mind, someone's reading the article and thinking, I want to buy that wine. But I've stopped that now. It's not always about selling something.

"The vineyard tours are about getting people on that journey and understanding what you're doing and why. That's more important than selling a few bottles of wine. If it's not real, then what's the point?"

While Atkinson had his work cut out for him 10 years ago when trying to convince people of the merits of English wine, he says people are warming to the idea – despite him noticing that visitors can often have a fickle palette.

"Wine is one of those things where people need to be led to it. You see it in wine-tasting groups. If people are being positive about it, everyone likes it, but if someone's had a bad day and you ask them and they say it's only all right, everyone will say the same."

Atkinson enjoys teaching people how to properly taste wine – although, he admits, he didn't really taste anything properly before he started working in the industry.

"Tasting is linked to being in the present, to being able to slow down and not just consume it and rush onto the next task. It's like a focus. One of the joys of tasting or enjoying anything is taking time, and your brain trying to detect where the flavours are coming from and why.

"When you make something, it makes you far less prone to snobbery. You're really tasting it for what it is, as opposed to picking up a bottle of wine and thinking the label looks nice," he says.

'Every time you handle a grape in a certain way it will reflect in the wine and change it.'

The UK remains a minnow in terms of production volume but standards are rising, and its sparkling wines regularly win awards. Renishaw Hall is among the handful of UK producers that also makes red wine, in its case from the pinot noir grape, which prefers cooler climates

Atkinson is always thinking about taste. One slight change in the wind, after all, can change the end result.

"Every time you handle a grape in a certain way it will reflect in the wine and change it. Wine is more than just a drink – it's a direct reflection of the soil and the sunlight. As the maker, I'm trying to craft it into the best drink I can."

England's climate lends itself to wine with a relatively high level of acidity – "fresh and citrus flavours, as opposed to riper fruit flavours", Atkinson says.

Like many English makers, Renishaw Hall's forté is sparkling wine. Its 2011 vintage won it a Decanter World Wine Award. But it also produces still whites, rosés and – less common in England – a red.

"The acidity is why sparkling wine is done so well here – once it's put through secondary fermentation, you need the acid to give you structure, otherwise you can't make nice sparkling wine.

"We're fortunate that the weather is ideal for wine production in the UK – climate change is the greatest catastrophe for mankind but right now, as a country, it makes growing grapes better."

However, as the planet warms, Atkinson says, conditions might not stay so favourable. The UK has around 1,000 growing degree days, which is a calculation growers make to estimate a crop's growth during the growing season, based on the theory that it needs a certain minimum temperature to grow.

"This is the same as the French regions of Champagne and Burgundy, which is scary. This has the potential to change the whole industry, because fruit is becoming too ripe to make wine with," Atkinson says.

"If climate change continues, south England would be the right place to grow red wine, and north England, or Scotland or Ireland would be right for sparkling wine – where does it end?"

Wine producers in England have a long growing season – roughly a month longer than France's vineyards, Atkinson says. And over winter, there's pruning to be done – a delicate job, since how much you leave on the vine affects the wine at the other end.

As it starts to get warmer, buds will burst – one of Atkinson's favourite times of year – and then the shoots start to come through around June. The fruit develops on the vine from July to September, and the picking process goes on from September to November. Then it's time to produce the wine.

Atkinson has found ways to experiment with ways of making wine.

"I've been pruning for decades and I've just gone back to a technique used in the 1920s that had almost been forgotten about. My problem is, I like doing different stuff, so I often have to focus on one thing so I can make the most of it. It is a creative process but there are principles to it that need to be adhered to in order to make a decent thing at the end of it."

The vineyards may show few signs of the life in the winter but, just like tasting wine properly, they remind Atkinson to focus on the present.

"It's a cyclical plant that is effectively dormant. We've had a year of being dormant as a world, and one would hope we'll come back in the same way. We'll produce fruit and make wine, and keep going." ■

Big Issue North vendor Simon returns to his pitch without magazines

Words: Christian Lisseman Photos: Lee Brown

SIMON SITS ON his mobility walker in Harrogate town centre. It's a freezing cold February morning and he clutches a takeaway coffee while he waits for people he knows to pass. He's near the spot where he would usually sell *Big Issue North* but today, somewhere in the middle of the third Covid lockdown, he has no magazines to sell. But still, he comes here anyway.

"It's better than sitting at home," he says. "Too right! I couldn't do that." For a start he's saving on electric, and he owes them a lot already, so every penny counts there. But selling the magazine "isn't just about the money", he says. "It's my social life as well."

As if to prove the point a regular customer stops to asks how Simon is before the two of them chat about the state of the world, the lockdown and the vaccine rollout.

Simon, diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2017, should be one of the next in line for the vaccine, since his condition makes him vulnerable to the disease. "I'm still waiting to hear but I hope I get a letter any day soon," he says – although he has reservations about getting the jab. "My mum said she wasn't very well after she'd had it so I'm a bit nervous, but I guess that's better than getting Covid."

Like so many others, he's desperate for the vaccine to work and the lockdown to come to an end.

"During the first lockdown I did a lot of eating. I just ate all the time," he says. "There was nothing else to do really. I read a book, one book that I read a long time ago. It was a Wilbur Smith novel, his first one. That's about it. I'm not a big reader. I was when I was at school, but these days I'd rather stick the telly on and, yeah, I watched a lot of telly. There are so many repeats on now of course. The same crap over and over again. Now I just want to come back to work."

Throughout most of 2020 Simon was shielding because of his MS, though he briefly returned to selling the magazine in the latter part of the year. When lockdown prevented him selling, he started travelling from his flat in nearby Knaresborough to Harrogate anyway.

"I have a good chat with most of the people in Harrogate. I missed them a lot in that first lockdown. I live in a first floor flat and to be honest I don't like spending time on my own there. That's why I come here. I just need something to do and it's better for my mental health to be out of the flat rather than sat there doing nothing and staring at the four walls. That does my head in."

The police moved him on once, accusing him of begging, but he feels justified in going back to his pitch. He's always careful to maintain some distance between himself and those he speaks to, and he wears a mask when necessary.

"Most of the people who chat to me are really safe. When I could sell the magazine, they would put the money on a post near where I was selling or whatever. People have got their heads screwed on right here – they're not having raves or whatever they do in the big cities. They look after each other and look after me, and I do what I can to look after them."

Sometimes, he admits, some of his former customers do give him money. These acts of kindness spark a conflict within him. "I feel like I'm back where I was years ago, when I was begging, before I started selling the magazine," he says. "It feels shit." But cash is tight and he's grateful for any support he gets.


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'I live in a first floor flat and to be honest I don't like spending time on my own there. That's why I come here.'

Simon receives both Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments, but these benefits are paid monthly and often at the same time as one another. "I'm not exactly great at budgeting," he admits. "But I try my best." Right now, he's in the middle of one of those periods between benefit payments and the money has run out. His electric is in danger of going off and he has other bills to pay, including some child support for his teenage daughter.

When the first lockdown occurred, *Big Issue North* set up a crisis fund for vendors. With the help of generous donations from the public they were able to support many vendors like Simon with small payouts in lieu of the money they would normally make selling the magazine. But now the hardship fund has started to dwindle and the office has had to prioritise who gets support. Because he is eligible for benefits, Simon knows there are plenty of other vendors worse off than him, although he has had some cash from the fund recently to help see him through.

Originally from Wakefield, Simon, who turned 43 in early February, started selling *Big Issue North* "years ago" when a relationship ended and he became homeless. Then, just as he was starting to get his life back on track, he was diagnosed with MS. He first noticed something was wrong when he started limping with his left leg. "I went to the doctor and he didn't know what it was, and I was sent to a neurologist. Then it just got worse and worse." He takes medication but it lowers his immune system, making him more susceptible to Covid and other illnesses.

"My body doesn't do what I want it to and it gets me really frustrated," he says, but he's thankful for the support he's had over the last few years as he's coped with the worsening condition. The *Big Issue North* team helped him apply for his benefits when it was clear that he wouldn't be able to sell the magazine daily like he used to, and his customers were quick to support him too, "apart from the odd kid who sniggers and thinks that I'm drunk, especially when I'm walking. That used to annoy me but I'm used to it now – it's their problem not mine."

In a normal week, Simon's life would still revolve around selling the magazine, despite his condition. Two or three times a week, he would leave his flat and take the two and half hour round trip to buy magazines from the Leeds office before returning to his pitch in Harrogate to sell them. He doesn't mind the journey. "It gets me out and about, so that's okay. Selling the magazine keeps my mind off the MS, gives me something to do and helps me earn a little bit of money at the same time."

The illness means he now has to use the walker to get about and he struggles to get up and down the stairs to his first floor flat. The stress of the last year hasn't exactly helped and he feels his condition has got worse because of it. "It's shit," he says, sounding defeated for a moment. "My life is shit but you know, I'm getting by."

But then he smiles again.

"I just hope they get whoever ate that bat!" he laughs. "You know, the one that started all of this. If only we could turn back time and stop whoever it was from doing whatever started this. But then I suppose this would have happened anyway, eventually. I mean, we've not exactly done right by our world, have we, what with all the plastic and pollution and stuff. It feels like this is the world teaching us a lesson." ■


WE WANT JUSTICE
RETURN THE DEAD BODY
of
WANI ATHER

ONE FAMILY'S QUEST AMID THE KASHMIR CRACKDOWN

BODY OF EVIDENCE

WORDS AND PHOTOS: SYED SHAHRIYAR

A huge crowd of people arrived in cars from the villages of south Kashmir at the police control room in Srinagar, summer capital of Indian Administered Kashmir, on 30 December 2020. It included relatives of the three youths killed in a suspected gun battle on the outskirts of Srinagar on the same day. The sudden arrival of this procession was surprising. For almost 18 months, since India revoked Kashmir's special status and imposed a military siege, such civil demonstrations had been impossible.

One of the protesters identified himself as the uncle of Ather. His own son, an active militant, was also killed by Indian forces. He shouted: "Oh people of the city, what you are watching today, they did this to us. Tomorrow it can be you." A large number of locals gathered to watch as the families demanded the bodies, insisting that they were civilians killed in cold blood by the Indian forces.

Mushtaq Ahmad, father of Ather, led a group of people, including some relatives, towards the main gates of the police control room. Folding her hands in grief, Ather's aunt pleaded with the police to let them go inside to see the bodies. The police stopped them. With tears in his eyes, Ather's father cried: "I haven't seen my son. Let me go inside. Won't you allow me inside? My son was home yesterday and just left home in the afternoon for Srinagar."

The situation turned unruly and shocking when he laid down in front of the police truck believed to be carrying the dead bodies, including 16-year-old Ather, to the unidentified graveyard meant to bury militants killed in firefights with Indian forces. He was pushed aside.

Until mid-April 2020, the Indian forces handed over the bodies of killed militants to their families for burial, but since then more than 150 militants have been buried in a graveyard meant for unidentified bodies. Now the resting place of the named as well as the un-named, it also includes 14-year-old disabled boy Muhammad Hazim, a civilian killed in crossfire in north Kashmir 30km away from the site.

In August 2019, the Indian government deployed additional forces in Muslim-majority Kashmir, already the most militarised zone in the world. Days later, claiming security reasons and a manifesto pledge to integrate Kashmir to India, Narendra Modi's government scrapped Article 370, the constitutional provision that gave the Himalayan state the right to make its own laws. He called it a "new era" for Kashmir. The road leading to the Srinagar airport was filled with civil trucks hired by Indian forces, waiting for contingents of troops to land and be further deployed across the disputed region.

The government issued an advisory for tourists and Hindu pilgrims taking part in the annual Amarnath pilgrimage to leave Kashmir, as unpredictable violence could take place. It cited "terror attacks" by militants backed by neighbouring Pakistan.

That prompted anxiety and chaos as people thronged to petrol pumps, grocery stores and cash machines, not knowing what was to happen. Many felt the crackdown seemed even more severe than during the peak of militancy, when an armed insurgency broke out against Indian rule during the late 1990s.

An unprecedented communication blackout was imposed by the Indian government. All landlines, mobile phone networks and internet services were barred. More than 6,000 people were picked up by forces for what the government said was "preventive detention". Hundreds were flown in military aircraft to Indian jails.

Pro-independence party leaders – and even politicians seen as pro-Indian but seeking constitutional change – as well as prominent activists were arrested and detained for months. Along the world-famous Dal Lake in Srinagar, a government-controlled hotel was turned into a jail for pro-India party leaders.

From 1949, Article 370 gave special status to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, including land rights and restrictions on Indian citizens settling in Kashmir and buying property, holding government jobs and securing educational scholarships. Many believed the Indian government's unconstitutional abrogation of Article 370 was the first move to change the demography of disputed Kashmir by getting Hindu residents to settle here.

Pages 18-19: After the killing of 16-year-old Ather in a suspected gun battle, his father Mushtaq Ahmad, along with his family and relatives of the two other young men who died in the incident, demonstrate in his village of Bellow Pulwama. Police sealed routes into the village and stopped many journalists covering the event

Page 20: Family members wail over the grave of a militant at a government graveyard in the remote village of Wader Bala in north Kashmir's Handwara region, more than 100km from summer capital Srinagar. Citing coronavirus restrictions, authorities stopped handing over the bodies of militants to families. Ather's body has been buried in a similar graveyard away from his village

Page 21: An Indian paramilitary solider deployed near the suspected gun battle site in which Ather and two other boys were killed. Families contested the police account that all three were "hardcore militant associates" and refused to surrender. Family members serve tea for people visiting Ather's home on the 15th day after his killing

Left: Mushtaq Ahmad and others help to remove the steel sheets placed on the empty grave he has dug for Ather in his native village graveyard, while demanding his mortal remains that the police refused to hand over. He had promised not to protest if the remains were returned

Above: Mushtaq Ahmad prays inside the mosque in his native village. On 7 February Indian police booked him and family members, as well has a local cleric, under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for "organising illegal procession under criminal conspiracy". Police said Mushtaq had led people after offering Friday prayers and shouted slogans demanding his son's body

In August last year the Indian government ordered a partial withdrawal of troops after a "security review" – and no doubt mindful of the difficulties in keeping them stationed there through a harsh winter. Internet and social media restrictions have been gradually lifted, although connection speeds are very low. Only in February did the Indian government say it would end the ban on 4G mobile data.

An uneasy calm now prevails. Srinagar looks like a military camp with new bunkers and forces standing on streets. In the old city an intersection is occupied by paramilitary forces who often close down the road in the evening, forcing locals to make long detours, even to a government hospital situated just a few metres away.

On an autumn evening after the withdrawal, an Indian military convoy deployed in the day was moving back to its base when a group of boys pelted the vehicles with stones and ran away. Armed personnel stopped and thrashed a chicken seller in a nearby shop in revenge, breaking his cellphone and killing his chicken. Meanwhile, 108-year-old Zooni Begum was facing the prospect of losing her home.

In May last year, in the midst of the pandemic, the Modi government introduced new laws that make it possible for Indian people to settle in Kashmir. Begum, of the fourth generation of her family to live in Zilisidara – a forest village in central Kashmir's Budgam district – has been told to leave her land.

"I don't understand what is happening," she said. "We have such a miserable life. I have worked so hard all these years living here. A few days ago the forest department came with notices of eviction for the land we have held for decades. They asked us to clear the land otherwise we will be put in prison. I don't know what are they planning for us. We got so scared that we didn't even eat that day."

It is too early to assess February's joint India-Pakistan statement that they will newly respect the 2003 ceasefire on the disputed border. Back in Srinagar, no one had told Ather's father where the bodies were being taken. It was only when a boy following the police truck phoned the family that they learnt they had reached the graveyard 80km to the north-east. ■

Left: **People from other villages come to console Mushtaq Ahmad and offer prayers for Ather. They included some whose sons were also killed – some as civilians and some fighting Indian forces as militants. Mushtaq Ahmad says he will "strive to get my son's body back despite whatever happens" as the family plans to travel more than 115km from their village to the graveyard for the first time since Ather was buried there**

Above: **Ather's young cousin stands next to Ather's belongings, including clothes and schoolbooks. Ather's father said: "He wanted to become an engineer. I had asked him to take admission outside Kashmir and was planning to send him after secondary school, but I never tolerated seeing him far away from me. They took away a part of my body and buried him so far."**

M62

For peat's sake

It took visionary civil engineering and a six-year-old pony to build the M62. By Roger Ratcliffe. Photos: Rebecca Lupton

IN THE END, the success or failure of Britain's highest motorway being forged across the 1200ft moors between Lancashire and Yorkshire was pretty much in the hands, or rather the hooves, of sheep.

Local upland breeds like white-faced woodlands and Derbyshire gritstones showed nothing but contempt for physical barriers. If a motorway carrying tens of thousands of vehicles a day could ever connect the two sides of England, its builders would have to invent a totally sheep-proof fence.

In 1964, at the start of the seven years it took to complete this one six-mile section of the 110 mile-long M62, from the appropriately named Windy Hill above Denshaw to Pole Moor near Huddersfield, they erected an experimental enclosure and filled it with sheep and lambs to test different fence heights and mesh sizes. On the outside was a local farmer's prize ram, an inducement for the ewes to escape from the enclosure.

But this had to be no normal fence. Although it should be high enough to stop even the most determined ewes from leaping over, the mesh was even more important. Not only must it be small enough to prevent lambs from squeezing through to reach tempting grass on motorway verges and central reservations, but the mesh also had to be big enough to stop snow accumulating and freezing on the wire, where it would form solid walls of ice. This would obstruct the wind from passing through the fences, and lead to deep snow drifts blocking the motorway. The fence posts would also be latticed steel to offer no resistance to the wind.

So did the engineers succeed in their remit of building a mountain motorway that would keep traffic flowing even in the worst Arctic conditions? "Snow drifts themselves have never closed the M62 up there," reflects Stuart Holland, who is the motorway's unofficial historian and at the age of 19 got a job working as a lab technician for the project.

"Okay, there's sometimes a jackknifed lorry holding up the flow, because that happens in all roads in winter, but there's always been at least one lane on either side kept moving."

Today, the M62 is considered a marvel of civil engineering. Even the Romans – considered the greatest road-builders in history and whose network is still the basis of Britain's trunk road system – steered well clear of the vast expanse of peat bog that was eventually chosen for the motorway.

There was no doubt about the need for a major new route across the Pennines, one that shortened journey times between the industrial areas centred on Leeds and Manchester. The project had been proposed, then shelved as far back as the 1930s, but in post-war Britain booming trade with Europe and huge increase in car ownership saw the main east-west roads over the Woodhead and Snake Passes to the south and Blackstone Edge to the north become more and more congested. It was time for action.

Initially there was talk of upgrading an existing road to a dual carriageway, but which one? Traffic surveys were conducted along trans-Pennine routes and drivers asked about their journeys, although not everyone took them seriously. One of the people who conducted on the surveys, Chrissie Trollip, recalls that while many were happy to co-operate there were quite a few who refused. "When I asked where they were going, quite often I was told 'it's none of your f-ing business'. I remember a vicar being extremely rude. And there was one bloke I interviewed quite early in the morning who said he'd just been to his girlfriend's, and when I asked where he was driving to he said 'home to the wife.'"

In the late 1950s the Department of Transport began to talk about a "motorway". In Britain the concept had been pioneered with the construction of the eight-mile Preston bypass in 1958, which later became part of the M6. The concept that soon developed for the M62 was a super-highway running all the way from Liverpool to Hull, and its chief advocate was Lancashire's county surveyor, James Drake, now regarded as the father of Britain's motorways. Drake had been to Germany in the 1930s and admired the new autobahns being built by Hitler. Seeing the US's Interstate Highways on a visit there in 1955 convinced him that nothing less would do to solve the trans-Pennine traffic problems.

The route that was chosen could hardly have been more difficult, and at one point looked like defeating the road builders. The weather conditions alone were against them. Besides prolonged spells of ice and snow in winter, frequent low cloud reduced visibility to nil, while torrential rain turned parts of the construction site into soup. Holland says: "Often it was a case of three steps forward and two back, and sometimes two forward and three back."

The construction team that comprised the West Riding county engineers and Sir Alfred McAlpine as the main contractor encountered trouble the moment they set foot on Moss Moor. It was more than just their hearts that sank, according to the West Riding's project manager, the late Geoffrey Hunter, who took on the job at the age of 28. He later recalled in a TV interview: "It's not possible to build a motorway over a peat bog because it will not support anything. It's better to go through it in a boat, actually, and the contractor lost a series of machines in the peat."

Despite assembling the biggest fleet of earth-moving vehicles ever seen in Britain, embarrassingly the contractors couldn't even get onto the moor at first in order to peg out the basic route. In desperation, they turned to farmer Joe Jagger at nearby Ripponden, who used a six-year-old pony named Peggy for hauling a home-made sledge for milk deliveries when it snowed. Might that be deployed on the moor?

Joe's son, Edward, remembers: "They couldn't get over the peat, and decided the only way they could mark the route was by either hiring a helicopter or our pony and sledge. We were the cheaper option, so they would come to the farm in the morning, load up the pony, and up at the site Peggy would pull the sledge over the moor so they could bang in oak posts and secure them with cement. That's how they managed to start building the M62. But at one point Peggy herself got stuck in the peat and it took four men to roll her out."

Hunter, who drove an E-type Jaguar to the site each day from his home in Wakefield, quickly found that even his site Land-Rover was useless for travelling around the moor. He imported a small Muskeg tractor with caterpillar tracks from Canada, something that was later adapted for use by astronauts on the lunar surface.

Scammonden Bridge over the M62 in 1969 (Shutterstock)

"It's the only way to cross peat bog," insisted Hunter, whose battle to excavate the peat lasted four years. The contractors estimated there were a total of 11.5 million cubic yards of rock and peat to move from this one stretch of motorway. If they had used Wembley Stadium as a bucket, it was said there was enough material to fill it three times.

"The atrocious climate made it hard to work," Hunter said. "That moor is the only place in the world where it can actually rain up your trouser leg." Rainfall was twice the national average. Conditions were so bad in the winter of 1966-67 that work was suspended for three months. "The contractors walked in mud, sat in mud and there was mud in their sandwiches," said Hunter.

A vital part of this stretch of the M62 was the construction of Scammonden Reservoir, which would fill the Deanhead Valley and require a 200ft high dam to support the M62. It was the first-ever dam to carry a motorway on its crown. Another first was constructed nearby – the longest single-span bridge in the world, carrying a minor road over a vast cutting from which had been blasted 7 million cubic yards of rock.

At the Lancashire end of the route a more novel problem cropped up. Britain's first long-distance footpath, the 250-mile Pennine Way, would open in 1965, and before Harold Wilson won the general election of 1964 for Labour, the outgoing Conservative transport minister Ernest Marples, who was MP for Wallasey and a keen member of Manchester Ramblers Club, insisted that the money be found for a 65ft-high footbridge to convey walkers over the new motorway.

As the years passed the nascent M62 became a popular visitor attraction, with one enterprising Yorkshire coach operator taking parties onto Deanhead Moor to give them a panoramic view over the vast site. Bizarrely, one day in 1970 a group of female models and a photographer arrived on site to do a photoshoot for *Playboy* magazine. To the cheers of workmen, the women posed amongst the vast earth-moving equipment, wearing nothing but hard hats.

The M62's most famous feature, of course, is the farm marooned between the east and westbound carriageways. Its own Facebook page describes it as 'the little house on the prairie'. But even after half a century there is still a persistent myth surrounding how it came to be there.

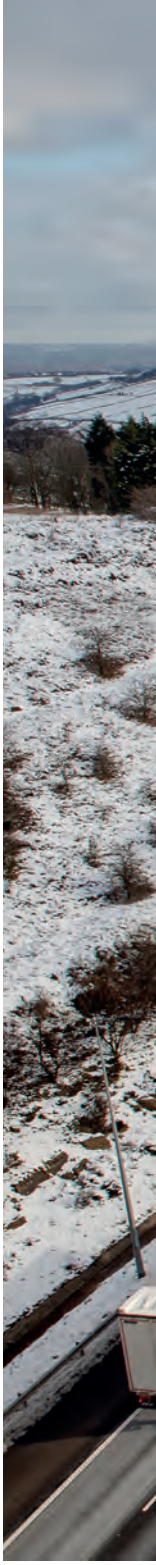
Local legend has it that the then-farmer John Wild, whose family had kept sheep at Stott Hall Farm in the middle of bleak Moss Moor since 1933, stubbornly refused to make way for the motorway. One account has him standing in front of bulldozers with a double-barrelled shotgun and blasting workmen with Led Zeppelin records from speakers roped to the roof. This war of attrition, it is said, forced the road builders to leave Wild stuck between the carriageways. The legend was given a new lease of life only last year on one news website.

In truth, these stories refer to another farmer, Wilf Dyson, a 65-year-old loner who fiercely resisted moves to get him out of his farm in nearby Deanhead Valley, where the land was needed for Scammonden Reservoir and the dam that would carry the M62. Dyson held out for five years, and was still maintaining a stand-off with police and contractors when a search of the land registry revealed that he wasn't the owner of the farm but a squatter. Still Dyson stood in front of the bulldozers, which he called "devil diggers", until the earth they were pushing made him fall over. He was given a three month prison sentence for breach of the peace.

At Stott Hall, news of the proposed motorway had been sprung on farmer Wild when the engineers knocked on his door one day and said they were just surveying the land for potential routes. "Of course, we didn't think it would come past here, but then it did," his son Ken said in a later TV documentary. "It looked like we were going to have to move, but then they found a [geological] fault which meant they would have had to build up the eastbound motorway too much to keep all six lanes together, so they left us here".

It was a decision that led to the farm becoming an emergency motorway service station, with regular knocks on the door from pre-mobile phone motorists asking to borrow jacks or wheel braces when they had a puncture or to call a breakdown organisation. In the early hours of one morning Wild and his wife Beth awoke to hear a loud crash in the farmyard. They rushed outside to find a 30ft juggernaut had hurtled through the safety barrier on the westbound side and overturned just a few yards from their back door.

The problems continue today, with vehicles big and small running off the motorway and landing



in the sheep pastures. The current farmer, Paul Thorp, also complains about fly-tipping.

"We've had things like golf clubs and hockey sticks tossed over the fences," he says. "And someone once dumped a huge load of Yellow Pages directories."

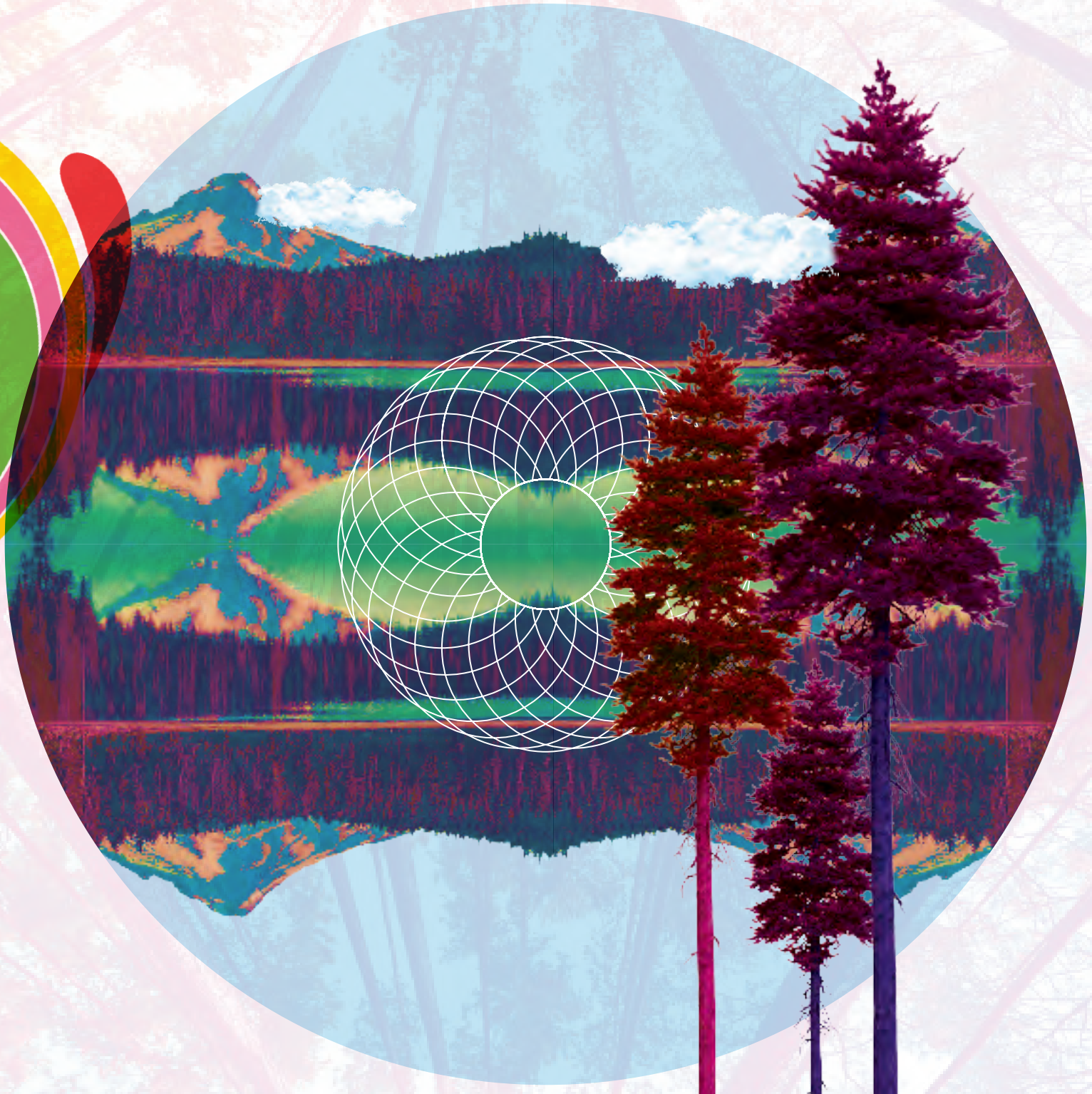
One issue in many minds when deciding to build the M62 was that it would finally cure the sometimes bitter antagonism between Yorkshire and Lancashire. At worst it had fuelled the 15th century Wars of the Roses between the royal houses of York and Lancaster for control of the English throne, leaving an estimated 35,000-50,000 dead. In recent times, the old rivalry had been acted out on sports fields.

But the feud was still evident during the construction of the M62. An argument resulted between the Lancashire contractors, building the motorway up the west side of the Pennines, and civil engineers on the Yorkshire side when the point at which they were supposed to meet was found to be out of alignment. Both sides blamed each other. There was also a heated dispute over the name of the road. Should it be the Lancashire-Yorkshire Motorway, as Drake insisted? Or should it be the Yorkshire-Lancashire Motorway, as fiercely advocated by the West Riding county surveyor S Maynard Lovell? In the end they tossed and coin and Drake won.

This rivalry also spilled over into the M62's official opening on 14 October 1971, when the Lord Lieutenants of Lancashire and Yorkshire had an unseemly public spat over which of them should be presented first to the Queen. It was a day that had already started badly, with the royal train overshooting the red carpet that was laid across the platform at Huddersfield railway station. The brass band that enthusiastically played *God Save the Queen* was told to stop until the carpet was repositioned for the royal party.

Fifty years on, parts of the sheep-proof fencing are beginning to deteriorate, says Holland. "It's steel wire with a green plastic coating, but I've been up there to check and I can see some of the caps on the lattice posts are starting to rust and may have to be replaced. Still, those fences have done the job they were designed for. Absolutely no question." ■

Down memory lanes: Stuart Holland (left) is the unofficial historian of the M62



Remembering Kesey's Oregon

By Wayne Koberstein

At some point more present than future, Drummer looked out across an empty field and thought about all that had happened to Kesey's Oregon since the famous author made his mark. Drummer remembered it all, because he was there, not from the beginning, but when the whole picture came into focus for anyone willing to see it.

Remembering: Back when he was 20 and barely married, he had a vision. On a perfect July day, sitting on a coastal riverbank, he looked up and his eyes beheld it. The trees across the Umpqua spoke to him – in writing. He lay on the bank and looked across at a large stand of Douglas Firs on the far side, and he noticed a red corona shining from their branches almost as bright as their usual green. Then, like a big neon sign the size of the whole hill, the green-red trees formed letters, not alphabetical but somehow familiar, like ancient writing on rock. More important than whatever mysterious meaning remained hidden, it seemed, was to see the letters at all. A phrase, "The balance is off between being and doing," came into his mind and out of his mouth, quietly, repeating. He was serene.

But later, pinched in by the cabin walls and hollow conversation, Drummer went out to his car and turned on the engine. His guide-friend joined him and talked until he was calm again. Only months later would he learn the real reason for his sudden discontent inside the cabin. Yes, the balance was off between being and doing, and though he had been content in just being, he now had to place his weight back upon the doing. Even so, he could never again return to before the trees writ large and bright their message to him. They had come alive for him in a way that would last forever. Not just living wood, or uncut lumber now, but awake and aware as one giant creature.

Over on the McKenzie River, a larger and more torrential stream dropping west out of the high Cascades, other events were pushing the state of Oregon toward a similar expansion of mind. Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters returned to the Kesey family farm from their big loop through the nation in the famous bus named Furthur. Drummer would soon encounter them in Eugene, the university town close to where the McKenzie joined the Willamette, one of the few major rivers in the world to flow due north, to meet the mighty Columbia. The tributary flows down the middle of the great Willamette Valley bordered by parallel mountain ranges running north and south, the ancient Coast Range along the west and the younger Cascade Range of volcanoes along the east.

Drummer learned in junior high how the Coast Range would steal most of the rain from Pacific Storms, still leaving plenty for the Valley and the Cascades, which hogged most of the remaining rain away from the painted deserts to the east. Oregon owed its reputation as a wet, green paradise only to the western third of the state. Kesey's Oregon was western Oregon. The Umpqua, Siletz and the many other streams flowing out of the Coast Range into the Pacific inspired the fictional Wakonda Agua River in his epic second novel, Sometimes A Great Notion. Drummer always loved the first chapter of the book, foreboding as it is, for its signature description of Oregon's rain-soaked forests, then a relentless feature of the land taken for granted by the locals.

When Drummer remembered the book, however, he recalled the picture it invoked in his mind more than Kesey's actual description. The novel emphasises the precarious position of the house built and occupied by the central family of loggers near the river, with improvised bulwarks against the running stream rather than the rain that drove the entire scene. Instead of the river setting, Drummer imagined dripping limbs and moss and rain-bleached siding on the house.

Illustration: Laura Turner

He had never thought the forest would change because, growing up, he never thought much at all about the climate or environment as a dynamic component of the place where he was born. In that ignorance of the familiar, he was not alone but joined with his entire generation. Even the early hippies and Prankster crowd had little or no awareness of such things – that is, until their young adulthood, when the collars they wore were blue and they got up every morning in the dark and headed to work on the soaked mountain slopes.

As did many of his friends in the 1970s, Drummer found decent-paying work planting and thinning trees in the mountains. It was not an easy transition for a young rebel, often an artist or musician, though some took to the new life with natural ease. Early on, many were friends of the Pranksters if not Pranksters themselves. Drummer's friends included founders of the legendary Hoedads cooperative. You might have rain beating in your face all day, maybe mixed with ice or snow; you might slide two steps down in the mud for every three steps up a steep slope; but the work offered other compensations, including calmer moments gazing across a green valley and breathing its pristine air.

Among the many famous but now dead authors in Oregon, Kesey was the only one Drummer actually met and knew, in the heyday of the Merry Pranksters and the Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test. Drummer wasn't Kesey's friend or one of his group but actually a friend of a friend, or several friends removed. That was partly because he was younger than the core members, extra-long haired, and a quiet pacifist vegetarian – all qualities the tough-skinned Kesey liked to rail against. But Drummer couldn't seem to go anywhere without seeing Kesey or his Pranksters, often along with his lieutenant Ken Babbs. Drummer kept a clear memory of what these characters were really like, and the picture does not harmonise well with the Wolfeian legend of Kesey and his merry men.

Many old-timers from that era still make a living selling crafts and food at Eugene's outdoor Saturday Market, a block away from Kesey Square. The city has installed a statue in the square of a youngish Kesey sitting on a bench and reading a book out loud.

Oddly, the general reverence for this local god rests on the dream that he was an ordinary man who attempted and achieved extraordinary things. That's very American. We love our Forrest Gumps. Work hard, never give up, don't worry about having to actually know anything. The old-timers then close to Kesey either join the chorus of praise or stay silent and sweep their memories under the rug. Back then, Drummer would think, "Am I the only one who sees him this way?" Drummer began to share the chief doubts of outsiders based on a single question: why did Kesey stop writing after the two great first novels? In fact, he did write, but almost as a by-product of his other, generally theatrical activities. As Tim Appelo points out in his 2006 Seattle Weekly article Shameless Shaman, Kesey tried to "fuse thought and action and bypass traditional art".

No one can take away Kesey's recognised attributes, either: strong family guy, truly loved his Sunday school-teaching wife, and an unflagging creative spirit. Yet Drummer would say Kesey headed a ragtag group of mental marauders who had nothing much going but tagging along with him and conducting their ambush acid tests on unsuspecting co-eds and other hapless victims. At different points, Drummer would encounter this group, wade into their midst, and maybe spend some time with the great one.

Between direct encounters with the Pranksters over the years, Drummer attended the 1969 concert at Altamont, when Kesey's group and the Grateful Dead were joined at the hip. The Dead planned the concert, and they invited the Hell's Angels to conduct "security" there. On that day, the swastikas sewn on the Angels' jackets matched their Nazi behaviour. "Look me in the eye, and I'll pound you into the ground," was their general approach. Altamont confirmed Drummer's suspicion that a strong machismo culture, bordering on fascist, permeated the Kesey/Dead pre-hippy crowd, finding full expression at the event, though always present in more subtle ways elsewhere. Kesey's own fascination with John Wayne and other he-man stars, and even the aggressive heroes of his books, reflected and fed the macho chic.

The man-on-top attitude extended to another practice that raised Drummer's hackles and pushed the Kesey clan into real overlord territory: the sneaky imposition of psychedelic consciousness known as dosing. Tall tales demand incredulity, yet one thing is certain. The fabled acid test often involved getting subjects to ingest LSD without mentioning it to the subjects. Drummer would forever consider the practice outrageously wrong.

This he-man image fit well into the larger Oregon history and culture. Oregon entered the Union in 1859 as a non-slave state – and a non-black state. Its constitution banned black people from state citizenship, so only a few lived there, or live there now. Even so, after filling up with white immigrants from the Old South, towns all over Oregon had their own KKK, whose members included town founders and state leaders. In most places, integration meant you had Irish, Germans or Slavs in your neighbourhood. Otherwise, the whole state was always a WASP heaven. Antipathy toward blacks extended naturally to gays, Catholics, Jews and other strangers in this strange, lily-white land.

Kesey's Oregon was the world before coming out, before save the whales, before melting glaciers, before MAGA. It was also the world that led us to grunge and heavy metal, legal pot, Bill and Ted. Those icons still have great appeal for millennial males and their mates, who live a lonely life of stubborn freedom and independence, and for anyone young, old, or middle who enters their realm. In Kesey's culture, the men ran things, or appeared to, while the women quietly steered the men around like a herd of pampered bulls.

Women among the Pranksters were no wilting flowers, though. Carolyn Adams (aka Mountain Girl), Faye Kesey and Valerie Ann Steinbrecher (Tangerine) went on to do great things after their marriages to Jerry Garcia, Ken Kesey and Zonker, respectively. They and others from the former Prankster-related group were instrumental in environmental initiatives, such as forming the McKenzie River Trust. The women also proved to be great mothers, grandmothers, aunts and so on to the next generation. One could argue the image of Earth Mother originated with this special society of women.

There is irony in history. The hipster culture that gave birth to beatniks and Pranksters evolved from an internment of pacifists on the Oregon coast during WWII. Some later became professors at the University of Oregon and started a tradition of yearly mega-parties named for a coastal Indian ceremony, the potlach. Kesey saw partying itself as a creative tool for his brand of artistic rebellion.

With all due regard for human culture, however, it was the natural world, not the human-created one, that prompted Kesey to dream up Sometimes A Great Notion, and it is the natural world that wins out at the end of the novel. The relentless rain washes away all of man's contraptions and follies. Until the rain abates.

And, yea, it hath abated. The Oregon of today: mercurial seasons, long-lasting drought conditions, harmful logging, thoughtless development and, most recently, an ever-worsening trend of annual wildfires. Global warming, a concept initially denied by capitalists, unionists and communists alike, was simply unknown to the Kesey crowd as it was generally. Forest fires happened every year back then, but they never consumed whole towns or blanketed the region with thick orange smoke for weeks at a time, as they did in the fall of 2020. Fire was once a local employment booster, in fact. Burned areas are typically logged, so fires were often intentional. In the 1970s, Drummer read about a retired local undercover cop whose job was to round up forest-fire arsonists. The perpetrator was often just an out-of-work logger who would have a few beers and brag loudly about the crime at his favourite bar. More than once, the investigator found a matchbook bearing the bar's name at the arson ignition scene, then simply hung round the place for a while until he overheard the guy's inevitable boast.

The current fires, as Oregonians experienced in the past year, are a whole new breed. They carry the full force of global warming, quite literally in the winds. Like California, Oregon has always had a season of late summer winds bringing hot air from the east over the Cascades into the west. Fires could begin when the wind exposed tree roots with glowing coals from previous blazes, reigniting in the strong airflow and spreading embers like lit matches all over, from open field into deep forests. Winds, of course, also fan fires of any origin, from lightning to humans. In late 2020, following the hottest winter on record, the seasonal winds blew with extra heat and speed, in sustained gusts of 50mph or more. Where unencumbered, down main highways and river channels, the wind formed virtual blast furnaces. So it was with the McKenzie highway.

"Like in much of the fire's footprint, floodplain lands burned in a mosaic pattern," says Joe Moll, executive director of the McKenzie River Trust, a non-profit organisation that obtains land around the river to serve as a buffer against fire and other forms of degradation. "Hotter, more intense burns in some areas, cooler, less intense burns in others. Higher water tables in active floodplains, and higher water tables where beavers have been active, tend to carry less intense fire, but fire behaviour is not simply a function of the fuels available. In the case of this fire especially, wind was the bigger driver."

Moll also considers unbridled development as a more important issue than fuel build-up. "The bigger issue around buffers and the river is the difference between a floodplain where there are no structures – houses, barns, and so on – versus where there were. In some places, burned houses and vehicles and such have literally melted into the river. Not good for water quality and other aspects of river health."

Before the burn, the McKenzie corridor was one of the most beautiful areas of Oregon. The green-laced river roared over basalt boulders and around treefall and contained world-class rapids unmarred by burned debris. Gorgeous tree-covered foothills led to vast volcanic lakes and finally the volcanoes themselves, with the comely cones of the Three Sisters and great lava flows saddling the Cascades summit. And where allowed, the McKenzie will be that way one day again. But the human cost was great – whole towns and countless homesteads burnt to the ground.

When Drummer got back to Oregon in 1982 after seven years in Tennessee, he was surprised to see the logging debate had shifted to old growth, and even now companies and activists fight over the remaining heritage stands, less than one percent of the original forest in the state. Drummer merely asked, "If reforestation made timber the renewable resource, why still target the oldest trees?" Answer: because they make the best lumber. Mature Douglas Firs stand up to 100 metres high and 2.4 metres across at the bottom. They get that way growing slowly and densely. They naturally use shade, not herbicides, against the undergrowth, thick bark and pitch against insects, macrobiotics in soil for fertiliser. They also just happen to withstand fire many times better than regrowth.

Another renowned author and resident of the McKenzie area, the late Barry Lopez, returned to his home after the fire to find it all burned, including all of his papers and writing projects. Also a founder and supporter of the McKenzie River Trust, Lopez died of cancer weeks later. His story would be sad if he hadn't met the destruction with undying hope for the area and its environment, and for the idea of valuing the environment in general. The earth cares for us but does not care about us. For the most part, nature only unconsciously provides us with the means of our existence. If we "destroy the earth," we only destroy ourselves, for the world flows on, regardless of our fate. That may be the most valuable lesson of the changes Oregon has seen since the days of Kesey.

Drummer came to see another side of Kesey and his gang as time passed. The other side was not equivalent or perfectly counter balancing, but only an acknowledgement of additional truths, or at least the potential for trueness in the total picture of their lives. Maybe, thought Drummer, the Pranksters not only bridged the beatnik and hippie eras but also created key ingredients in the hippie stew. They invented light shows, large rock concerts and tie-dye. They found new ways hippies could make a living and carry on productively with a great deal of personal freedom. They kept creativity and art alive, radically different from the traditional line but somehow consistent with its most advanced forms. They may have conducted a rougher way of going "back to the country", but they encouraged a bunch of middle-class town-dwellers to salvage the remaining patches of 19th-century pastorals. And they helped keep alive the knowledge that nature rules all things on earth.

Kesey, as well, may deserve credit for achieving some valuable legacies. He worked hard to resurrect the oral tradition of story-telling and from that laid down some of the early links between young white people and Native Americans. Their wonderful sounding words reverberate throughout Oregon – words like Stilcoos, Chintimini, Siuslaw and Klamath. But native peoples had all but disappeared in Oregon, as their hopes for continued peaceful independence were repeatedly dashed. Treaties broken, land taken and, perhaps as the greatest insult, stewardship of the Earth usurped by relentless defilers of the land, air and water of the region. Black Elk predicted that his people would someday see a generation of white children grow up to adopt native ways and help tribes reclaim their heritage, and between land grants, environmental alliances and, yes, even the casinos, that dream may yet come to fruition. If so, the inroads Kesey explored will have partially led the way there. One of his legacy achievements was his Bend in the River project in the early 1970s, a series of gatherings across the state raising issues of environmental policy and practice almost for the first time in Oregon history.

Attempts to reach people who shared the times Drummer remembered will now be mostly futile, perhaps partly because it really has been a very long time and, sad to say, many of those elders may have gotten too old to care or have reached the ending bell. One can still revisit the sites and sights where Kesey and his Pranksters roamed, but no one can bring back all that has faded and died since then. In some form of hippie justice, his dark side has slipped from view, while his smiling, benevolent expression has remained in focus.

Remembering Kesey is one thing. Knowing him is quite another. Studying Kesey now to assess attributes such as his awareness of Native Americans would be like reading through history to discover how medieval builders forgot Roman engineering techniques. Kesey's Oregon was just as mysterious as Kesey the man, as mysterious as he remains. And in that way, Kesey's Oregon is our Oregon for all time. ■

Pam's party

Drummer got his name from Kesey. It happened at the end of Pam's winter solstice party in Eugene. Pam had invited his band to play at the party. Just as Drummer was leaving the next morning, Kesey, lying on the kitchen floor surrounded by women of his close family, lazily lifted his curl-ringed head and said: "See ya, Drummer." It stuck.

That followed from the night before, when the band took a break but Drummer stayed a moment longer and wound up jamming off the cuff with Kesey, who grabbed an electric guitar and began crunching out some rock-sounding chords in randomly changing rhythms. For about 20 minutes, the two crashed away with the drums lending some coherence to Kesey's start-and-stop approach to the guitar. (To Drummer's surprise, the old man wasn't bad, either.)

"That was one great party Pam threw," Drummer often said later. The people filled two adjacent houses in West Eugene – Pam's place practically joined at the hip with a Prankster hangout. Drummer and his band set up in a second-floor room, where the fabled author and a few guys played with equipment that pumped sound around the two houses. To Drummer, Kesey looked like no state champion wrestler, and he seemed an unlikely leader for a bunch of acidheads. Big pot belly, cueball-head, except for the half horns of white curls on the sides, beer in hand – Kesey showed all the tired signs of his post-best-seller prosperity.

"Every time I saw him, his eyes followed me around like some killer puppy dog. But until Pam's party, he had never said two words to me. From the time he called me Drummer, my dislike gave way to something more like sympathy for the old devil."

Prankster Zodiac and friends had wired the two houses together with dozens of power, speaker and mic cables laced between all the rooms on both sides. Pam's house held most of the people; the other house, in the small living and dining rooms, most of the equipment – tape recorders, mixing boards, amplifiers, and weird sound-altering gizmos of the early seventies – along with the band. All the rooms in Pam's house had microphones and speakers, as did the "studio" rooms next door. All the mics fed into the recorder and sound equipment, through which Zodiac's crew played back the altered recordings in random loops and snatches, backward, forward and upside down. As people in one room spoke, they would hear pieces of conversations in their room and others, mixed all up with music and gratuitous sound effects.

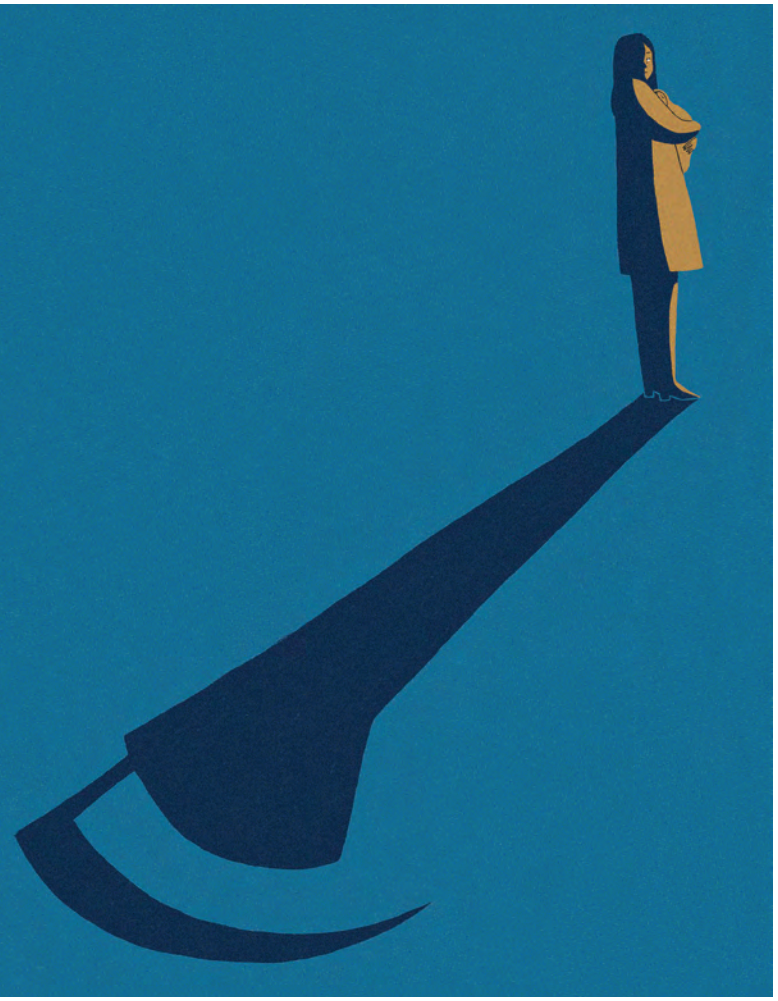
The police stopped by once but never disturbed this loud affair, perhaps because the party showed no hostility toward the outside world. Drummer looked out the window at one point and saw Zodiac, a tiny long-haired swarthy guy in a Santa Claus suit, skipping down the driveway toward the street with his arms around a pair of cops. Even they couldn't resist Zodiac's magic on this night, though, of course, the Pranksters were almost always good at charming the police. After his band played, Drummer spent the rest of the night talking with but mostly observing the crowd. He left before dawn, feeling more relaxed than he ever had before. ■

Wayne Koberstein writes articles, stories, songs, plays and a serial novel in progress, Drummer's View. Drummer is a character of fiction, based on memory and imagination

Left: **Ken Kesey in the 1960s. Photo: Robert Altman/Getty**

A global conspiracy of scientists

By Matthew Baker. Illustration: Steph Coathupe



Many years ago now, in a quaint happy town on the shore of a great lake, there once lived an anti-vaxxer. On a rainy spring evening when all the cherry trees were in blossom, a foreign doctor came to town to give a lecture at the community centre, arriving in a flashy sports car with pop music playing over the radio. Lacey was only there at the community centre that night because she'd gotten the dates confused – she'd thought that that night there was supposed to be a talk about meditation. She almost slipped back out of the community centre when she realised the mistake, but she hesitated when she saw the foreign doctor step onto the stage, and on an impulse she decided to stay. The doctor – or former doctor, technically – had somewhat juvenile taste in clothing, but nevertheless was charming, speaking passionately, with a captivating accent. He had come, he said, to spread word of a grave threat: that vaccines were dangerous, and caused autism in children who'd been vaccinated. Lacey was stunned by the figures he cited, and was especially alarmed when she learned that the scientific community had suppressed the results of the study he'd conducted. Earnestly, with a terrible sense of urgency, standing there on the stage with both hands raised to the heavens, he pleaded with those in the audience to resist vaccinating the children in town. For an instant he looked directly at her, as if making a personal appeal. Lacey returned home from the lecture with a tote bag full of pamphlets and her heart pounding and promptly sat down at her laptop, still wearing her raincoat, and began to scour the internet. What she discovered terrified her. Thousands of parents who were already aware of a link between vaccines and autism, exchanging information on blogs and forums. Parents concerned about a link between vaccines and epilepsy. Parents concerned about a link between vaccines and diabetes. Parents warning about the danger of vaccines that contained mercury, formaldehyde, aluminium. Lacey was nine months pregnant, expecting to give birth any day. Earlier that year her husband had been killed on a foot patrol in a war overseas. She was going to be a single parent, solely responsible for the life of her child. She wanted so much for her son, but what she wanted most of all was for her son to be healthy. Sitting there at her laptop with her palms resting on her belly, she felt her son moving in the womb. Already so playful. Energetic. That was the night she decided that she would never vaccinate her child.

Her son was born a week later, a healthy rosy-cheeked baby with shiny golden hair and bright blue eyes. He was a happy newborn, hardly ever cried.

Later that month her friends from college drove over to the house to meet her son, bringing homemade casseroles, bouquets of flowers, tramping into the kitchen in sorority sweatshirts and vintage sweaters. Lacey felt her cheeks glowing from the attention. Her friends all wanted to have kids some day too, and she was anxious to warn her friends about what she'd discovered. But when she told her friends about how dangerous vaccines were, her friends laughed nervously, glancing at each other.

"That's, like, definitely a conspiracy theory."

"Like, seriously, it's a certified hoax."

"You should for sure have him vaccinated."

"You don't understand," Lacey said, trying to remain calm.

Her friends smiled awkwardly, as if embarrassed for her.

"Honey, when you honestly think about it, what seems more likely to you? That millions of medical experts, belonging to hundreds of nations and possessing a tremendous diversity of political views and religious beliefs and personal ambitions, could all be coerced into participating in a massive cover-up? Or that the one doctor who supports the claim is a fraud, and is motivated by self-interest?"

"He has proof," Lacey exclaimed, on the verge of tears.

She desperately tried to explain, but her friends refused to accept the evidence.

"Lacey, he's a quack."

• • • • • •

Her sister drove over to the house to meet her son a day later. Lacey had never been particularly close with her sister, but she'd imagined that her sister would be supportive. Her sister was enthusiastic about healthy living, a vegan yogi who only ate food that was local and natural and organic and who brewed homemade kombucha in gigantic jars. Her sister had an easy-going personality, was broad-minded, and typically responded to any difference of opinion with an expression of amusement. But when she told her sister about the decision not to vaccinate her son, her sister suddenly became grim.

"I honestly can't tell if you're joking," her sister said, sitting across from her in the kitchen with a mug of herbal tea cupped in her hands.

"Vaccines are dangerous," Lacey said.

Her sister gazed at her intently for a moment, then set the mug down on the table.

"I'm sorry. I sometimes forget that you were a biology major in college," her sister said.

Lacey hesitated, confused.

"I sometimes forget that at graduation, as you were crossing the stage to be handed your diploma, the dean of sciences grabbed the microphone and, totally overcome with emotion, announced to the crowd that you weren't just the most brilliant scientist of your class, you were the most brilliant scientist of your generation."

Lacey said, "I—"

"Wait, that never happened, did it?" her sister said.

Lacey felt her cheeks burning.

"Because you didn't study biology in college. You studied business," her sister said.

"I've been doing a lot of research," Lacey said, flustered.

"You're not an expert. You're an amateur with internet access," her sister said.

"There are legitimate reasons to be concerned," Lacey protested.

Lacey tried to describe the data she'd discovered, but her sister stood to leave, stuffing her hands into the pockets of her jacket.

"No offence, but you're fucking wack," her sister said.

Her sister refused to be his godparent unless she vaccinated him. Her gynaecologist scolded her. Her dentist rebuked her. The babysitter she'd found to watch her son while she was at work clearly disapproved, judging her in silence whenever the topic of vaccination was referenced. At the library, when she happened to mention that she wasn't vaccinating her son while chatting with a librarian, the librarian begged her to reconsider, becoming visibly emotional, offering to pay for the shots personally if necessary. When she announced that she wasn't vaccinating her son to the bespectacled teller at the bank who'd always been so friendly, the teller reached across the counter, grabbed her by the shoulders, frowned, and ordered her to vaccinate her son, sternly, and then seemed to become self-conscious, releasing her and apologising for perhaps overstepping. When the lip-ringed cashier at the pharmacy discovered that she wasn't vaccinating her son, the cashier sneered at her over the register with an expression of utter contempt. Her friends from college, who'd initially been so polite about the decision, now had become angry at her, simmering at her with bitter resentment, as if disappointed in her, and began to occasionally exclude her from get-togethers. Lacey felt lonely and persecuted. Her only support was blogs and forums on the internet, where ostracised parents in distant villages and faraway cities encouraged her not to succumb to peer pressure, urging her to prioritise the health of her son.

On his first birthday, she took her son on a stroll through the neighbourhood, carrying him in a sling as he babbled and pointed and sucked on his fingers. In the lungs of a teenager with neon elbow pads and neon knee pads rollerblading down the street, varicella viruses were rapidly replicating.

On a warm clear morning when pollen was floating down from the hickory trees, she and her son sat on the stoop together with a pair of binoculars, watching the birds. A block away, in the throat of an elderly neighbour shuffling out to a mailbox with a stamped envelope, pertussis bacteria were replicating.

On a humid windy afternoon when fluffs were blowing down from the cottonwood trees, she and her son squatted over the driveway together with sticks of chalk, drawing a hopscotch course. Up the road, in the throat of a grizzled neighbour sweeping dust from a porch with a straw broom, diphtheria bacteria were replicating.

On a holiday weekend, as the smoky scent of barbecue cookouts drifted about on the breeze, she brought her son to a park to teach him how to ride a bicycle, cheering and clapping when he finally managed to balance on the bicycle for a couple of seconds before tumbling off the bicycle into the grass. Hepatitis viruses were replicating in the liver of a toddler with sticky hands licking an ice cream cone in the grass nearby.

On a hot summer day, she and her son went to the beach in bright swimsuits, sunbathing on colourful towels in the sand, drinking cans of cola still frigid from the crushed ice in

the cooler, eating chilled grapes, munching chocolate candies, occasionally running into the lake to play together in the waves. In the gut of a child in a fluorescent one-piece splashing around in the water nearby, rotaviruses were replicating.

On his first day of kindergarten, she had him pose for a photo at the door to the house. Her son grinned proudly, wearing a brand-new backpack that he'd carefully packed with pencils and toy cars. In an apartment complex down by the train station, measles viruses were replicating in the lymph nodes of a foreigner in town visiting family, who'd just set down a pair of suitcases still tagged with stickers from the baggage check at the airport.

A day later, after breathing in the face of a newborn baby, sneezing over a drawer of silverware, using a shirtsleeve as a handkerchief, licking a fingertip to flip through a wad of dollars, spitting phlegm into the sink in the restroom at a gas station, and coughing onto a laminated menu at the local diner, the foreigner was hospitalised with life-threatening symptoms.

Lacey magneted the photo of her son to the fridge, then followed the sound of giggling to his bedroom, where he was talking into the oscillating fan on his nightstand, cracking up laughing at how the spinning vanes changed the pitch of his voice.

"Mom, you have to try this," he said, running over to take her by the hand and lead her over to the fan.

Her son had been so excited for kindergarten, and kindergarten was truly a beautiful time for him. His teacher adored him, taking her aside one day to tell her how intelligent he was, how helpful, how kind. Lacey was so happy to find another person who appreciated just how special her son was. At five years old, he was already her favourite person she'd ever met. Her best friend. He jumped into piles of raked leaves with her, and cracked jokes in the car, and pranked her with rubber snakes, and presented her with finger paintings, and invented constellations with her at night on a blanket in the grass under the stars in the backyard. He shouted advice at characters in movies, covering his eyes during the scary scenes, sitting next to her on the sofa with a bowl of popcorn in his lap. He knew when she needed the ketchup, passing the bottle to her before she'd even asked.

"Is it hard to be an astronaut?" he asked her one night as she was tucking him into bed.

"I believe that you could do it," Lacey said, sitting on the edge of the mattress, stroking his forehead.

He gazed at the moon out the window, thinking for a moment.

"I'd probably rather be a janitor," he said.

"You wouldn't get paid very much," Lacey said.

"I think cleaning is really satisfying," he said.

Feeling a duty to protect the other children in town, that autumn she printed out flyers about the dangers of vaccines, stapling the flyers to the community bulletin board in the entryway of the library, but when she walked back through the entryway minutes later with a tote bag full of books she discovered that the flyers had already been torn down. Waiting to pick her son up from school, she tried to talk to other parents, attempting to explain why she hadn't vaccinated her son, but the other parents dismissed her outright, ignoring her. When she broached the subject of vaccination at a rare get-together with her friends from college, who'd all gotten pregnant in the span of a year, her friends exploded with anger, insulting her, and afterward refused to speak to her whatsoever. In an argument with her sister, her sister accused her of neglect, suggesting that if she wouldn't vaccinate her son then she simply wasn't fit to be a parent. When his teacher discovered that he hadn't been vaccinated, he took her aside again, this time speaking in hushed tones, trying to pressure her into vaccinating her son, warning her that her son was in danger, even as she explained that she was protecting him, that vaccines were the true threat.

• • • • • •

An older neighbour attempted to hand her a stack of articles printed out from the internet, individually paper-clipped and labelled with fluorescent sticky notes.

Lacey stared at the articles with a sense of alarm.

"That's bad science," Lacey said.

"Um, these are peer-reviewed papers that were published in some of the most prestigious journals on the planet."

"Those studies are all paid for by the companies that make the vaccines," Lacey said.

She sat on a bench at a playground, watching her son climb on the monkey bars in a windbreaker and a wool hat.

Dropping to the woodchips, he ran back across the playground to her, grinning with flushed cheeks.

"I'm going to keep you safe," she whispered, hugging him.

A week later her son was exploring the heap of scrap lumber rotting in the weeds behind the garage when he stepped on a rusty nail that pierced the flesh of his foot through the sole of his shoe. Afterward a neighbour suggested that he might have been exposed to tetanus, cautioning her to keep a lookout for symptoms. But he was fine. The wound in his foot gradually healed. He recovered. He climbed trees in the backyard, and sang opera in the bathtub, and danced goofily around the kitchen, healthy as ever. In the end, her son was never infected by tetanus, or polio, or rotavirus, or varicella, or hepatitis, or diphtheria, or pertussis, or rubella, or mumps, or measles. A stranger at the supermarket sneezed in line at the checkout, spraying thousands of microscopic droplets into the air through the gaps between the fingers of a hand raised in an attempt to cover the sneeze, and her son, standing nearby, chattering about dinosaurs while gazing at a display of candy, breathed in a great swirl of the droplets, and then breathed in another, and breathed in yet another, oblivious, until his tongue and his throat and his lungs were shimmering with droplets, and her son was infected with the flu. The following evening he began to complain of a pounding headache, shivering at a chill even though when she slipped a thermometer under his tongue he

registered a burning fever. He was pale and sweaty when she tucked him into bed, and he vomited so many times during the night that by dawn he was dry-heaving over the toilet bowl, looking miserable and exhausted. Lacey called into work to stay home with him, nursing him with a nourishing array of comfort foods and natural remedies. She cooked him a pot of homemade chicken soup hearty with heirloom carrots and organic celery, and gave him zinc lozenges to suck, and brought him coneflower capsules to swallow, and spooned glimmers of elderberry syrup between his lips, and served him steaming mugs of honey and ginger stirred into hot lemon juice, and made him peanut butter toast with the crust carefully trimmed off just how he liked, and buttered salted crackers for him, and ensured that the jar of water on his nightstand was always full to the brim. But whatever he ate and whatever he drank was soon ejected from his body in the form of vomit or watery explosions of diarrhoea so violent that afterward, back in bed, he would stare at the ceiling with a wide-eyed look of trauma, still trembling from the shock. He began to visibly fear having to eat or drink, even as she stroked his forehead to try to comfort him. His breath reeked of sickness even after she'd helped him brush his teeth. He rubbed the skin under his nose raw wiping at the snot constantly dripping from his nostrils, and his fingers were constantly sticky with wet globs of mucus that he'd sneezed into his hands, blinking at the furniture in his bedroom with a look of delirium, through bloodshot eyes. She'd expected him to recover quickly, but instead within days he became gaunt and sallow, grimacing at sudden throbs of his headache, flinching at jolts of pain in the muscles of his arms, whimpering at bursts of pain in the muscles of his legs, and suffering from brutal fits of coughing that shook his whole body, leaving him splayed out on his bed afterward, panting for air. Dizzy, frail, he needed her help just to shuffle back and forth from the bathroom without falling. The scent of any food made him queasy, but he was constantly thirsty, and by that weekend he was so desperately thirsty that he began to cry, weeping there in his bed with wild sobs of utter desolation. Lacey had never heard him cry like that before. The sound terrified her, making her skin crawl with goosebumps over where she stood in the doorway, frozen in fear. But what frightened her more than anything was the sight of his face. No tears were falling from his eyes. His eyes didn't even appear to water. Her son sobbed for whole minutes, and afterward his face was perfectly dry, as if he was too dehydrated for his body even to produce tears. Lacey was so worried that she finally called a paediatrician, who prescribed a medication for him, but by then all the local pharmacies were closed for the night, and when she went back into his bedroom to check on him she saw that he was struggling to breathe, wheezing at the air with feeble gasps, gripping fistfuls of his sheet in a panic, and his lips had an eerie bluish tint.

She carried him out to the car in his pyjamas and drove him to the hospital under a starless sky.

Streetlights illuminated the interior of the car in quick flashes between stretches of darkness.

"I don't want to be sick anymore," he said with a tone of pleading, slumped in the passenger seat, as if all he needed was her permission.

"You're going to be okay, baby. You're going to be better so soon," she said, trying to contain the fear in her voice.

Those were the only words he managed to speak during the drive.

Although initially the staff at the hospital seemed hopeful, within hours her son was in a coma, and a week later her son was dead.

She stood in a daze in a hallway of the hospital until she realised that the doctor who'd delivered the news was already gone.

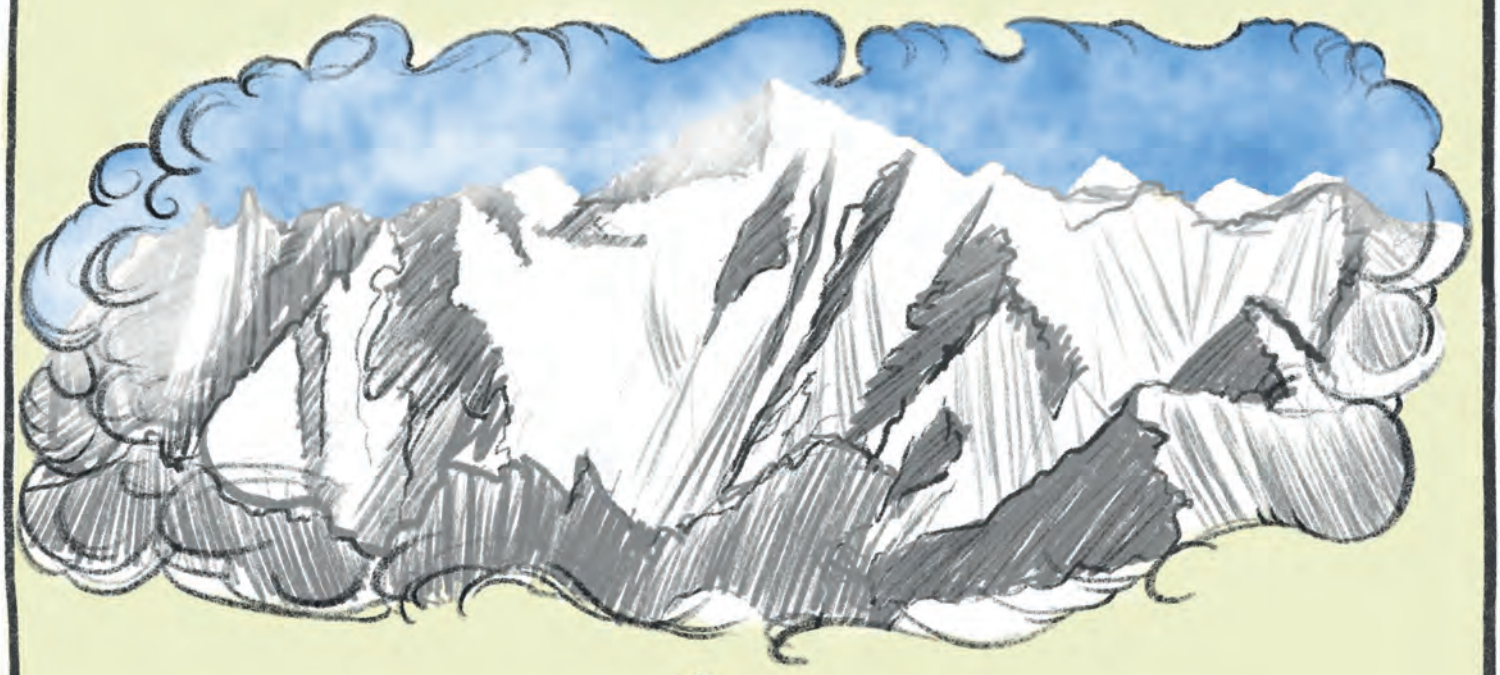
She suddenly remembered the morning he'd been born, when she'd cradled him to her chest in a bright sunny room in that same hospital.

"Excuse me," said an aide pushing a patient in a wheelchair, trying to navigate past her in the hallway.

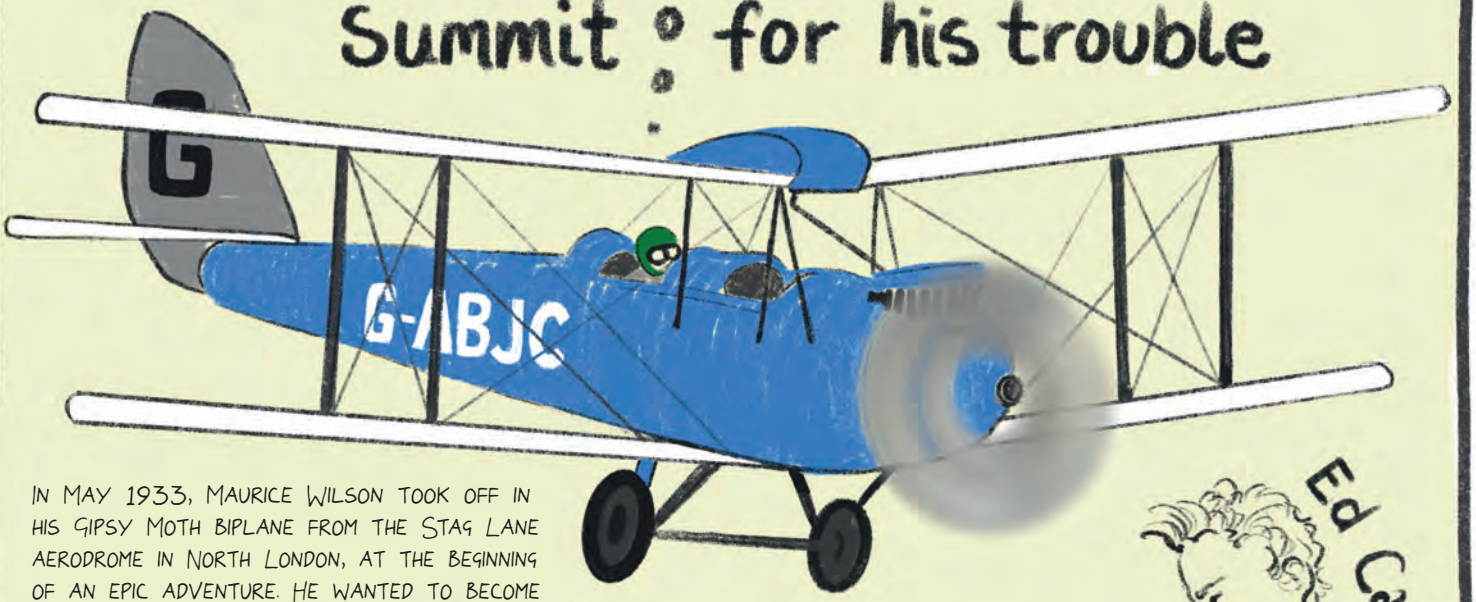
Afterward, for days, she wandered alone through the streets of the town, wearing no coat, just sweatpants and sneakers and a stained t-shirt, mascara smeared under her eyes, her shoulders hunched with hunger, shivering at the bitter chill of the wind, clutching a pair of his pyjamas in her bare hands as she hobbled down the sidewalk. A dusting of snow fell. Snow fell in a flurry. Cheerful holiday decorations twinkled in the windows of shops. People stared at her from the windows of shops. In the steamy windows of cafés, people sipped coffee, and nibbled at pastries, and stared at her passing. In the candlelit windows of restaurants, people slurped up noodles, and savoured wine, and stared at her passing. People stared at her from the windows of passing cars. People stared at her while passing her on the sidewalk, carrying colourful shopping bags brimming with presents. She recognised all of the faces, and through the blur of tears in her eyes every face seemed to be contorted into a grotesque expression, laughing and shrieking at her, "You fool, you fool, you fool, you fool." ■

Named one of Variety's 10 Storytellers To Watch, Matthew Baker is the author of the story collections Why Visit America and Hybrid Creatures, and the children's novel Key Of X. Born in the Great Lakes region of the US, he lives in New York City.

MAURICE WILSON AIMED FOR EVEREST WHEN HE FELT HE HAD TO LEAVE BRADFORD. BUT THE FIRST WORLD WAR HERO NEVER LOST SIGHT OF HIS HOME CITY, HOWEVER FANCIFUL HIS FLIGHTS, WRITES ED CAESAR



Summit ? for his trouble



IN MAY 1933, MAURICE WILSON TOOK OFF IN HIS GIPSY MOTH BIPLANE FROM THE STAG LANE AERODROME IN NORTH LONDON, AT THE BEGINNING OF AN EPIC ADVENTURE. HE WANTED TO BECOME THE FIRST PERSON TO REACH THE SUMMIT OF EVEREST.

HIS PLAN WAS TO FLY HIS PLANE TO THE HIMALAYAS, CRASH-LAND ON ONE OF THE PLATEAUS NEAR EVEREST, THEN CLIMB THE MOUNTAIN ALONE. IT WAS A MAD IDEA. WILSON HAD NO ALPINE EXPERIENCE. MOREOVER, HE HAD ONLY JUST LEARNED HOW TO FLY.

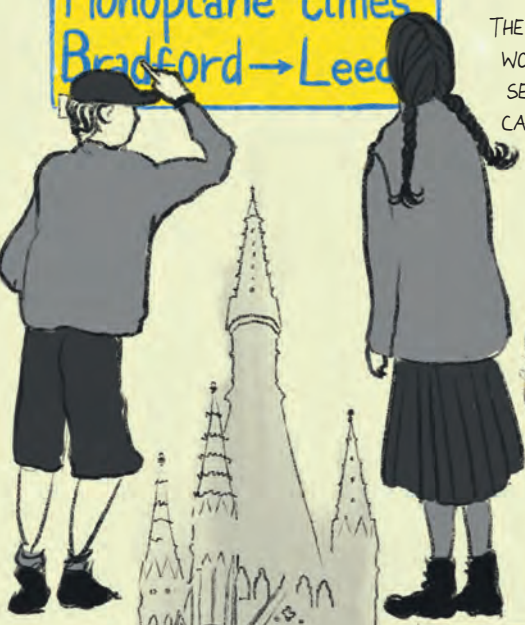
1914

NINETEEN YEARS EARLIER, AS A SCHOOLBOY IN BRADFORD, WILSON HAD SEEN HIS FIRST PLANE IN THE SKY. IT WAS 1914, AND HE WAS 16 YEARS OLD, THE THIRD SON OF A MILL OWNER IN THE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD'S WOOL TRADE.

SCHOOLBOYS CRANED THEIR NECKS IN WONDER.

JB PRIESTLEY, WHO WOULD GO ON TO BECOMEBRADFORD'S MOST FAMOUS WRITER, WAS RAISED ABOUT A MILE FROM WHERE WILSON LIVED AND WAS ALMOST EXACTLY HIS AGE. HE WROTE ABOUT BRADFORD AS A PLACE OF NOT JUST COMMERCE BUT RADICAL IDEAS, WHERE TRADE UNIONISM FLOURISHED AND THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY WAS FOUNDED. WILSON'S OWN FATHER WORKED TO HELP THE CITY'S POOREST CHILDREN EAT BETTER AND HAVE ACCESS TO NEW, EXCITING EXPERIENCES.

JULIA VARLEY OBE WAS A PROMINENT TRADE UNIONIST AND SUFFRAGETTE, BORN IN BRADFORD IN 1871. SHE STARTED WORK AT AGE 12. AT 15 SHE WAS SECRETARY OF BRADFORD WEAVERS AND TEXTILE WORKERS UNION.



THE GREAT YORKSHIRE SHOW ROLLED INTO TOWN IN WILSON'S FINAL TERM AT CARLTON ROAD SECONDARY SCHOOL.

THE STAR ATTRACTION WAS THE WORLD'S FIRST PASSENGER AIR SERVICE – A MONOPLANE THAT CARRIED ONE PASSENGER ON A TIMETABLE FROM LEEDS TO BRADFORD AND BACK.

THE GOTHIC REVIVAL GRANDEUR OF BRADFORD WOOL EXCHANGE REFLECTS THE WEALTH AND IMPORTANCE WOOL BROUGHT TO BRADFORD IN THE 19TH CENTURY.

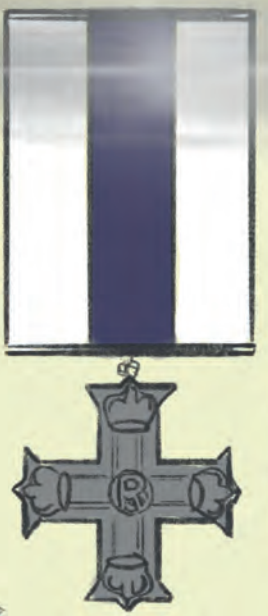
BRADFORD'S TRAM SYSTEM WAS THE ENVY OF OTHER CITIES.

In the years I researched The Moth and the Mountain, my book about Wilson's adventure and the extraordinary life that preceded it, I often thought about how much his character had been shaped by the city he grew up in. At the turn of the 20th century, Bradford was one of the most exciting cities in the world. Money from the wool trade poured in. The city had its own symphony orchestra, it had a thriving immigrant community of German-Jewish merchants and for a time, it had two football teams in the first division: City and Park Avenue.

The First World War changed everything for Britain, but especially for Bradford. A few months after Wilson saw that plane in the sky, a four-year nightmare of mud, murder and barbed wire began in the trenches of the Western Front. Wilson himself fought with bravery, winning the Military Cross in 1918 by showing outstanding courage as he resisted a German onslaught near the Flanders town of Wyteschaete.

Hundreds of pals in the West Yorkshire Regiment were killed on the same day.

The city he returned to felt bleak and dark. Thousands of young men from Bradford had died in the fighting. On Cecil Avenue in Horton, where Wilson lived, many families now had a spare place at their dining table. Moreover, Wilson's brother, Victor, was so traumatised that his body shook and he suffered nightmares. He would never be the same man again. To add insult to all of these injuries, the wool trade on which Bradford relied began a precipitous decline.



The 16th and 18th battalions of the West Yorkshire Regiment were known as the Bradford Pals.

Wilson no longer felt at home, either in himself or in his city. The war had ravaged his peace of mind and his sense of purpose. He began a long period of travel in 1923, living, working and passing through New Zealand, Canada, the United States, Germany, South Africa and Mozambique. He burned through two marriages and began many failed relationships. Eventually, in 1932, he hit on an idea he believed would redeem him. He would become the first man to reach the summit of Everest, and he would do it alone. The adventure is detailed in The Moth and the Mountain, a wild story, full of harum-scarum scrapes in the air, in the mountains and eventually on Everest itself.

Artwork by Una

What I find so touching is Wilson's belief in the dignity and value of every human life. When an earthquake ruined the Indian town of Darjeeling in 1934, he was the only European man to bend his back alongside local people to repair the damage. When it became clear that the local men who helped him sneak into Tibet and reach Everest might be punished, he wrote a wonderful letter to the British authorities in India, begging for his "lads" not to be punished.

This comic by Una was adapted from an article originally published in Big Issue North and written by Ed Caesar. His book, The Moth and the Mountain: A True Story of Love, War and Everest, is published by Viking

‘Children do not know what it is to be safe’

Boko Haram’s dual threat in north-eastern Nigeria

Photos: Sean Sutton
Words: Kevin Gopal

For the villagers of Borno, the choice can be stark: don't farm, starve and die, or farm, get blown up and die.

Boko Haram is responsible for their deadly predicament. Since 2009 the jihadist terrorist group has murdered tens of thousands of civilians in the north-eastern Nigerian state, as well as killing soldiers, kidnapping women and children, and forcing men into its army.

When the villagers are escorted by the military over defensive trenches to fields they depend on to grow maize and sorghum, they risk not only direct attacks by Boko Haram but also detonation by their landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). It's perilous enough for locals who know the area, worse still for those who have fled their homes for marginally more safety elsewhere. More than 1.5 million people are said to be internally displaced in Borno, many living in official camps where they receive assistance, others in camps in the host community or just makeshift ones.

Mamza (main photo) and her friend Falmata were badly injured when Falmata's nine-year-old grandson Mustapha detonated a rocket-propelled grenade he was playing with. Mustapha and his 14-year-old uncle Bakura thought the grenade was part of a water pump and brought it back to the internally displaced person (IDP) camp where they shelter in Maiduguri. Mustapha was killed in the explosion. Bakura survived.

The international landmine clearance charity the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) says there were 408 deaths and 644 injuries from landmines and unexploded bombs from January 2016 to August 2020 alone. In part Boko Haram uses the munitions to attack military and aid convoys but its other strategic motives for mining an area it has to operate in itself are unclear – as is much about the group.

It was founded in 2002 to oppose western educational and cultural values, launching violent attacks on the Nigerian state and people it regarded as non-believers in Islam. Attacks intensified from 2009. It captured territory and, in 2014, more than 200 schoolgirls from the town of Chibok in Borno, prompting the #BringBackOurGirls campaign backed by Michelle Obama and Kim Kardashian. High on its notoriety, Boko Haram declared a caliphate, its leader Abubakar Shekau stating: "We have nothing to do with Nigeria. We don't believe in this name."

Cover: **A woman and child walk past a battle-scarred building in Gwoza, once declared the capital of the caliphate by Boko Haram but now back under the control of the Nigerian armed forces**

Right: **People displaced by landmines in Borno return to their camp with their goats and firewood as dusk approaches**

New arrivals in Bama camp. Many are desperately ill and malnourished, having previously been hiding in the bush and in areas controlled by Boko Haram before fleeing to Cameroon and then returning to Nigeria. Pictured is the Yagambo family preparing their evening meal. They have arrived from a refugee camp in Cameroon where they faced insecurity and a lack of food


IOM
IOM

Left: **Woodcutters are paid to chop tree trunks for firewood – a precious resource in the camps. Their hands are calloused after hefting their axes for 12 hours a day**

Right: **An elderly woman is taken to the clinic in the IDP camp in Bama. The camp was formerly the district hospital in Bama, which was held by Boko Haram for over a year and has been repeatedly attacked since the government took back control in 2015. There are now more than 40,000 people living there**

Driven back again by a regional military force from Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, as well as government-backed militias, it has split into two after a shift in allegiance from Al-Qaeda to Islamic State. In some areas it occupies villages and keeps their residents prisoner. In others it's unclear whether it retains some local support from people frustrated by state neglect and corruption and scared of the militias. But those Nigerian politicians who claim it is beaten are not vindicated on the ground, as those who jump into the train of pickups crossing the trenches will testify.

Zara Abubakar, a mother of eight who lives in an unofficial IDP settlement in Maiduguri, sustained serious injuries in a landmine explosion. "We were fleeing, we were running as we were attacked in Baga. Someone set off a landmine and we were all blasted. Many died." Her husband had been killed in a previous landmine explosion.

As the women's representative in her camp, Falmata calls for more food, medicine and education. She also speaks for women once associated with Boko Haram who – like low-level ex-Boko Haram combatants – are being rehabilitated.

"Some have family here in the camp but it is difficult and complicated," she says. "A lot of time has passed, women may have re-married. I help with this situation. Peace building is important but people need to have food. Without food it is difficult."

MAG cannot defuse mines and IEDs in this shifting, contested and volatile territory. Helicopters are the only safe way to travel. Instead, the Manchester-based charity trains people to recognise the threat from unexploded munitions and gathers evidence from hazardous contaminated areas.

"Barely a day goes by without someone being injured or killed by a landmine or other explosive here," says Zainab Waziri, community team liaison leader for MAG in Borno. "People here have lived in fear for so long that many children do not know what it is to be safe. And those who flee for their lives are at higher risk as they travel across unknown land in search of safety. Children's natural curiosity puts them at the greatest risk of all." ■

MAG has helped over 20 million people in 70 countries rebuild their lives after war. The charity was a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for campaigning that led to the introduction of the worldwide Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty (maginternational.org)


Community Group: 12
Sector Commitees: 6
Camp Chairman:
Police Station: 1
Fire Station: 2
Ambulance: 2 MSF/IRC
Available
Not available
Child Friendly Spaces (CFS)
Women and Child Friendly Spaces
School 1
Health Facilities 3
Nutrition Facilities 3
Ring Well/Wells 2
Water points 1
Shower stalls 18
Latrine 183
Protection Desk: 5
Service Providers: IOM, UNHCR, GISCOR, CARE, IRC,
MERCY CORPS, ICRC, FAO, PLAN, NR
No. of Household: 2,027
No. of Individuals: 7,341
Age
Male
Female
Total
(<1) 227 365 592
(1-5) 559 910 1,469
(6-17) 772 1,199 1,971
(18-59) 1,188 1,973 3,161
(60+) 53 95 148
Total 2,799 4,542 7,341
No. of Pregnant women
No. of Lactating Mothers
No. of Persons with Disabilities 114
No. of Single Headed Household 317
No. of Latrines 302
No. of Showers 193
No. of Women Friendly Spaces 1
No. of child Friendly Spaces 1
Essential Contacts (IOM) :
Essential Contact IOM
07036206423
08134231295

Facing page: An ostrich strolls through a camp in Maidaguri. Ibrahim Mbaya, chair of the camp for displaced people in Gwoza, explains that two weeks earlier there was a well-coordinated and intense night-time attack by Boko Haram. The camp was caught in the crossfire. "The attacks mean there are unexploded shells. We are grateful to MAG for helping us learn how to recognise the threat. People find things and now report them to me rather than trying to pick them up."

Above: Teenager Mamma Buji is one of thousands of children taught to stay safe by MAG staff using song and puppet shows. Women and children leave the safety of the camps daily, crossing defensive trenches to work in the fields as hired hands. They are at risk of being killed by landmines and murder and kidnap by Boko Haram

Left: In Bama, people explain to MAG staff where they have seen unexploded devices

Drawing inspiration

Fifty-three years and 200 miles don't come between the teenage frontman of Working Men's Club and the Bard of Salford's mutual affection. Gary Ryan gets the pair on the phone for a proper introduction

Illustration: Stan Chow

Down the phone line from his home, John Cooper Clarke is lavishing praise on Working Men's Club's debut album – in typical poetic style. "If they've got jukeboxes on Mars, this is the kind of music they'd be putting on!" he enthuses of the fast-rising Yorkshire band. Although he's lived in Essex for over 25 years with his wife Evie and daughter Stella, the Bard of Salford still speaks in his distinctive accent that sounds like he's gargling the River Irwell, stretching his syllables like bubblegum and punctuating his sentences with quips.

He recently turned 72 – "another lethal number on the clock" – but Clarke has always existed outside of time. His spindly image (looking like he's leapt out of Tim Burton's sketchbook) has remained steadfast through the years, and he doesn't own a laptop, hence the old-school landline conversation.

"I don't have social media," he says. "I don't need the earache at my time of life. I could get trolled and I wouldn't even know about it. Imagine living in 1978 – that's how I live my life."

Joining him on the call, from his house in Todmorden, is Sydney Minsky-Sargeant, the 19-year-old frontman of Working Men's Club. Last year, the group released their self-titled debut album to rave reviews – one of the standout tracks is called John Cooper Clarke, a paean to him that includes references to his poems. A beloved copy of Clarke's anthology The Luckiest Guy Alive sat next to Minsky-Sargeant when he was writing the lyrics.

"As morbid as it sounds, I thought it was funny to say that even John, the luckiest guy alive, would eventually die," he says. "It's using his character to say it doesn't matter how much money or social power you have, inevitably we end up in the same grave."

He'd never met the song's lodestar – until today. Despite the 200 miles and 53 years between them, they're getting on like a house on fire. In the 1970s and 1980s, Clarke was known as punk's poet laureate, performing with the likes of the Sex Pistols, the Fall and New Order – he can see shards of the latter two bands in Working Men's Club.

"I'm looking at the vinyl and it's futuristic and retro at the same time, which gives you some idea of what to expect from the music," says Clarke. "It's redolent of Factory Records' aesthetic. You've got a fabulous voice, Syd. Very reminiscent of my great friend, Mark E Smith of the Fall. I'm sure you won't mind me pointing that out. It's no insult."

"No, it's not," replies Minsky-Sargeant. "We come from the same part of the world, Prestwich. A lot of kids my age are starting to listen to the Fall so I guess that's one that's stuck."

Clarke: "Get out! I know Prestwich like the back of my neck. I also hear bits of Alan Vega in there as well. Do you like him?"

Minsky-Sargeant: "I love Suicide. There's a lot of inspiration from you and your poetry in there as well. I guess that's pretty obvious, innit?"

"Well, on one of the tracks it is, yeah!" hoots Clarke.

Minsky-Sargeant: "My friend Nathan Saudi, from the band Fat White Family, said to me that songs have either got to be funny, sexy or sad. And I think that's what your poems are in a lot of ways. They've got that important mix of humour, lust and darkness. That's been a constant inspiration to me through reading your poems."

Clarke: "It's been a pleasure making a living this way. When I released my last collection of poetry under the collective title of The Luckiest Guy Alive, I wasn't being ironic."

Talk turns to how fledgling bands are supposed to make a living when Covid-19 has curtailed their main income stream – touring – and how many artists are now signing on. Clarke recalls the one time he was fleetingly on the dole.

"It was fucking horrible," he says. "The two weeks I was on the sausage I was under investigation for fraud. My giro got eaten by the dog. The proprietor of the place where me and my first wife were living temporarily down in Somerset said: 'Get up early or the dog will eat your giro cheque.' Sure enough, it did. So I had to go back there saying 'the dog ate my giro', which sounds like the oldest trick in the book. A likely story! They sent two people in mackintoshes round every day for 14 days to check I wasn't living the life of Riley at the taxpayer's expense. They had lights shining in my eyes, slapping me around – I joke – but they put a lot of pressure on me."

"There's a real lack of anger being put into art and music at the minute," says Minsky-Sargeant, who performed a lockdown gig last year resplendent in a 'SOCIALSM' T-shirt, which culminated in him decapitating a cardboard cut-out of the Queen. "It's something people need to start doing again because bands are becoming the domain of the upper middle-class."

"They're the ones getting the fucking breaks," agrees Clarke. "Where's your Albert Finneys at the pictures? It's all Lord Farquhar singing about foie-gras. Social mobility is dead in this country."

Still, Clarke cheerfully admits to being a social climber. "I've always lived by the words of Yazz – the only way is up!" he laughs. Clarke frequently bursts into song throughout their conversation (including Yazz, and Wayne Newton's 1963 hit Danke Schoen) and his own storied career encompasses numerous albums with producer Martin Hannett – most famously Snap, Crackle and Bop in 1980 – proving that his poetry could work to music.

"We should do a track together," suggests Minsky-Sargeant.

"My days in the studio are over, kid," says Clarke. "I can't take it anymore."

"We can bring the recording studio to you," says Minsky-Sargeant, of advances in technology. "All you need is a phone."

"That would be great," replies Clarke. "I think my records would have sold more without any music. I'm not being funny – great people playing on them and they had their moments – but if only I could have made a record over the phone, that's exactly what I would have done. It would have had that phone quality as well, because that's what I was always trying to get in the studio."

When Minsky-Sargeant hails Clarke as a "national treasure", Clarke responds that whenever anybody would accuse him of being famous, he'd insist that he couldn't be – because he'd never played Las Vegas. Famously, he was addicted to heroin in the 1980s (he even lived in a druggie squat in London with Velvet Underground muse Nico), and arrests prevented him playing America for years. In 2015 he finally did.

"It was a big thing for me, after 30 years of hammering on the door trying to get back into the States, to start off in Las Vegas – and then it was the first place I ever got a standing ovation," he beams. "I'm telling you this because what's the point of doing these things if you can't tell someone? I only got into this business to be a name-dropper. As I was saying to Des O'Connor shortly before he died, I'm a hell of a name-dropper. You just need one chart hit to take you to Vegas, Syd."

Talk drifts to how they're both coping in lockdown. Clarke's immersed himself in watching Talking Pictures, the vintage movie channel that re-reruns the flicks that inspired him when he first saw them at Salford's old Rialto Cinema in the 1950s. "I have to force myself to go for a walk every day because I ain't the most vigorous of people at the best of times," he says. "It's terrible people are getting ill and dying and not to downplay that but I've had underlying health issues, so when you've had one health scare and another intervenes, they cancel each other out. To be honest, I ain't felt this good for a long time," he laughs. "Swimming against the tide as usual. It's my default setting, Syd! I don't do what everybody else does."

"There'd be no fun in it if you did," says Minsky-Sargeant. "You never conform."

Apart from having recently released his autobiography, I Wanna Be Yours, which lays bare a life as unpredictable as his next line, Clarke hasn't been overly creative during quarantine. "I've not been writing much poetry because long ago I stopped writing for any therapeutic purposes it might have. I like to think I'm writing for the public – they're a big part of the equation. When you're writing, you don't know whether it's any good until you put it in front of the punters. But the effect you're going to have on a whole load of people – that's the engine room of what we do, innit?"

"Definitely," concurs Minsky-Sargeant, who's been writing songs to stave off boredom. "For me, it's the music rather than the lyrics I'm writing while thinking of the effect on an audience. They may not connect to the words, but they can still dance or move to the music."

"There's a real lack of anger being put into music and art at the minute."

Over the last decade, Clarke has been embraced by a new generation of musicians – including Working Men's Club. He appeared Plan B's 2012 hip-hop album Ill Manors, on the track Pity The Plight – which Minsky-Sargeant says is his favourite poem ("I am that mardy kid," he laughs). A year later, Arctic Monkeys adapted his pre-existing poem I Wanna Be Yours for the lyrics to a track of the same name for their album AM – frontman Alex Turner even has Clarke's name inked on his arm. "I worry about how long people's memories are, but then I watch TV channel Dave and I've been on all last week on repeats of Eight Out Of Ten Cats Does Countdown. You can't even forget me if you want to, I'm happy to report!" laughs Clarke.

"There's a song in this conversation, John," concludes Minsky-Sargeant. "Second album – John Cooper Clarke and Me."

"I hope so," responds Clarke. "I want to hear the result of it, especially if it's as sensational as the first one that referenced my words. Fingers crossed it could be the smash that takes you to Vegas!" ■

Bela is still visible

One of the youngest Holocaust survivors talks to Antonia Charlesworth

The lessons Joanna Millan learnt before she was three years old have stayed with her for nearly eight decades. If she smiled – because everyone said what a nice smile she had – she got rewarded, either with something good or, more crucially, with something bad not happening. To a certain extent she's still like that – probably more compliant than she should be.

Memories, be they fleeting ones, formed remarkably early too. One of the first she can pin down to 15 August 1945, two days before her third birthday. She is sitting on somebody's knee on a wooden crate and moving, at great speed, through the sky. It is very loud. Men all around her wear uniform, which isn't usually very good news. She is so frightened. She doesn't know what is going to happen to her. Nobody has told her she has been liberated.

Joanna had a different name then – Bela Rosenthal, pronounced Bay-la, like Belarus, rather than the Italian Bella. It was one on the list of acceptable names for Jewish children born in the Nazi period. In Hebrew it means a swallowing or

destruction, which was the name's fate at the hands of her adoptive parents. There was a complete denial of her identity. A denial of her father – Siegfried – who in February 1943, when Joanna was six months old, was taken from the streets of Berlin to Auschwitz, where he was killed on arrival. A denial of her mother – Elsa – who in June that same year was taken, along with her 10-month-old baby, to the Theresienstadt Ghetto north of Prague, and condemned to death by tuberculosis one year later, due to the conditions in the concentration camp. A denial of that late summer day in 1945 when she, along with 300 other refugee children, boarded military bombers bound for an airfield in England's Lake District. A denial of the three children's homes she lived in by the time she was five, and the children she had lived and played side by side with. Joanna swallowed it all.

But Bela is still visible in Joanna. Her thick dark hair has become wispy and white but it still has its natural curl and side-parting that frames her round, apple-cheeked face. Bela is photographed, wearing Joanna's same warm smile, in November 1945, in the garden at Bulldog's Bank – the children's home in West Hoathly, Sussex, where she moved after a two-month stay in a temporary reception centre in Windermere. She and the five other youngest survivors were the first to move on, at the behest of psychoanalyst Anna Freud, whose nurses took fastidious notes on their behaviour in their new surroundings. Joanna first read the embargoed notes and subsequent book – *An Experiment in Group Upbringing* – as an adult. A lot of the findings are total rubbish: the children weren't affected by what they'd been through, they could carry on like ordinary children and there were no ill-effects. Of course they'd learned that if you behaved yourself you would have a chance of preventing any terrible thing happening.

It wasn't a very happy childhood, later, with the Jewish couple who adopted her – very stiff, formal people who treated her like she was in a nursery, and she was a lot older than her years. It was quite lonely and they made no allowances for her background and what she'd been through, or even acknowledged it. If it was out of fear, there's no way she could know – they simply wouldn't talk about it. Joanna never had a close relationship with them and she's not even sure they wanted it to be one – they seemed to make no effort. Maybe they felt obliged to take a child because so many children needed homes, and they had no children and could afford it. Maybe her mother felt that since her friends were all having children she should too, but Joanna found out later that her adoptive father didn't want to adopt her at all. Nevertheless they pretended she was their natural daughter – always – but Joanna knew. She had memories of the other children – and of Bela, who she kept alive, privately.

If ever she tried to bring up her past with people in her life she was rebuffed. Often they thought she was making it up and would brush it off. Put it behind you, they would say. You're in England now and everything is wonderful – why do you harp on about these things?

Joanna's husband was different. During their courtship she told him what little she knew because she thought, well, he ought to know that her adoptive parents were not her real parents and so on, and actually – the memory invokes a mischievous laugh – he was very relieved! Somebody had told him that if you want to marry a girl you had to look at the mother, because they'll turn out like her. There's a warning for you! It was something that was going around at that time. Not long after, he proposed.

She was glad she told him but all through her married life he was nagging her and nagging her, forever saying, why don't you do some research, find out a bit more – you might have uncles and aunts or cousins around. Of course this was before the internet and everything and her life was just too busy. She was bringing up three young children, trying to work to earn them some money. Her husband was not a well man and in and out of work. She couldn't even think about doing this. It was too much hard work. And also, she thought, you hear stories about people finding their birth family and they don't want to know them, so there was fear as well. And anyway, she didn't even know her parents' names, where they were born or anything about them. Where would she start?

Where it began, it turned out – in Berlin, just after the fall of the wall, when she was invited, as many survivors were, on a cultural visit at the German government's expense. She felt that was uncomfortable but decided to go anyway.

Joanna has seen a lot of the world. She and her husband travelled around Europe for their honeymoon and, later, his consultancy work took the family all over. They lived in Norway, America and Holland. In her flat in London, where she lives alone, she watches travel shows and struggles to find one about

somewhere she hasn't been. But before that first trip she had not been to Germany since she was deported. There was a lot of anti-German feeling in Britain and, of course, with her story as well, she felt even more strongly that she really did not want to go. Arriving, she felt very unsure and sick with nerves. Today she feels no sense of belonging there – her visits have not been happy ones and it's a rather cold place.

Joanna was given a list of archives by the German government. Every time you went to one of these places they asked you for money upfront, whether they found something or not. Some people said well, you know – after they've taken the money – that the archive was burnt or destroyed during the war. There's always an excuse. On her second trip to Berlin she turned up at one prison-like archive in a basement for five consecutive days, despite being repeatedly met by an obstructive secretary.

She said to her, look, I'm not leaving, and the secretary looked at her like nobody had ever dared say that. The memory tickles Joanna now, whose laugh defies her gentle speech just as she defied her tendency to comply that day. She was leaving on a plane the next day and there was no way she could come back tomorrow. The secretary said, no, no, no, you can't do that, and she said, well, I am. I am not leaving. Soon enough a man arrived there with a file, apologised and said he had never expected anybody, a survivor, to come and claim these documents.

Inside were all the deportation documents, the list of people on Joanna's train, on her father's train, her grandmother's train, plus a list of items that her parents had in their flat that the Nazis confiscated. The documents led her to the site of that flat, to the Jewish hospital where she'd been born, and she eventually found her birth record as well. She went to the Jewish cemetery and found three of her grandparents. Most harrowing of all, she visited the station from where she was actually taken. That was difficult.

As she gathered more fragments of her story, and painstakingly pieced them together, she did consider changing her name back to Bela, but by then it was difficult – nobody remembered. In the end it seemed to be pedantic, in a way, but when she writes or talks about the Holocaust she usually uses her birth name.

She supposes her parents were fairly average – from middle-class working families – just average. Her father didn't have chance to earn a trade or build a career. He enlisted in the German army when he was just 17, in 1915. He wanted to show how patriotic he was, being a Jew, that he was still a German first. Then he was imprisoned by the Russians. At the end of the war he couldn't get back to Germany because he was ill in hospital and the prisons only returned those who were fit. They sent him to work on what they called a kolkhoz, like a communal farm. He must have been good at figures because he became the farm accountant and apparently married a Russian woman. She fell pregnant but when it came to delivery, both she and the baby died. He stayed on the farm until 1939 when the Russians sent him back to Germany and he arrived at his sister's door with just the clothes he stood up in and a travel pass. By then the Nuremberg laws were in force and he had to work as a slave labourer in Berlin. He stayed with his sister until she and her family managed to get visas to leave but they couldn't take him. And so he was left in Berlin on his own.

Joanna's mother was mostly a housewife before she too was forced into labour, at Siemens, where she worked right up until she and Joanna were deported. She had been previously married too but had no other children and Joanna doesn't suppose she thought it was possible before she was conceived – a total honeymoon baby. Her parents married in October 1941 and Joanna was born in August 1942. Her mother was 40 and her father 47. She doesn't suppose they planned it, at a time like that.

When she had enough information Joanna visited the Holocaust remembrance centre in Israel, Yad Vashem, and was able to fill out the forms and put in pages of facts about her family.

It felt significant to record their names but it was also apparent that they were just a few among so many – in drawers and drawers, and files and files. That was very emotional.

But it was partly through that that some of her father's family in Israel found and contacted Joanna. Through them she found family in Australia. Her mother's side she discovered because she found out that her uncle had been a glassmaker – not windows, fancy glass – in a town called Lubeck on Germany's North Sea coast. There weren't many master glazers around so it was easy to trace his daughters and his grandchildren. Some of them are in America and South America. Joanna thinks she'd found everybody.

It was totally amazing for Joanna when she found photographs of her parents and grandparents as well. Funnily enough she's the image of her maternal grandmother. But it was too late for her husband to tell

her whether he was happy with the family resemblance. Despite being silenced throughout her childhood, Joanna is well versed in difficult subject matter. She's spoken about her early childhood trauma often since she began researching her past – at schools, at conferences, to academics and journalists – but her voice cracks when she speaks of how her husband died, 18 years ago, before she managed to trace her family. He wasn't a healthy man, unfortunately. But he certainly set her on the path.

Joanna met Harvey at a Jewish youth group and they married in 1964. She was determined, if possible, that she would marry a Jewish man. Her adoptive parents were non-observant but Joanna identified as Jewish – her parents died because they were Jewish. She has a duty to carry on that tradition. She took it up of her own accord and lit the Hanukkah candles alone in her teenage bedroom. She had a bat mitzvah when she was 16 and read from the scroll. She and her husband were never ultra-religious but they kept all the festivals and made sure their children knew what being Jewish was about. Her son is observant. Her youngest daughter married a non-Jewish man but has since separated and Joanna thinks she is coming back into the fold, so to speak, and has a new Jewish man friend. She has eight grandchildren! One in Australia. One who looks the image of her mother at the same age. Some of them are at uni. The grandchildren feel Jewish. In fact, recent high-profile anti-semitism has made them more conscious of their Jewishness in a positive way, as they've looked for support within their community. And of course, they all know Joanna's story. Her adoptive parents were very cross when they realised she had told them but she thought, well it's their history – they should know!

Not having her own birth family was Joanna's motivation for having three children, and nurturing them was very important to her, but when she started her own family she did feel the loss.

Top: Joanna as a child playing with other survivors and nurses in the garden of Bulldog's Bank, West Hoathly in Sussex. Above left: Joanna's mother Elsa Rosenthal aged 16. Right: Joanna's father Siegfried on the left, with two friends after enlisting in the German army and before they were sent to the Eastern Front

She had nobody to ask for advice, nobody to confide in and nobody to compare with so she felt pretty inadequate. She never made a great many friends because they moved around so much and the friends she did have had that Dr Spock book. They would open it on page six for bathing, and page 12 for feeding – whatever. She just thought, I can't be bothered with this. Her husband didn't give her a lot of support because he was either working abroad or was in hospital, so she was on her own a lot – bringing up children and having to be mother and father. If he was at home he was sleeping because he wasn't well. But actually he gave her a fantastic bit of advice. He said, just do whatever you feel is right, and that was fantastic. It liberated her and, in fact, she thinks it served her pretty well. Her daughters have both independently said that they wanted to bring up their children like they had been brought up. That's a pretty big compliment.

Joanna takes a lot of satisfaction in her family, a lot of pleasure. And finding her birth family has been almost a voyage of self-discovery and she feels whole in that sense now. She considers with a long, audible sigh and a quiver in her voice whether it's been a happy life. She doesn't know how happy it's been. It's been challenging. Every period of her life has had its challenges. But equally, you have to consider every period of your life as the best. You're not to look forward, and you're not to look back. Live the one you're living in. ■

TOGETHER

For most people today, twin beds clearly signal a bygone age. They conjure up images from mid-century films such as *Brief Encounter* or *Mrs Miniver*, or the *I Love Lucy* show from the 1950s, and suggest a society too coy or repressed to show the grittier and messier real world of sex and marriage.

While this might be the reputation that twin beds have now, it is not how they have always been seen. For a century or so, from the 1880s onwards, they were far from being the old-fashioned, prudish or faintly ridiculous objects that they have now become. Instead, they were the height of household fashion, the sign of a forward-thinking couple and a modern marriage. In 1892, the *Yorkshire Herald* predicted that twins would "no doubt in time succeed the double bed", and by the late 1920s, *The Complete Household Adviser* found this to be the case: twins had become "the rule in most houses".

This turn away from the double bed for married couples was prompted not by Victorian prudishness, however, but anxieties about health and illness. This new way of sleeping arose in the context of a widespread concern among the middle classes about unhealthy houses. It was believed that any disease – from so-called "filth diseases" such as diphtheria, dysentery, measles and pneumonia to the more commonplace colds, headaches or general malaise – could arise in insanitary conditions. The fear was that disease could lurk in dust, odours from drains and arsenic in wallpaper, but there was particular concern about the dangers of foul air, including the exhaled breath of a fellow sleeper if you were up close to them in a double bed. Dr Benjamin Ward Richardson, one of the most prolific writers about such hazards, was unequivocal. "The system of having beds in which two persons can sleep is always, to some extent, unhealthy."

Twin beds were a widely recommended solution to this problem. They maintained the companionableness of sharing a room with one's spouse but guarded against the risk of inhaling their potentially dangerous, disease-laden exhaled breath. They allowed couples to be simultaneously – and healthily – both together and apart in the bedroom.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, twin beds were firmly established as the sign of a modern, progressive couple, committed to furnishing their house in as healthy a manner as possible. The design of the twin beds sold in London stores such as Maples or Heal's reflected this commitment to modernity. Sweeping away the fussy, ornate style preferences of the Victorians in favour of simpler, cleaner lines, fashionable designers included twin beds in their plans for modern homes fit for the new century.

Twin beds came into fashion as a healthy bedroom choice but were quickly also understood to be the sign of a healthy modern marriage. Just as forward-thinking couples were troubled by the way their houses might be making them ill and changing to twin beds to counteract this, so too such couples were also rethinking conventional ideas about marriage. Moving away from the idea that middle-class married men and women occupied "separate spheres" – the husband associated with the public world of the city and the workplace, the wife with the home and the family – a new ideal was forming, stressing the importance of equality, mutuality and companionship in marriage. While men and women were still thought to have different areas of responsibility in the family, they

were also now encouraged to cultivate and enjoy the things they had in common – going to the theatre, perhaps, or playing bridge – and also to respect each other's individuality and separateness. This ideal is embodied in twin beds. By separating the sleeping couple but nonetheless keeping them close by, side by side, these beds gave the wife, as well as the husband, her own space, a night-time territory over which she had control.

Many late Victorian marital reformers recommended twin beds for precisely this reason. The double bed, wrote Eliza Duffey, "is a constant provocative of amorous ideas and sensations to the husband, if not to both". Such desires needed to be regulated because sexual excess in marriage was seen as debilitating and coarsening for both men and women, "deadening their finer sentiments". Twin beds guarded against this, but in so doing they were certainly not straightforwardly anti-sex. Rather, they allowed the couple to "gather all the delicate aroma of mutual passion", and therefore resulted in better – more mutually satisfying – sex than the double bed.

Not everyone, however, was convinced by this argument. In the 1920s and 1930s, the best-known marital reformer of the day, Marie Stopes, regularly wrote against the twin bedstead, calling it "that invention of the devil… one of the enemies of true marriage". She was eloquent on the problems it introduced. "It gives a false pretence of nearness in union which is a travesty. Its narrowness creates cold draughts at a time when warm comfort and space is vital. It secures the ever-present sense of intrusion when real solitude is desired. It enforces continual proximity, and deadens feeling, without that intimate and close contact which rests, soothes and invigorates."

In the inter-war period, Stopes's was a lone voice speaking against the problems she saw caused by twin beds. After the Second World War, however, her views gradually came into the mainstream. Newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror* and *Observer* debated – often via their letters pages – the relative merits of double or twin, and increasingly the consensus was in the double's favour. As the *Mirror* concluded in 1955, the double bed might have the disadvantage of starting rows over "blanket-snatching", but nevertheless, "one thing must be admitted. It's so darned friendly." In a period where "togetherness" emerged as a marital ideal combining companionship, complementarity and sexual compatibility, and promising these as the principal source of fulfilment for the wife, in particular, this new advocacy of the double made perfect sense.

By the 1970s, twin beds had acquired the air of outmodedness and prudishness they still have today. However, when we read in the media today about the current epidemic of insomnia and the national sleep deficit, or sleep specialists' recommendations to sleep alone to ensure a good night's rest, or celebrity interviews that recommend living in separate houses as a way of keeping a relationship fresh and exciting, maybe the concerns and desires which led to a century of twin-bedded sleep are not so very different from those that still exercise us today. ■

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BUT APART

Twin beds were once just the thing for forward-thinking couples, writes Hilary Hinds

Collective endeavour

Standing up art in a falling-down mansion

Photos: Ryan Ashcroft Words: Kevin Gopal

THERE ARE THE gallery events that take place in a pristine white cube of a room, artworks carefully hung, pale flooring and polite conversation. And there are West Art Collective events.

These take place in a rundown old house in Rusholme, tucked away off the Curry Mile in south Manchester. There'll be live music and drum and bass DJs, drink is BYO and the toilets a reminder of the underground club that Antwerp Mansion once was. Artwork is hung where it will hang – and yet the real difference is what lies behind the scenes.

Antwerp Mansion owes its name to an incarnation from the 19th century as home to the Belgian Consul. Another was a Conservative club. The current owners – who were forced to shut the club in 2018 – were trying to kickstart art exhibitions but were no experts. When Lucy Briscoe Rimmer went to collect a painting she'd exhibited there, they asked the former fine art student from Southport if she had any experience. She responded by forming West Art Collective, with four – later five – friends who'd grown up together around Lancashire and had studied art.

Previous pages: Tom Kinloch in the Red Room of the mansion dressing as the "doll maker" – a persona he created using a vintage dress, a wig and a homemade mask. He becomes part of his creations when he uses photography to document himself with the finished products.

Above: Lucy Briscoe Rimmer and Mimi Waddington in the old toilet block of the mansion. Another collective member, Josh Kelly, is on FaceTime. When operating as a nightclub, this infamous block was used by thousands of clubbers throughout the years and still holds the tags and doodles of that era. A new private toilet has since been installed in the room to accommodate guests at exhibitions and events

Facing page: working in the ballroom on a West Art Collective sign – with Jake Sachs's works in the background – and Waddington's nightlife-inspired art


COSTA

Left: in Antwerp Mansion's Blue Room, whose colour and natural light are perfect for exhibitions. Haunt, an exhibition organised by the collective back in Halloween 2019, had 19 artists' work throughout the mansion and featured a Blue Room takeover by northern working-class creative clothing brand Donkwear

Above: Kinloch uses his fine art and sculpture skills to restore and redesign dolls and other antique items. He aims to combine the dolls with working antiques to create functional art pieces

"My aim was to create art and music events that were free to submit to and free to exhibit in – that didn't cost the artist anything," says Briscoe Rimmer, explaining the key difference between West Art exhibitions and the mainstream art world. "That was my main goal, regardless of what the venue was going to be.

"As a group we're all from working-class backgrounds. We don't have a lot of money. We really struggled even applying for exhibitions that were £25 entry. That doesn't even guarantee that they're going to exhibit you. They're going to choose who's going to exhibit. We couldn't afford to do that. We know a lot of other people who can't afford to do that as well so we wanted to create an opportunity."

The collective members are all artists themselves. Alongside Briscoe Rimmer, who specialises in erotic art, are printmaker Mimi Waddington, sculptor Tom Kinloch, painter Jake Sachs, Shayley Crabtree, another sculptor, and Josh Kelly, a designer. Their Zero-Cost Exhibition Programme is not only free for artists' submissions but doesn't charge commission if the work sells. The first exhibition got a good response, says Briscoe Rimmer. Their

Left: Shayley Crabtree holds up her Rumplestiltskins figure in the Forgotten Bedroom of the mansion. She showcases her sometimes controversial humour through "daft, unapologetic sculptures" and textile work. Right: art – and crafts

most recent, an erotic one she led, sold out 250 tickets at £4 a time, the proceeds split between West Art and Antwerp.

"We've got quite a special relationship with Antwerp because they've given us that opportunity to not to have to charge the artist," she says.

"With all of us taking a degree in art we found that there's a standard for exhibiting art. Everything's done to a tee. There are certain processes you've got to go through to curate art and hang it. With Antwerp that whole structure is absolutely stripped from us because it's not a white walled venue – it's a mansion. It's a falling down mansion.

"We hang our artwork on the original Victorian picture rails we've been helping to restore in the building."

This process of what she calls "manipulating the building" has been replaced in lockdown with online exhibitions, some of which the collective does curate, some of which are merely amassed, as a way to document strange times. One dealt with coronavirus directly, another was about Black Lives Matter and a third featured artists who hadn't studied art. Coming up is *Unseen*, created by those coping with or caring for someone with an invisible illness.

When they can, Briscoe Rimmer wants to see if they can take their concept to other venues, but they are cementing their relationship with Antwerp by creating office space and a studio HQ there. When lockdown lifts, the first exhibition will be the delayed *Eden*, about positive health and raising money for anorexia and bulimia charity the Pip Foundation, and the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. Maintaining the nightlife connection, music will come from their friends at Inner City Recordings. "It should go down a treat because we have put so much care into it." ■

'As a group we're all from working-class backgrounds. We really struggled to pay even £25 exhibition fees.'

At a fair lick

Anwesha Sarkar tells Kevin Gopal about the science of surfaces

ANWESHA SARKAR IS speaking in tongues. It's not that the terminology of food colloid science, biomechanics and atomic force microscopy is hard to understand – even though it may be. It's that she's harnessed those scientific disciplines to design an actual tongue.

Sarkar, professor of colloids and surfaces at Leeds University, is part of a multidisciplinary team that has created a synthetic version of this most complex of human organs.

Its familiar rough texture comes from the hundreds of bud-like structures called papillae on its surface. Some of them contain the taste receptors that give us so much pleasure. Some do not. And it turns out they are randomly spread across the tongue too. It's some mechanical challenge to replicate that. Then the tongue-twister – how to achieve the elasticity of the real thing. What about its wettability – how it interacts with liquids – and its ability to lubricate?

3D-printed with silicone, the world's first biomimetic tongue surface could enable developers to test pharmaceuticals, oral care and food products without costly early human trials, says Sarkar. One application could be research into treatments for dry mouth, an innocuous sounding condition that can nevertheless lead to dental problems as well as difficulty in chewing food, and is estimated to affect up to 30 per cent of older people.

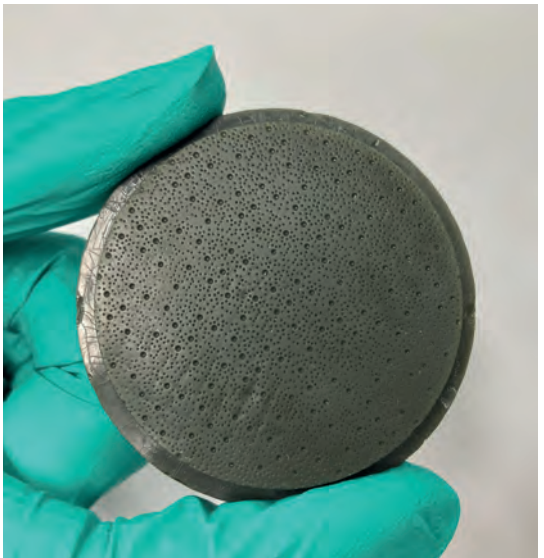
Making the tongue was "no small task", says Sarkar, who joined Leeds University from the multinational Nestlé in Switzerland, after beginning her career in her home country India and completing a PhD in New Zealand. Atomic force microscopy helped understand the forces at play on the tiniest scale. But there was an "enormous amount of data" to deal with. Also in the inter-disciplinary mix were dental and computer science experts, all needing to pull in the same direction.

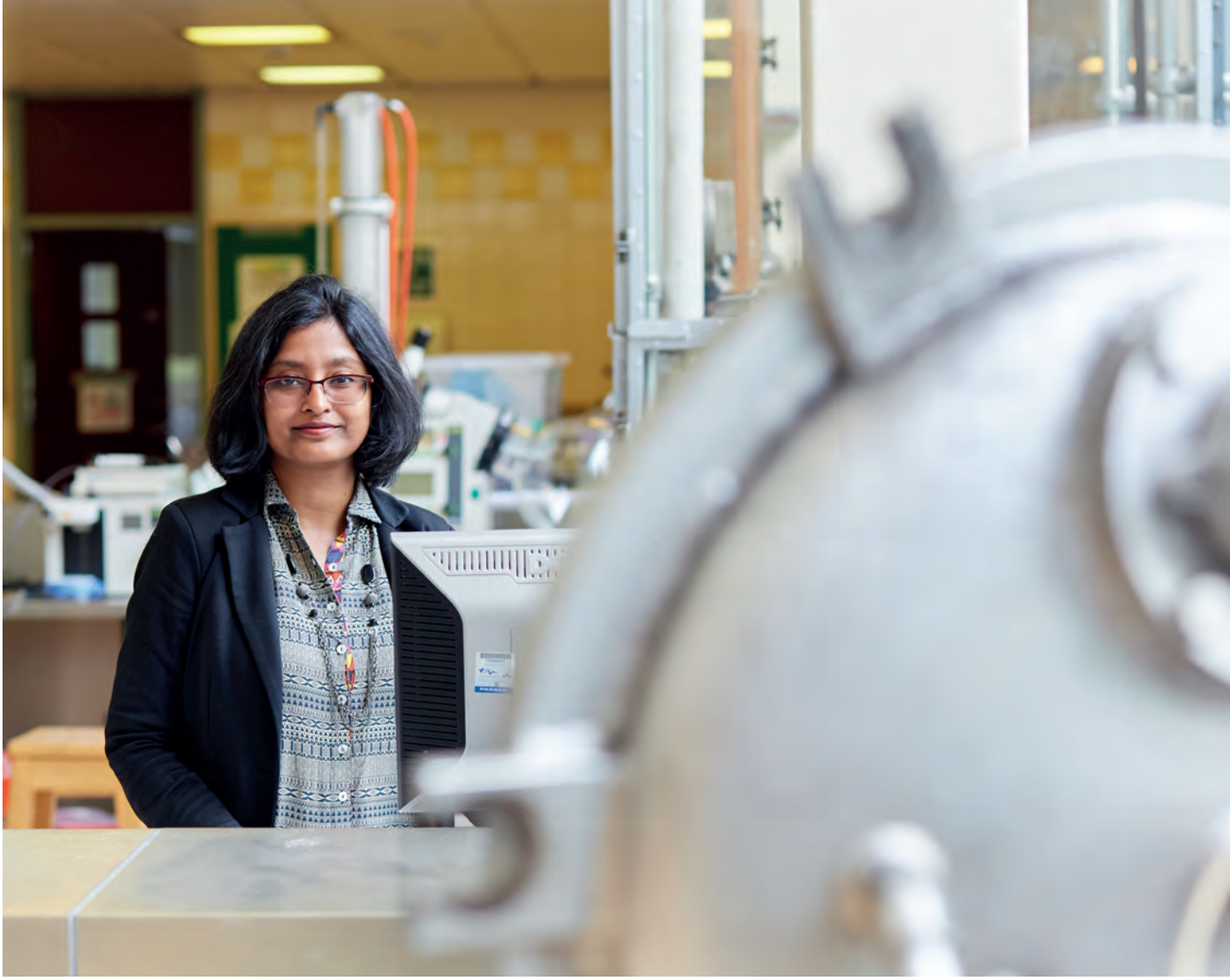
"Ultimately, our hope is that the surface we have designed can be important in understanding how the biomechanics of the tongue underpin the fundamentals of human feeding and speech."

It was the cow, one of the fundamentals of human feeding, that got Sarkar's career underway. Growing up in Calcutta, good at maths, science and maps, and fascinated by the worlds revealed under a microscope, she completed a degree in dairy technology – in the largest milk-producing country in the world.

"It was an obvious choice, because I wanted to do engineering but with a biological angle," she says. "Food is something that varies across the world so I knew I'd be able to travel. That was the initial reason. But in terms of science what I really wanted to do was structure – I know that if I can change the structure I can change the properties. That's why I started with food but I now work with many things that are not directly food-related. They have pharmaceutical or medical applications."

Her spell in New Zealand, where she completed her PhD in colloid science, wasn't easy because of the cultural differences, but it was where she grasped that science is not just done in the lab. "It starts much earlier," she says.





Professor Anwesha Sarkar in her Leeds University workplace – but she says science is as much in the head as in the lab. Left: the world's first biomimetic tongue

"It starts even before developing the hypothesis, by reading a lot of books and literature. It's much more in the head than the lab. That was a transition for me."

Sarkar was immensely proud when the tongue project paper received major online attention. Another recent project – like the tongue, funded by the European Research Council – has been patented and could be on the way to commercial development.

Sarkar realised on trips to community centres that much as she and colleagues might try to puree or texture food for the elderly – so they could eat more easily and avoid malnutrition – ultimately they lacked saliva.

Her team tested existing sprays used to hydrate the mouth and help with swallowing but found they didn't have the right lubricity. But in their quest to find a hydrogel that would bind to the tongue's surface and work as well or better than saliva, they struggled to find the right formulation – until a PhD student on the team came up with some new calculations.

"It's extremely exciting when students challenge your hypothesis, and it was a Eureka moment, but there was also the sort of moment where you think, oh my god, we've got to go back and check everything, temper our excitement."

Away from work, Sarkar likes to travel and spends time volunteering in those community centres for the elderly where – what else? – she likes to cook. The fake science that surrounds food – bogus nutritional claims and so on – bothers her.

"Science should always be backed up by evidence. As long as you can say this is the evidence behind what I am saying, another person can refute it. That's how science grows." ■

Leek inquiry

With only one exception vibrant spring veg should never be boiled, says Mary-Ellen McTague

Photo: Rebecca Lupton

Talking about the green shoots of recovery has got people on all sides of the political spectrum into hot water in the past so I'm not going to go that far, but I will say that, despite frost on the ground and a chill in the air, there are blue skies and birds singing, sounding delightfully busy, and daffodil stalks are starting to poke up out of the ground in the park… and I will take all of that as a sign that spring is in the air.

I could actually smell it in the air yesterday, mostly because I was cooking leeks.

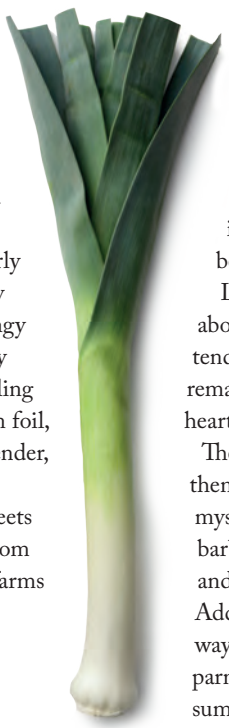
Leeks are such an underrated vegetable (see my theory on the ruinous impact of boiling below). They are, in truth, absolute beauties when treated with care, and they shout SPRING INCOMING to me like nothing much else, aside from perhaps wild garlic.

This is how I like to coax the best out of leeks. Slice thinly, soften ever so gently in butter or oil, and season with salt and pepper. Done this way, I think they make pretty much everything better. Adding these lightly cooked leeks for a minute or two right at the end of the cooking time to soups, stews and roast vegetables lends a fresh, allium flavour, like chives or spring onion tops, with a comforting base note of stewed onion.

I'm going to share with you my favourite way with leeks, but the overriding principle is this: cook them just a little. Always separate the white and green parts, and cook the green bits even less than the whites. Even use the green parts raw, as a chive-like garnish.

There aren't many times when I would recommend boiling as a cooking method. It has forever besmirched the name of so many vegetables, and fairly so. Boiling swede results in a cabbagy, stringy, watery mess. It also ruins leeks – everything except the stringy cellulose and a ghostly suggestion of the once oniony flavour leeches out. Usually, I would say to avoid boiling beetroot too. It is much better left whole, wrapped in foil, and baked at around 200C for an hour or so, until tender, then left to cool before peeling and slicing.

However, for the next few months, the tiny baby beets that will be thinned out of growing plots to make room for the bigger ones to grow are available from local farms and need eating up!



We scrub them gently with a nail brush to remove any silt, leaving the stalks and leaves intact, and then dip the roots in boiling water for a minute or two – just long enough to loosen the skin really – then dip into an ice bath. Once the skins are rubbed off, they make the most delicious salad, either doused in vinaigrette, homemade salad cream or even Heinz. Add crumbled up feta or fresh goats cheese and toasted walnuts for a lovely lunch – also excellent between two thick slices of good bread.

UK-grown Jerusalem artichokes are in abundance in early spring too. I find there is something really magical about artichokes. They have this complex, pungently earthy flavour, reminiscent of white truffles, and a meatiness that makes them an excellent vegetable if you are avoiding meat. They also, despite being cheap to buy by the kilo, feel like such a luxurious treat to eat – spring-like in some ways, but warm and comforting still, which is good because it will be freezing until June at least.

Again, I would advise against boiling and simply scrub, quarter and roast. The skins go delightfully crisp, and the insides delightfully squishy, making them perfect to mop up juices from a Sunday roast or a stew. Alternatively, we often scrub and peel them, keeping the peelings to fry as a snack or to make a stock for soup, then slice them thinly and soften in butter or oil, cooking long and slow until the flavour has fully intensified and they are starting to caramelise just ever so slightly. They are then pureed in a food processor until smooth. The resulting puree is excellent with roast fish and seafood, or add stock, butter (or oil if avoiding dairy) and salt to make into a simple but beautifully aromatic soup.

Last of all, but definitely not least of all, I can't talk about spring vegetables without a nod to broccoli – the tenderstem or purple sprouting types, specifically, which remain a constant in my top 10 vegetables ever (this is a heartier recommendation than it sounds).

They are so delicious, I could demolish a plateful of them with nothing else at all. Without wanting to repeat myself endlessly, don't bother boiling them. Grill, roast, barbecue or fry in some kind of fat. Season with salt and lemon juice, or vinegar, or some other acidic thing. Add garlic, or chilli, or anchovy, or all three. Done this way, they are so very good with roast lamb, or pasta and parmesan, or cold as a salad – the perfect spring-to-summer segue food, when our plates can offer sunshine, even when the skies can't. ■

Mary-Ellen McTague is a chef of 20 years' experience, and a writer of at least two or three weeks' experience spread over the same time. She was chef at the Michelin-starred Sharrow Bay before working at the Fat Duck under Heston Blumenthal, and then setting up Aumbry in Prestwich and the Creameries in Chorlton, shortly to reopen. She's a co-founder of Eat Well MCR (eatwellmcr.org)

Leeks with cheese and mustard

This recipe is so simple but so delicious, ridiculously easy to make and hugely versatile. Also you can use ANY OLD scraps of cheese in your fridge! Even the slightly dried-out ones from Christmas! The stinkier the better, in fact (although I'm not above using Babybel when that's all there is left in the fridge).

Try as follows:
- on darkly roasted wedges of any type of cabbage
- over roast celeriac, cauliflower or squash
- as a side dish on your Sunday roast, especially lamb
- with slowly and thoroughly baked potatoes
- on smoked fish and wilted spinach
- on poached eggs on toast
- or eaten directly out of the pan with a spoon.

150g grated cheese
300g cream
25g dijon mustard
200g thinly sliced leeks (separate the whites and greens)
40g butter

1. Place the cream in a saucepan, bring to the boil and reduce by a third.
2. Add the grated cheese, stir until melted then blitz with a hand blender to a smooth paste, or whisk until smooth. If the fat starts to separate in the sauce, add a splash of water and mix again.
3. Add the mustard and stir through. Add salt and pepper to taste.
4. At this stage, you can also add chopped herbs, anchovies, capers or gherkins for extra punch if you fancy.
5. Melt the butter in a saucepan and add the whites of the leeks. Cook over a medium heat, stirring often, until just becoming translucent. Add the greens, cook for a further minute or so, then turn off the heat.
6. Combine the leeks and the sauce, then set aside until required. Any leftovers can be refrigerated and then used as a spread for sandwiches or toasties, especially good with ham.

Stolen moments

Neil Tague plots a way to watch county cricket

IN THE THIRD edition of *The New Issue* we expounded the virtues of non-league football as a sport built for the age of social distancing. When it comes to county cricket, you can multiply that tenfold.

"One man and his dog" is the disdainful refrain, but for many there's a certain joy in rattling around the stands of Trent Bridge or the Oval on a midweek county championship day, with only a couple of hundred souls in a stadium built for 20,000. No matter how legitimate one's presence, these can feel like stolen moments.

And even if the match in front of you enters a lull, or is just not a particularly good game, there is for any cricket fan a stack of sensory memories in these cathedrals of the game. On a grey Headingley day, who could fail to picture Ben Stokes crashing the drive that sealed the most astonishing of sun-kissed Ashes Test wins in 2019?

The smaller county grounds, often bafflingly bitsy in their construction, have their own charms: old-school canteens, a wealth of old pictures and honour boards, characters knocking about. True, many parts are members only, but wandering casually past a chap in a blazer into some restricted area is an enjoyable pursuit in itself.

County cricket, like the sexier, big-time international version, comes in three broad formats: first class – two innings per side, over several days, wearing whites; one-day – 40 or 50 overs per side; and an even shorter format, mainly Twenty20, but also from this year, in England alone, the Hundred, a brave or foolish attempt at making the shortest form even shorter.

It's the long, slow version we shall concern ourselves with here. The ebb and flow of first-class cricket, with things swinging the way of first one team, then the other, happens here as it does in Test cricket. Obviously, the standard isn't as high, but it's still way beyond the village green.

What could be finer than taking in the finery of Lords – the Grace Gates, the Old Father Time weather vane, a thousand memories conjured – away from the bustle of international packed houses? Or taking in a game at Canterbury's beautiful St Lawrence Ground, or that greenest of valleys, New Road in Worcester (check it's not underwater first).

It's democratic, too. On many grounds during the lunch period, the outfield is taken over by swarms of kids and parents setting out wickets, bending their backs bowling, swinging bats to their hearts' content.

You may read that the county game is in crisis and needs fixing – because the county game has been "in crisis" since Noah was in short pants. No one goes to watch it, there's too much of it, the competition doesn't test players enough to develop the hardness necessary to win at Test cricket. Yeah, yeah. Heard it all.

Any cricket historian can show you thundering editorials, funnily enough often in the wake of heavy England defeats, on this theme going back a century or more.

Yet county cricket endures. It's a charming thing, and yet it is elite too. And for every few precocious Ollie Popes or Zak Crawleys, fast-tracked to the top, there's a Rory Burns, grafting around the circuit for a decade before forcing their way in.

The truth is, the county game is competitive. The shake-up of English cricket around the turn of the century brought not just central contracts for top players – meaning England stars can be withheld from county duty if the management wishes – but the splitting of the

Grounded: Somerset at home to Notts.
Photo: Michael Steele/Getty Images

county championship into two divisions, with promotion and relegation each year.

The scheduling has in the last few years become a bad joke but generally it works, rewarding the best and bravest, while ensuring most games have some sort of meaning right up to the season's end.

While the concept of sharing games around out-grounds has dropped off somewhat from four or five games a year to one or two in most cases, one of the glories of the game remains in festival weeks, usually encompassing a first class match and a couple of limited overs games in a different setting: Cheltenham College for Gloucestershire, Scarborough for Yorkshire, Tunbridge Wells for Kent.

Modernisers might sneer at the marquees, park benches and deckchairs, the cream teas, warm bitter and egg butties – but as long as the sun shines it's all really quite lovely, a genuine thing of beauty. Why shouldn't people enjoy this and the crash-bang Twenty20? Plenty do.

One thing people bemoan that isn't really the fault of the counties, more a reflection of global cricket's modernisation, is that you don't get the very best overseas stars now. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, many top players returned regularly, building a rapport with the locals and passing on their skills.

In those days of scant international cricket, six months with a county – or even as professional for a weekend league club – was miles better than could be earned at home. Hence, some of those legends can still be recalled as indelibly linked to a county: Imran Khan with Sussex, Clive Lloyd and later Wasim Akram with Lancashire, Michael Holding with Derbyshire.

That doesn't really happen now. The international calendar is so packed and franchise T20 leagues around the world so commonplace that players arrive for short bursts, and the best don't really need to come at all. The selling point of the Hundred is that it will change this.

It's just the way things are, really. The ability to change things lies with the bosses of cricket's three superpowers, for which read "those with the most valuable TV rights": chiefly India's BCCI supported by Cricket Australia and England's ECB.

The IPL, India's T20 competition, is the biggest brand in the sport by some distance and there appears to be no real appetite to tinker, particularly with authorities juggling schedules to keep the show on the road (and the TV cash rolling in) during the pandemic.

What can we expect to see in 2021 then? The ECB rescued something from the tatters of the 2020 lockdown with the Bob Willis Trophy, scrapping the two county divisions in place of three regional groups of six. The two highest scoring group winners then contested a final at Lord's, with ex-England captain Sir Alastair Cook scoring a century for the ages.

The idea for 2021 is slightly different. The groups of six will play each other home and away early in the season.

Then everything pauses while the coloured kits are dug out for the theoretical peak summer weeks, as the short-format tournaments take over. On resuming the serious stuff, the teams will be divided into three divisions according to the early season standings, and each team will play the four teams in its group that it hasn't yet faced.

Still with us? The top team in division one will be crowned county champions, but, showing a belt and braces approach, the top two will face off in the second Bob Willis Trophy final, again at Lord's.

True, this does seem a somewhat convoluted approach, but if there's one thing the county game has shown since the late 19th century, it's that convoluted, pigheaded, misguided or simply batty ideas from administrators are far from the exception.

And yet, in the fashion of a balding thirty-something county seamer, on the game trundles.

Mine's a bitter. Cheers! ■

Neil Tague is a journalist covering everything from business, commercial property and urban regeneration through to sport, culture, travel, and food and drink for a variety of publications. Based mostly in Bristol with a continual magnetic attraction back to Manchester, he spends his time walking with his greyhound or puffing and panting along hilly paths and trails, in a cease-less quest for the perfect country pub.

Backwords

Lisa Blower glances in her rear-view mirror at this edition – but it's tricky getting into the middle lane

Lisa Blower is a novelist and short story writer who lectures in creative and professional writing at Wolverhampton University. She's the author of the Arnold Bennett Prize-winning short story collection It's Gone Dark Over Bill's Mother's, and the novels Sitting Ducks and Pondweed, loosely based on one of her many motorway commutes held up by caravans

So, I told my friend who's turning fifty this year that he's the same age as the M62.

We both know the M62 like an old friend whose Christmas cards drop behind the back of the radiator. Back when I lived in Leeds but studied in Manchester, then lived in Manchester but worked in Leeds, whilst he remained, and has continued to remain, just off junction 6 towards Southport. We share an M62 memory of when we were dodging potatoes falling off the back of a truck. There was a particularly hairy time when my head gasket blew three miles off Hartshead Moor services, and this was back when you called for help from a rusty orange box on the roadside – a phone with no dial just one big button you pressed and put all your hope in. And he reminded me of the time that I'd been followed by an unmarked travel cop who'd clocked my backlights out and flashed me for over 10 miles because he had a couple of spare bulbs in his boot. Then he said, "Is that farm still there?" because that's the other thing folk talk about when talking about the M62: the farm it straddles atop Saddleworth Moor and just where it rises 1,222ft above sea level, a place often associated with stubbornness, protests and plenty of rain, and there is a lovely aerial photograph that provides a kestrel-eye view of it sandwiched between lanes, like a pupil in wide-eyed wonder. It's bleak and it's boisterous up there, incessant and unforgiving, prone to both myth and misinformation when a geological fault stopped it from disappearing off the map.

What I quite like about the Stott Hall Farm legend is that it comes with its own moral: nature always finds a way of making us rethink how we do things. And, as per all tall tales passed along the motorways of life, it provides a rather neat analogy too: my urge to be still whilst everyone else persists in racing past.

I've had many moments when the fast lane has felt too fast, and lots more in the slow lane because I've misjudged the size of my petrol tank. And because this is how it tends to work for writers, I interrogate other analogies when motorways are a fact of life; a scientific feat in structural engineering; an ingrained infrastructure that we discuss like the weather with a told-you-so vibe. I would've used the toll. You'd be better off coming off at junction 6. I don't know what they're doing at that flyover but I counted 700 cones and not a single workman. I remember family trips from Stoke-on-Trent to wherever, my grandparents sat in the back of the Triumph Herald soft top with me and my sister on their knees, and pleading with my dad – you won't be going the motorway, will you? Like he really had their lives in his hands. My first motorway memory is, in fact, being aside of my Nan with her head in her coat whilst I felt exhilarated, like I was really going somewhere. I do remember my first time actually driving on a motorway was the M1 Sheffield and all the way down to Bournemouth having only ever driven on the dual carriageway of the M54 and thinking how I'd made it as a driver when seamlessly progressing from motorway sprat to the shark frenzy of Spaghetti Junction. I thought nothing of jumping on the motorway, and bless the old bangers I put through it that got me and many friends from A to B and back again, and sometimes in the dead of night. I guess what I'm saying is that motorways go from rite of passage to second nature to that friend you went to school with but would rather avoid.

And then last year, the roads emptied, the goats took to the streets, and the cars rested too; less rush, less need, less having to be there for 9am. Less sitting in hold-ups owing to jack-knifed lorries or squirming in the driver's seat as you crawl past a pile-up vowing in the glow of blue lights never to break the speed limit ever again. Suddenly, we were all faced with travelling the road we warned about when living at such breakneck speed.

I don't know about you, but three lockdowns in and it's starting to feel like waiting on the grass verge of the hard shoulder for the recovery team to arrive. There've been other days, when clean out of Zoom petrol, I'd think about how much I'd like to get into my car and hug that middle lane just to see family and friends I've not seen in donkeys. It usually takes me three separate motorways to visit my friend who's turning 50. I've also not seen this friend in almost three years. Snarled up with work or stuck in the weekend jam that comes with children, "another time", we've been saying, before Covid renegotiated what time really meant.

We will travel those motorways differently, I think, when we are able to. They will be roads leading to reconnection and reunion, celebration and condolence, as we learn to skirt around the geological fault that stopped us all in our tracks. I'd like to think that we'll be far more aware of what lies beneath our lives and what we now have to do to put things right. I think we'll look out of the windows more, noticing the things that we've been missing and seeing the things we wouldn't see when running late or hellbent on just getting there, because that's when all these motorways will, once again, lead us back to each other. ■

A break in the road: contruction worker during the building of the M62