

Tales From the Real World

Stories and poetry from Thursday morning class at the Millin Centre, Benwell.



Class run by **A Living Tradition CIC**

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Reflecting on the past

Tales of Old

The struggle of Newcastle people in 18th century was very hard. We suffered, either physically, mentally or spiritually. Most of us lived around the River Tyne, working as coal miners, where we were worked tirelessly, throughout the day.

“When I am not working I go to meetings, despite the weather not being friendly. In the middle of weather that wasn’t kind, cold wintry evening and small flakes of snow are being blown around the cobbled streets. My bones are aching from the long hours of hard work...I shiver with the cold and turn up the collar of my old coat. Frequently I almost fall, slipping on a patch of ice. Our life seems to be one long struggle.., against the grinding poverty, which drags on day in, day out, month in month out and against the powerful group of people who run commercial life and the politics of Tyneside. Mostly our opinion isn’t considered by the government or authority. However, luckily there is a new preacher who puts the conscience of our words that helped me and all... his name is James Murray. He speaks the truth.., he talks of the Bible and uses it to rail against the injustices that I face during this time.”

.....

It has become a custom in my family, after dinner we get together and talk about what happened or what has been done its activity during the day. However, I was more often to tell stories about the struggle of the hero in long time ago, how they were helping people. How could they sacrifice for the people and be so selfless? Without them, we cannot live like this today prosperous and independent. I mean the tell it to motivate them to create a sense of empathy, a social mutual help, mutual love sense, that is very useful for the future lives.

One night on a weekend after dinner, a time in the early summer vacation, we had free time to relax.. , my children don’t have homework or other assignments from their school. An opportunity for me to talk to them about past experiences, how the ancient people fought, worked hard to fight for their rights, for their life, before reaching the welfare of its people with a safe and fair governance as it today. I was impressed to read the stories of a fighter called James Murray, et al, .I just got from my tutor in Millin Community Centre on last Thursday.

My smallest child, his name is Tommy and he really like history lessons, but Bobby his brother, who is 15 years-old, he prefers art and is a bit political.

“Tommy..., Bobby...Mommy had and interesting story for you..is about the struggle people in Newcastle in North-East of England in the past before they achieve happiness, prosperity and advancement as it is to day, but.., wait a minute honey, Mommy going to trim the table and dishwasher first..”, I exclaimed.

But Tommy cannot wait too long time, he wants to know immediately the story... “ just let Mom, later sink!”, Tommy shouted.

I immediately sat down with Tommy and Bobby in the living room, who was ready to listen, and then I start a story about The Struggle of James Murray.

In ancient times, about in the mid 18 century ago, the British people's too hard almost same as our country Indonesia . British people's struggle against injustice, unfairly, persecution, enslavement of the people, demanding a prosperous life and struggle for their rights, occurring in almost all areas in England, including North East areas, such as Newcastle Upon Tyne.

"And then?"... Tommy urged by the innocent faces, wrinkling his forehead.

People lives when it is suffering.., their life seems to be one struggle. In general they work as worked hard as a miner.. around Tyne and Wear. The difference lives ordinary people with the powerful families was like aristocrats, leader of officials in government who run the commercial life af the politics are so far. Nearly all of the money and all the political power was in the hands of a few families in the region. The government only really cared about rich people.

"Em mm.., so the powerful families in government are corrupt?..Is not it Mom emm ??", Bobby suddenly interupted with a loud voice as he moved his chair close to me..not to be outdone by Tommy.

"Be patient honey.., Mommy will continue this story!" As I was thinking I tipped my head with a sad face.. With compassion I try to continue this story..

On a cold night, snow flakes scattered over the street. My body was piercing with shivering bones, old coats covering them crudely, from morning to evening and even into the night amid sober light of the dark, when they had no electricity. They worked hard tirelessly, digging in the pits to feed their families lives from day to day. Frequently they don't meet and play with their son or daughter because his father left for work early in the morning still sleeping, while returning from work found his child was sleeping asleep. From day to day, month to month and from year to year they walked along the uneven cobbled street on a path of ice, even they often slipping in the icy gloom.

They were waiting for a glimmer of hope, wish the God's helper , a hero who are willing to make sacrifices to bring a bright her life. In North-East England, only a few number of men could vote, more over women were not involved.

"Can you imagine, how the societies live in the ancient times, filled with challenges, suffering, the struggle before the birth of democracy...."

Taking a deep breath, I continue the story later.., while Tommy and Bobby with teary eyes remained was silent listened.

"Amid these difficulties, fortunately came the heroes, the leaders to come to help and lead Tyneside and Wearside rebellions against the powerful and wealthy, who spoke out for human rights in the late 18 th century. The most famous of them are Rev. James Murray, Thomas Bewick and Thomas Spence. Rev James Murray is a preacher who use the Bible to speak the truth; Thomas Bewick used his great artistic skills, and Thomas Spence is an activist.

"However..., I am more interested in the story of the struggle Rev. James Murray, who was a preacher...."

"Why mom????, instead of Thomas Bewick? He is better, because he is an artist or the activist Thomas Spence", said Tommy and Bobby with surprise.

Then I said, the three heroes of this is great and exciting fighters, because they are fighting according to the field, means and ability.

As I mentioned before, the Rev. James Murray was a religious figure, who gave preaching and talks based on the Bible, to reassure the people, and he was very concerned to fight for the people who had been treated unfairly by the authority at the time.

The authorities finally arrested the activist Thomas Spence, but James Murray didn't get held.

Why?? ... As he was a preacher of religion, to speak the truth based on the Bible, give advice to many, he respected all the people except the authorities....Thus, he can continue his goal fighting, rebellion to assist the long-oppressed due to their indifference of the authorities, while Thomas Spencer cannot be detained.

Until now, the services of James Murray and his two friends as a famous Hero from Newcastle Upon Tyne has to be remembered person. We should be grateful for his services to the independence and well-being of Newcastle people.

.... Is it finished mom??? Oooohh...indeed an interesting story, how the same heroes story in our country

Tommy and Bobby was very pleased to hear my story and tomorrow night they told again asking about the same story of an hero from Indonesian country, who worked for justice like James Murray..

The clock showed it was 12 midnight, so each of us went to our bedrooms.

Ummu

Petition against Slavery

Today I am going to sign a petition against slavery. I heard some days before about slavery. It is a very bad thing. I am against the slavery. I am going to sign the petition and also want my friends to sign the petition.

Now I am going to the Guildhall by the River Tyne. The day is very beautiful with sunshine. The flowers smiled in the sunshine. I am happy yet angry too. I am angry with the government that they are doing nothing about slavery but happy because I am signing the petition.

On the way to Guildhall I meet my friend. She is enjoying the sunshine. We start talking about different things which are happening around us. Then she asks me where I am going? I tell her and say that she should also sign the petition but she says that it is a waste of time. She does not agree with me.

I say that this is a very bad thing, everybody has the right to live freely. I ask her if this happening to her beloved one then what should she do. This is the killing of human being. Nobody have right to play with lives.

Slavery is a system under which people are treated as property to be bought and sold, and are forced to work. We cannot rule on other people. We cannot treat the people as our personal property and treat like animals. People are not for sale. Every big thing have small beginnings. We must take part against slavery. We must fight against slavery.

After some time she agrees with me and is ready to sign the petition.

Falak Naz

If Only

I can remember it like it was yesterday. We were told not to advance any further into Germany because there was such a problem ahead. I was shocked to be told that we were even having a ceasefire with the Germans. We knew that the war was nearly over, but it still seemed strange to us to be having a ceasefire, while all around us the war was still raging. But we had to follow orders and deal with the German soldiers in a reasonable manner. What we were about to witness made this even harder to do. They were leaving a mess behind and wanted us to deal with it.

The camp was a short distance from where we were stationed and at first we were not able to advance into it. Our officers did a deal with the Germans and many of them were told to go back to the families; the war would soon be over and it was decided that many of them could just go home. Some of them, however, were taken off for further interrogation; their role in the war had been a whole lot darker.

Eventually the time came when we could go forward and it was then that we got into the camp. We thought something was wrong because you could smell the corpses from 10 miles away. There had been times when we had wondered exactly what we were fighting the war for....at least now we knew what we were fighting against. Those left alive in the camp, staggered around, like skeletons with a thin sheet of skin draped loosely over them, while the bodies of many of those who had not survived were just piled up in a big heap, as if they were left over stones from a quarry, which nobody wanted. There were still times when I thought that they were the lucky ones.

The smell of death and disease lay over the place like a foul blanket and although the spring sun was smiling down on us, in our hearts we were crying. A bulldozer was summoned from somewhere and with a scarf tied firmly over my face I was given the grim task of bulldozing the rotting bodies into a mass grave, which as much dignity as I could muster. We tended to those who were still alive as best we could. Some were given medical treatment, whilst others were fed, although tragically this very life-saving food was what killed a number of them, so unused to food were they. We shared what food we had and they certainly weren't used to our bully beef and chocolate. At length they were given a rice and sugar diet, called the Bengal Famine Diet, where it had first been tried, but paprika had to be added for the European diet. People did live.

Between April and June 12 000 patients died. They were too weak to be saved. By the end of April however 29 000 had moved from camp to hospital. Some of the Royal Engineers built cots and cribs and restored electricity and even set-up a cinema. By the end of April all the huts were cleared and some of our lads burnt them down.

Eventually the order came for us to move on and we left the camp to carry the fight further into the heart of darkness, until with great relief we were all gathered together and told that the war was finally over. We heard that back home, people were dancing in the streets, but we didn't feel like doing that. We just wanted to get home and try to get on with life. But we couldn't forget what we had seen.

.....
My job back at the factory was waiting for me when I got home and I settled back into the work and family routines. It was hard to say anything about what I had seen. Who could believe it, who would listen? Mostly, though I just didn't want to upset the rest of my family. And not saying anything meant that I could start to forget about it all; well try to anyway.

My two sons often asked me about the war. They were starting to grow up and would sometimes spend their pocket money on boy's comics, full of adventure stories, many of which were about war. War seemed the greatest of all adventures, full of glorious victories and heroic actions. I knew the truth. I tried to explain to them some of things I had seen. But not the camp.

I'm not sure exactly where I read about it...it was probably my newspaper. Anyway, somewhere I read about this girl from Amsterdam, who had hidden in an attic and ended up in a death camp. Sadly she had died there, but when her father went home to the attic in a factory in Amsterdam, where the family had hidden along with others, he found a diary of hers, on the floor. He picked it up and dusted it down. When he read it he was amazed at how well his teenage daughter had been able to write about her life and the lives of all of them stuck hiding away from the Nazis in that tiny, cramped attic. He was so impressed by what he saw that he decided to get it published and it was now fast becoming a best-seller. The story was interesting to me in itself. But it was near the bottom that I really got a shock. The teenage girl had died of typhus, the same disease which we had come across when we liberated the camp.

I couldn't help but wonder what would have happened if we had just got there a couple of months earlier. February instead of April. Goodness know we tried hard enough, to drive the Nazis back into their own land and finish the war off without any more innocent deaths. We had seen enough of those already. But what if we had got there earlier?

Perhaps this teenage girl would have gone home and seen her diary. What would she have done with it? Would she have seen it as mere adolescent musings, not worthy of reading anymore? Would she have thrown it away as a reminder of the bad old days, when she was stuck in the cramped attic, with adults who didn't understand her, ever fearful of being betrayed and captured? Would she have gone on to be the great writer the diary suggests she could have been? We will never know.

Still, I'm proud that it was a regiment from my own North-east of England which liberated Belsen. We have always hated bullies up here and the Nazis were the worst bullies of all. We did our best and saved some lives at the camp. I just wish we had got there earlier.

Sorry Anne.

Peter Sagar

You Might Think

Sure we have a different way of talking
And you might think our allegiance is to Rome
But our sacrifice in the mud of Flanders
Shows that this land of coal is our home

You might think that we are just funny
That we are a threat to you
But when our skin is cut by a blade
We shed warm red blood too

Now we have come from far away from here
From stifling heat and swirling sand
We may call our God Allah
But our home is now in this land

You might think we don't belong here
We've just come to take your women from you
But when our hearts are broken
We shed bitter tears too

Today we live invisibly amongst you
In homes where nobody else will live
Forced to flee from our native lands
For what we have said or believe

You might think we should just be sent back
We've just come to take your job from you
But when we're beaten in lonely dark cells
Our bones can be broken too.

Peter Sagar

To See The Red Streaks

We're going to the Town Moor today
With our banners held high
We want to know why those who gathered
At Peterloo had to die

We want a say in how our country is run
An end to corruption and stagnation
To see the red streaks across the sky
At the dawn of a fairer nation

We're going to Tahrir Square today
With our banners held high
We want to know why those who hang on
To power have to lie

We want a say in how our country is run
An end to corruption and stagnation
To see the red streaks across the sky
At the dawn of a fairer nation.

Peter Sagar

Letter from the Jarrow March

Hello my dear father and mother,
How are you, Dad and my little angel sister? I am fine here. Now I am in Ripon. This town is 70 miles from Jarrow. This is a very beautiful town and very nice people. They give us a good welcome. The hospitality and the food were always first class wherever we stayed. The breakfast, lunch and dinner, every thing is very good. We all are very tired but we should be soon in London and I will be return soon to home. And take care and give my love to my litter sister. I miss you all. It is very difficult to live far from yours loved ones and from home. Pray for our success

By Falak Naz

If Only we Can Dare

Our story starts way back in the dark 17th century
When few men had the vote and the people were not free
A man named Murray came to Newcastle to preach from the Bible
It's a wonder the rich and powerful didn't try to sue him for libel
But Reverend James Murray was sure he knew just what the Bible was for
For pointing fingers at the rich and powerful and helping the poor

In Murray's congregation was a Scot by the name of Jeremiah
He brought his son Thomas up to search for truth and not be a liar
So Thomas Spence grew up by the banks of the Tyne to become a man
All land in the nation shared out equally; that was to be his plan
For producing pamphlets saying this he was jailed once and then again
And there was no Amnesty International to help him way back then

Now Thomas Spence had a friend called Bewick and he really could draw
He drew birds and he drew cattle but he also drew the poor
So the wealthy people who bought his books could see with their own eyes
How those born without silver spoons in their mouths led their lives
Like Murray and Spence, Bewick knew that politics wasn't a game
To prick the complacent conscience of those with power was his aim

Meanwhile far away across the sea in so much warmer climes
Another group of people were having even harder times
Taken far across the Atlantic chained to the bottom of a filthy boat
On a journey without a map, on a journey without a hope
Yet on Tyneside churches were packed with those coming to their aid
Those determined to end the scourge of slavery and the slave trade

Then along came Joseph Cowen who became Newcastle's own M.P.
He bought the Daily Chronicle to help him fight for liberty
To help more working men win the vote and so to change the laws
He helped people in our region open some of those old closed doors
And to set up co-operatives to take control of their own lives
So their food and other necessities could be bought at a fair price

Then along came a determined woman by the name of Emily
Who was born into a proud Northumbrian family
She saw the miners winning the vote along with other working men
Decided that after that it should soon be women's turn
Until one day at the Derby she tried to put a flag on the King's horse
And Emily became the martyr for the Suffragette cause

One wet summer across the Irish Sea, potatoes seemed to be growing well
But inside they were found to be rotten and as black as Hell
Many starving Irish had to leave, some ending up by the banks of the Tyne
Where early tensions might have made you think, things wouldn't turn out fine
But Irish and Geordies learnt to live peacefully together over time
And work side by side in shipyard, steelworks and coalmine

While down the River Tyne in a bustling port by the river's mouth
Men came to work on boats, from a dry and dusty land to the south
Some living in South Shields wanted the Yemenis to just go away
So tensions rose until there was a riot one terrible August day
Imprisonment or deportation was the fate of many Yemenis
So the local people felt sympathy and they all learnt to live in peace

The Wall Street Crash led to the people losing their jobs across the world
In some countries sinister uniforms were donned and fearsome flags unfurled
A man named Mosley thought many in the North-east would support his fascist cause
But Geordies soon rejected him and the rest of his bullying bores
While two hundred men from Jarrow marched to London, limbs aching every day
To ask for the chance to work and to be treated in a dignified way

Now we have new challenges and we know that times are not easy again
We would do well to look back and remember all those times when
We looked injustice in the face and decided to do just what was right
Knowing that sometimes in life you can't gain anything without a fight
In solidarity with others, with tolerance and striving for what is fair
We can follow in their determined footsteps, if only we can dare

Peter Sagar

Reflecting on the present

My Life

I belong to PAKISTAN, KHYBER PAKHTOONKHWA with Muslim community. In Pakistan I lived in Parachinar .Parachinar is very beautiful, cold and green like England. When I was 1 year old my father took me to Qatar .I have one sister. My father was working in Q. TEL in Qatar. I spent 20 years there. I did my school and college there. Qatar is very nice country but too hot. After 20 years we came back to Pakistan.

6.4.2007 Friday was the bad day of our lives. The war was beginning in Parachinar. The war continued for 4 to 5 years. Many people were killed in the war, including women and also little children. We are fighting against the Taliban. The Pakistani government was doing nothing for us. Our main road was closed for transports. Our area can't be connected to the other side of the country, which is an important route of the area. The road was closed for years because of security problem. In our area there was a shortage of medicine. There are not enough doctors and teachers. We did everything by ourselves as the government did not support our area.

In 2009 I came to England. I spent 8 months here because of visa reason. I went back to Pakistan, however after 2 years I came back. My husband is a doctor in South Shields hospital. Our marriage is 5 years old.

Newcastle is a nice city, green and beautiful. I like the countryside most, because it looks like our village. The people are also very nice, but some of them are very rude to Muslims. I met some people who did not like the Muslims. We are not a bad people. Not every Muslim is a terrorist.

I went to many big city malls and parks. In March I joined the Millin Centre. I do different courses here. Now I am doing A Living Tradition and knitting.

My teacher's name is Peter. He is a very nice and friendly person. All the staff of the centre are very nice. I feel very comfortable here like my home. I meet so many people here from different countries.

Falak Naz

Play It Again Ram

Ram Toby wasn't English but he liked it over here
He liked the shops and football
He even liked the beer.

He started off in Dover but he only stayed a week
It was winter, it was snowing
And the house he had was bleak.

They said, "Get on the bus Ram, and go up to the North
Stay on the bus for three stops
And get off at the fourth".

Ram took their good advice and after half a day
He got to Westgate Road
And decided he would stay.

The weather wasn't good but the people looked quite nice
At least it wasn't snowing
And there wasn't any ice.

Now, since the day before he hadn't any food at all
So he got a local bus
That was going to Dumpling Hall.

"That's just the place for me", he thought, "I'll get a nice hot meal".
Dumplings were his favourite
They really did appeal.

But when he left the 39 he couldn't find the hall.
Just lots of fields and cows
And bits of Roman Wall.

He went back to the city on another 39
He looked out to the right
And saw the silvery River Tyne.

He found a leaflet on the bus about the Millin Centre
"Go down the hill, turn to the left
Just ring the bell and enter".

He joined a group of four or five to learn more English words
He found he had a talent too
For playing guitar chords.

In Hampstead Road and Canning Street he soon became quite famous
We all admired his guitar style
And nobody should blame us.

He made a lot of money and put on a special tea.
When all the guests arrived he said,
"The dumplings are on me".

Colin Jenks

Where Are They?

Ali entered the airport, with his mother for the first time. He talked so much. He asked so many questions from his mother, when we set in airplane? Is the airplane very big? How many people are travelling in it? How many doors in airplane?

He wants to see the airplane and was jumping around his mother and talking very loudly. He sang a poem loudly which he learned in school and saying to loudly the airplane name. He is saying to his mother that when they return from Paris he will tell to his all friends about the airplane, what he ate on airplane and about his journey.

Waris and his wife have been living in Newcastle for 4 years. They have 2 children one boy and one girl. They two are studying in school. Waris is a doctor. He is very busy in his job. The children are busy in their school.

After some days the children have holidays, so they decided to travel somewhere, so the children decided to go to New Zealand, therefore they start packing.

The flight is on 1st March at 10.00 am. Two days are left for the flight. They are waiting for this day but the day and nights are so long.

At last the moon turned over to face the day. At last they are in the airport on 1st March. The children are wearing nice clothes. They laugh and talk to each other, but when the officer wants their passports. Waris says to his wife to show the passports. The wife replies that she has not the passports. She thinks that the passport are with him.

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The two start to fight and shout at each other. The children are afraid. They start searching in their bags but there is no sign of passports.

Some time is left for the flight. They all are so worried. The officer says that if they have not passport they cannot travel.

But at the last moment the taxi driver comes and brings the passports.....

Falak Naz

She Couldn't see the Wood for the Trees

When she had been living in Newcastle-upon-Tyne for a year, Saluda passed her first exam in English. She knew there was a lot more to do, but she decided to have a change. She decided to learn some local history.

She enrolled on the history course and the tutor told her that they would be learning about Earl Grey.

She could have gone to the library, but she preferred to work on her own.

She spent three or four hours a day looking for anything she could find about Earl Grey, but she did not realise that the monument in the city centre was anything to do with him.

Despite this she was very confident when she went to the first history class.

The tutor began the course by asking if anyone knew anything about Earl Grey. Saluda said she had found out a lot of things. The tutor thinking that Saluda had visited the monument asked if she had seen what it said on the side.

Saluda said she had and offered to read it out.

Saluda told the class – “I have seen this written down in five different places.

The tutor was surprised, thinking only of the monument.

“Which five places, Saluda”?

“Tesco's, Morrisons, Asda, Kwiksave and Iceland”, she replied. “In all of these supermarkets, I have seen the same thing written on the side”

What so you think Saluda had seen? Uncover the answer below:

Earl Grey is a light tea which has a pale gold colour with the delicate flavour of oranges and lemons.

Earl Grey is the perfect drink for any time of the day.

Colin Jenks

A Cautionary Tale

It was a sunny, if windy morning and it was playtime on a school playground in Newcastle. Miroslav saw his friend Robert.

“Hallo Robert”

“Oh hi”, Robert mumbled in return.

“Is everything O.K.?”

“What’s it got to do with you?”

“I was only asking”

“Yeah well.....I’m sick of you...”

“Why what have I done? I only said hello”.

“You shouldn’t be here. I’m a proper Geordie, born here, with a Geordie name!”

Not knowing what to say, Miroslav walked away shrugging his shoulders.

The playtime soon ended and the teacher on duty blew the familiar whistle. The next lesson, that between break and lunch, went reasonably quickly. In one classroom, the class sat waiting quietly for their teacher to speak at the end of the lesson about what their homework would be.

“Right children, we are going to some work on our family trees, finding out who is in our families. I want you all to go home and ask your mum and dad what their mum and dad was called. Do you all understand?”

“Yes, Miss”, the children replied in unison.

That evening Robert Armstrong was at home.

“Have you any homework, Robert?”, asked Robert’s mum.

“Er.....”, replied Robert.

“Can I have a look in your planner?”

Robert dutifully handed over his planner.

“Come on, Robert. All you have to do is ask me about our family. That’s not hard, is it?”

“No....”, Robert agreed.

“Well, I’ll tell you....As you know your dad’s surname is Armstrong and so was his dad’s. Your dad’s mum was called O’ Brien. My surname, before I married your dad was MacDonald – that was my dad’s surname and my mum’s surname was Trevithick.”

”What?”, asked Robert.

“Trevithick – I’ll write it down for you...I’ll write all our family names down for you”

“Thanks”, replied Robert quietly.

In the classroom the next day, the class were gathered round on the floor, waiting patiently for the teacher to start the lesson.

“Well, class, I hope you all did your homework.

“Yes, Miss”, replied the class in unison.

“So.....who wants to tell us about their families? Robert – let’s start with you”

“My name is Armstrong and my dad’s mum was called O’Brien. My mum’s name before she married was Macdonald and her mum was called Trevithick”, said Robert proudly.

“What?”, said the class.

“Trevithick – I’ll write it down for you”, replied Robert.

“That’s all very interesting, Robert. Do you know where your family came from?”, asked the teacher.

“Well, they’re all Geordies, aren’t they?”

“Well, not originally, no”, the teacher asserted.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, Armstrong is a Geordie name, certainly.....”

“See”, said Robert.

“But”, the teacher continued, “.....O’Brien is an Irish name, Macdonald is Scottish and Trevithick is from way down in Cornwall. Your family, like many Geordie families, came from all over.”

“Oh,,,,”, said Robert quietly.

More children told the teacher and the others in the class, what their family names were and soon it was playtime again. Back on the school playground, Miroslav and Robert meet again.

“Hello,”, said Robert tentatively.

“Hello Robert”, Miroslav replied.

“Listen, I’m sorry about what I said the other day”, ventured Robert.

“It’s alright”, replied Miroslav. “Let’s be friends again”.

“Yes, let’s”, said Robert quietly.

Peter Sagar

There'll Always be an England.

John Smith was a real old-fashioned Englishman who worked in an office in Newcastle. He liked everything that was English and criticised everything that was not. His colleagues liked him, but thought he was a bit difficult to work with.

One day last year, the staff decide to go together for a meal and, of course, John was invited.

“What do you like to eat, John?”

“Just ordinary English food. If it's not English, I would rather go without.”

“So we can't go to Amigos, Rodrigos, Bendigos, Giovanni, Pastrami, Toonami, or the Roman Wall Chinese Garden. So where?”

“Let's think about it overnight and decide tomorrow.”

The next day they had found only one restaurant that specialised in serving English food – the Yorkshire Pudding House – so they booked it for eight o'clock the next Saturday.

They all arrived on time, sat down and studied the menu. John Smith was the last to order and the others were wondering what he would ask for and if, for once, he would have something that was not a pure English meal.

“Right, I will start with pea soup”.

“But John, didn't the first peas in England come from India?”

“Oh, potato soup then”.

“John, potatoes come from South America.”

“Watermelon then”

“Sorry, John. They are from Africa.”

John went on to order a main course. Or try to.

“Turkey?”

“North America”.

“Chicken?”

“North Asia.”

“Salad?”

“Tomatoes from South America, lettuce, onions and cucumber from Egypt, pepper from India, vinegar and olives from Continental Europe.”

“In that case, I'll go on to the dessert. They seem to have a nice long list of fruits.”

“That's true. Vanilla from Central America, blackcurrants from Asia, strawberries, chocolate and pineapple from South America.”

“Well, I’m getting quite hungry now, so while you’re all eating your foreign food, I’ll just have a few peanuts and a glass of arak.”

“Do you mean peanuts from South America and arak from Sri Lanka?”

“Oh, this is hopeless. There must be something English. I’ll ask the waiter for a beefsteak.”

He placed his order.

While the others were still enjoying their meal and John was waiting for his, he looked around and thought how well furnished the restaurant was, especially the beautiful snow-white tablecloths.... He commented on this just as the waiter was serving the steak. The waiter overheard him.

“Yes, sir. They all very nice aren’t they – the best quality Egyptian cotton. Enjoy your steak sir. It’s an Aberdeen Angus – Scotland’s finest”.

John realised he was beaten.

“Oh, alright then. And a nice cup of tea”.

“Certainly sir. India or China?”

Colin Jenks

Let's Get Back to the Stones!

It was quiet when they met in the small café at the corner of the old terraced street in Newcastle. The old clock on the wall had only just announced that it was midday and the rush of people wanting their lunch was still a few minutes away.

Brian had got to the café first and was just looking through the menu when his friend, Alan arrived. Sitting down quickly, it was Alan who spoke first:

"Sorry I'm late".

"No problem. I've only just got here myself".

Without any more speaking the two friends proceeded to order some food. Only with that out of the way did they begin to chat properly. After the usual 'how's the family' stuff, the conversation turned to the subject of the Olympics Opening Ceremony, which had been live on television the previous Friday evening.

"Well, I enjoyed it", said Alan. "I thought it showed the real Britain."

"Well I didn't", muttered Brian darkly.

"What didn't you like about it?", asked Alan.

"Well, it wasn't really about Britain at all. I agree with that M.P. who said it was all multicultural, er...nonsense".

"Oh, you mean the man who wrote 'Bring back the Stones!'" on twitter?"

"Yeah. Well he was right. I mean the Stones, they really are British aren't they?", said Brian.

Oh yes, the Stones thought Alan. The Rolling Stones. Suddenly Alan found his mind drifting off into a vision of Mick, Keith and the rest when they were young. There were on stage, singing old Kentish folk songs, surrounded by lively Morris Dancers, while the audience went mad.

"Are you listening to me at all?", asked Brian, snapping Alan out of his daydream.

"Oh, sorry, I was just thinking", Alan replied.

Just then the food arrived.

Alan and Brian ate in silence for a while, before Alan felt bold enough to say something.

"You always have liked the Stones, haven't you?"

"Yeah. Well you know, they were my favourite band when I was growing up."

"They certainly were huge when we were young. Part of what made Britain seem cool, I suppose", Alan replied.

"That's what I was saying. I agree with that M.P. The Stones are a proper part of our culture..... not like some of the other stuff at the Olympics Opening Ceremony."

"But the Stones' music isn't British really", protested Alan.

"Of course it is", retorted Brian. "They're British, so obviously it's British music isn't it?"

“Well, in the early days, when we were really young, we played rhythm and blues. That’s Afro-American music. It’s really from the Deep South of America. They reckon that it can be traced all the way back to West Africa, places like Mali. The first forms of it came over with the slaves. The only British influence there was that many of the slaves had been taken against their will from Africa to America on British slave ships.”

“Yeah, well, I suppose some of the Stones’ music has been from African-American roots, but they made it their own”, Brian replied somewhat sheepishly.

“Well, that’s right”, agreed Alan. “But that’s just it isn’t?”

“What is?”, asked Brian somewhat confused.

“Well, it was the mixing of cultures, which made the Stones so great. Just like a lot of other British things. They come from a lot of different cultures. When we are open-minded and curious about other cultures, we do best. That’s what the music of the Stones shows...”

“Well, you might be right I suppose...I hadn’t really thought about it that way before...”

Peter Sagar

Look for the Silver Lining

He carried his own case, holding it tight and checking every minute to see that it was still there.

“Did you pack this yourself sir?”

“Yes”, he proudly announced. “All my best things are in it.”

“Has anyone else opened it?”

“Yes. Mummy took everything out and then put some of it back again so there was room for her make-up. Can I go through that door now? I can’t wait.”

“Here comes the captain. I’ll tell him this is your first time in a plane. He will get the lady to look after you.”

“Thank you, but I am nearly seven.”

He hopped from one foot to another and managed to walk, not run, to the inviting gate with half an hour to spare.

He was startled to hear his own name on the tannoy.

“Paul Spender. Your parents are looking for you. Where are you? Tell someone in airport uniform where you are.”

“Excuse me. I am Paul Spender.”

“O.K. Paul. Stay with me in my little office and I’ll tell everyone you are safe.”

“Thank you. Who are all these people waiting on the other side? They’ve been there a long time.”

“I know. They are people who want to come and live in Britain. They have heard it may be better than where they live.”

“There are a lot of children. They look very unhappy and a lot of them are crying. Can you find them somewhere to wait instead of in that long queue?”

“Come with me and I’ll see what we can do.”

“Yes. Good idea. The children will be better off in Hall B. Well done.”

“Oh, it was Paul’s idea.”

“Well done Paul. Perhaps you can stay with them until your flight is called. I’m sorry you have had such a long wait.”

“Have you seen what’s happening in Hall B? There’s a young boy – he looks about seven or eight – talking to about fifty Asian children. He seems to be telling them about life in Britain. Not what’s in the government books though, about the population of Wales and where the Grand

National is run. He's telling them really useful things about schools and meals and the weather and what clothes to wear in winter.

"Thank you Paul. That was great. Those children were getting very tired and worried but now they seem alright. Perhaps you can come and do it again when you come back. It's been a great success. All because your plane was delayed and so you had to help us out. Everybody benefits – we airport staff are pleased, the children are now looking forward to living in Britain and it looks as if you might have a little part-time job here when you return. It looked like being a disaster, but its turned out O.K. Every cloud has a silver lining.

Colin Jenks

We're all too busy

I decided one relaxed sunny afternoon
To go to my local pub
To watch my favourite football team
Play away at another club

I got in to the pub just before kick off
It was then I began to worry
They didn't seem able to find the right match
They would certainly have to hurry

It seemed that the channel they were trying
Which was part of Arab tv
Was showing every Premier League game that day
All could be seen for free

So we ended up going round the grounds
As if it was already half-time
Finding the right match just as they kicked off
We were only just in time

I began to reflect on how many people
In many an Arab country
Were watching the Premier League that day
Just like my friends and me

I imagined a time in the future
When this common interest might save the day
Whether my team are playing at home or
If they are playing away

When hot heads in East and West decide
There is a clash of civilisations
And that we should all be called up to war
In defence of our nations

But across the West and the the Arab lands too
Young men refuse to answer the call
"We're all too busy" they defiantly say
We're all watching the football

Peter Sagar

Perfect Pitch

In Arthur's Hill and Elswick Ram Toby was well known.
He played guitar and sang as well
And learned the saxophone.

They said, "You'll get no money here. You can be sure of that
So find a decent pitch in town
And don't forget your hat.

"You'll need it when you're playing well. The crowds will flock around.
They'll throw their money in your hat.
A few pence or a pound.

Ram took the bus to Gallowgate. The crowds were strolling in.
They were happy, they were confident.
They knew their team would win.

Ram saw the player's entrance so he thought he'd go that way.
"Well, I'm a player after all.
I shouldn't have to pay.

"This looks a really decent pitch. I'll put my hat down here."
He did so and to his surprise.
He heard a roaring cheer.

The teams came out and ran around, just trying out their paces.
Ram thought he'd do his best to help,
So he played the Blaydon Races.

The game began but by half time there wasn't any score.
So Ram decided he would help
As he had done before.

The crowd were just astonished when he joined in the attacks.
A corner came, he missed the ball
But it bounced in off his sax.

"What did you get for playing?" asked his friend and neighbour Jeff.
"Ten thousand pounds from Ashley
And a red card from the ref"

Colin Jenks

A Trip to the Hospital

Alan and Tony are sitting in their usual corner of the local cafe, when they begin to have a lively debate on one of the topic of the day.

"No, you see you don't understand", says Tony firmly.

"Don't understand what?"

"It's all very well, all this welcoming immigrants here, but we can't cope with them. I mean look at the NHS. A great British institution that is. And now groaning at the number of immigrants who are using its services."

Just then Tony's mobile phone goes and before Alan can give his reply, Tony announces:

"Oh, that was my dad's care home. He's had another fall. He's in the General Hospital. I had better go in and see him now. I hope he hasn't broken his hip..."

"Yeah, I hope everything's O.K.", replied Alan. "See you soon."

Tony made his way to the hospital and after begrudgingly paying to park in the hospital car park (he couldn't see why you should be punished because a relative was ill),made his way to the Reception.

"My dad has had a fall. He's been brought in here. Where do you think he will be?"

"Try the Rapid Response Unit, he's probably there", the Receptionist replied in a voice which sounded to Tony as if it was from an automaton. She did manage a slight smile.

"Thank you", replied Tony quietly. He was about to walk off when he added, "er, where is the Rapid Response Unit?"

"It's on your left up there", the Receptionist said, whilst checking a computer screen, pointing to her right.

"Thank you".

Tony walked slowly up the corridor and as he did so an imaginary vice began to grip his stomach. What would he find at the RRU?

The Rapid Response Unit was a whirl of business, with people talking, checking charts, writing information down and tending to patients.wasn't sure where to go at first, as nobody seemed to be at the desk. Eventually he decided that the best course of action would be to just wait patiently at the desk and after a short wait, this wise action paid off.

"Yes, sir can I help you?", a tall nurse briskly asked.

"I've come about my dad. He's been brought into the hospital after having a fall."

"What's his name?"

"John Thornton".

The nurse consulted a chart.

"He's not here now. He's been transferred to Ward 3"

“Oh, O.K. Where’s that?”

“It’s along the corridor to your left. If you follow the signs, you can’t miss it.”

“Thank you.”

As Tony made his way dutifully along the corridor the same vice-like grip came over his stomach. Ward 3. What did that mean?

Tony soon found his way to Ward 3 and walked gingerly in. He found the desk, where an Oriental-looking nurse was sitting concentrating hard on a screen in front of her.

“Er, hello”, Tony said. “I’ve, er come to see my dad, John Thornton”.

The nurse looked up and smiled.

“John Thornton? Oh, yes, he came in here this afternoon”, the nurse replied. Tony noticed that her voice sounded East Asian. He had been to Thailand and then to China on a holiday a few years before and thought that the accent was probably Chinese.

The nurse looked up at a big board.

“He is down for bed 3. In that bay there”, she continued, pointing to a room just off to the left.

“Thank you”, Tony replied before walking off to see his dad.

Tony walked off through the bay to where he thought bed 3 was, but was confronted with an empty space where a bed should be. Panic began to course through Tony like a tsunami of fear. An empty space bed, where his dad’s bed should be. What did it mean?

Tony returned to the desk. The nurse was still there.

“The space for bed 3 is empty”, Tony said, trying not to betray his concerns.

“Yes. I’ve just been told that your dad is off for another x-ray. He had one earlier, soon after coming in, but it wasn’t conclusive. Sorry about that,” the nurse replied smiling. “Do have a seat. He shouldn’t be long”.

Tony sat down and waited. A few minutes later, he saw a bed being pushed down the corridor into the ward. With much relief, he saw his dad in it. He seemed O.K.

Tony smiled at the orderly pushing the bed and said he was glad to see his dad. He wasn’t sure that the orderly had fully understood what he had said. He was slightly darker-skinned and Tony thought that he was perhaps from somewhere like the Phillipines. The orderly smiled back.

Behind the bed was another nurse., a small blonde woman Tony asked her what was happening.

“It’s O.K. Your dad has been in for a second x-ray to see if anything was broken in the fall. The doctor should be along soon with the results.”

The bed in which Tony’s dad was lying was pushed back into its space by the orderly. Tony couldn’t help but notice how tired he looked. He simply smiled at Tony and left him to carry out further duties.

Tony sat on a seat near his dad’s bed and spoke to him.

“How are you”, he asked and immediately kicked himself metaphorically for asking such a seemingly stupid question. But what else do you say in these situations?

“Well, I was alright until this morning. I had just got up when my legs gave way. They just buckled under me“, Tony’s dad replied.

“Are you in any pain?”

“Well, yes a little. Down my right hand side. Just below my waist”.

“Near your hip?”, asked Tony hesitantly.

“Yes”, his father replied in a tired voice.

“Oh”, replied Tony quietly.

Tony wasn’t sure what to say. He just sat and looked at his dad, trying not to let him see how worried he was. After what seemed an eternity, a large black man arrived, with a stethoscope around his neck. He walked up to Tony and held out his hand. Tony instinctively stood up and shook hands.

“Hello. I am Dr Chebaye”, the doctor said in an African accent. “You must be Mr Thornton’s son.”

“Yes..... that’s right. I’m Tony. Pleased to meet you”.

“Well, as you probably know we’ve taken your dad in for two x-ray examinations. The second one is much clearer....”

Tony waited for the news.

“We thought at first that there might be a break in his hip, because he was in pain around there, but the second x-ray shows that although he has a lot of bruising around his right hip where he hit the floor when he fell, there is no break. He won’t need an operation.”

A wave of relief surged through Tony and crashed upon him, like a breaker on the beach at Tynemouth.

“Oh, that’s good”.

“Yes. But he will need to stay here a while. We need to get your dad get walking again and build up his confidence.”

“Of course”. There was a pause. “Well, thank you for the news” Tony continued. Dr Chebaye smiled and walked off to attend to other business.

“What did the doctor say?”, asked Tony’s dad.

“It’s O.K. The pain you are feeling is just bruising...”, replied Tony, again wishing that he had been a bit more tactful. “Er, not that the bruising is O.K. But your hip is not broken. You won’t need an operation.

“Good”, replied Tony’s dad, before closing his eyes.

After leaving the hospital, Tony gave Alan a ring on his mobile.

“How’s your dad?”

“Not too bad. I thought his hip might be broken, but it’s just bruised. He will be in for a while, but he’s going to be O.K.”

“That’s good”.

“It is, but it’s all been a little stressful. Do you fancy a couple of pints later?”

“Yeah. O.K. See you down the Crown later? About nine?”

“Yes, that will be fine”.

Alan was sitting there in the Crown as Tony walked in. Alan had bought him a pint.

“Oh, thanks Alan”, said Tony.

“A lot seems to have happened since we last spoke this afternoon”, commented Alan. “You were just saying how the NHS was on the brink of collapse due to immigration...”

“Yes, well, er.....I wouldn’t take those comments too seriously”, Tony replied somewhat sheepishly.

Peter Sagar

Pub Talk

"Neither of my two lads have worked for nearly two years. They've applied over and over but the jobs always go to immigrants."

"Well, they'll work for buttons".

"Aye, and some of them are really well qualified."

"That's right and they'll do overtime as well. Some of them do a fifty hour week - or more".

"Well, you can't expect us to work like that. This is our country. Like what that Nigel Farrago said - British jobs for British people".

"Is that the programme? Let's have a look."

"In goal, Farovic, two Stollen, three Ramuda, four, Wallasey...."

"What's happened to Gilberto - he's a great number four."

"Wants a transfer. Galatasary are after him, but Wallasey's not bad."

"Not bad for an Englishman you mean? I reckon we should keep Gilberto. Pay him double if we have to."

"But at least Wallasey's English. You've got to have some English in a Premier League team."

"No. It's the quality that counts. We'll start **a Keep** Gilberto campaign, starting today with a chant. 'Do Not Let him Go, Angio Gilberto.' I reckon the whole crowd will join in."

"That's it. We've got to keep the quality. Sell Wallasey to a lower division and use the cash to keep the Colombian."

Problem Solved.

Colin Jenks.

Human rights today

BURMA

The chance you have been waiting for all day and years has come at last. Across the world people are still fighting for their democratic right. Same are in Burma. Burmese people have been fighting for their rights for many years. Thousands are killed by the military regime; they come to their villages and attack the villages and kill men, women and also the children. Some time it can seem very difficult to fight back against powerful people. The Burmese people left their villages and houses, and people went to the other country to refugee camps in Thailand. Aung San Suu Kyi is the Burma democracy leader. Her father General Aung San was also fighting for their people. He was killed in 1948 and after him her daughter came back from England to take a place in the struggle for Burma democratic rights. Aung San Suu Kyi has spent 14 years out of the last 20 under house arrest. Aung San Suu Kyi is now an M.P in Burma. She left every thing for the Burmese people to fight for them. Some little but things are changed in Burma.

Slavery Trafficking

Slavery has so many kinds. In 18th and 19th centuries people were kidnapped and sold in other countries. And nowadays they promise girls and young women to get great jobs in another country. They left their home and country for a good job, but when they came to another country they have nothing, no job and money. They have bad jobs, less money. For their food and rent they borrow money from others. That is why they are stuck in the country and cannot go to their own country. They work hard; 12 hours a day and have less money. They live as a slave. They are worked until they are almost dead. They work night and day for tiny bit of food.

The Irish on Tyneside

1801 Ireland became part of the United Kingdom. In 20th century Irish became part of NE. Irish became Geordies.

The Irish begin to arrive North East England in large numbers in 1820 attracted by work in mines and the new industries which were developing in the region, such as shipbuilding, iron and steel and engineering. They have many social problems. The government of London did not help them. 1845 the Irish are very poor. They have nothing to eat only potato. They have their own potato famines, as they grow bad potatoes. The large number of Irish live in countryside. 1 million died by hunger and one million emigrated to USA, Britain, Liverpool, NE and Glasgow.

The local people did not like Irish to live with them, and also the local police. The Irish began fight against the police and local people. The local people also support the police against Irish. This is 1851.

In 1860's things begin to settle down between local people and Irish. Everything begins to be good between them. In USA large number of the police were Irish

.In 1916 in the First World War, a large number of Irish people take part in war and died. They fight by the side of Britain. After the war the local people think good about them.

Now there is a large Irish community in North East. They are the part of the local people now.

The Yemenis in South Shields

Yemenis began to settle in South Shields in 1900 when the Yemen /Aden became part of the British Empire. They Yemenis did not find it easy. In the early days, they were young and single men far away from their own home and jobless. Some local people did not like them, as they thought that they would take their jobs, but things changed in 1930. The Yemenis workers protested against the working conditions. The police beat the Yemenis. The Yemenis become poor and homeless. After August 1930 many Yemenis deported and put in prison. The local people of South Shields began to feel sympathy for Yemenis.

24th December 1931 Yemenis became accepted by the people of South Shields. They treated them good and in a better way. After 1930 Yemenis began to integrate in South Shields.

David Bean wrote in a newspaper on the 1st March 1962 that "Shields is a study in integration a place where colour prejudice died years ago." This means that in South Shields was a place where people were living together from different places and they had a different skin colour or a different kind of surname.

In 1977 the year the Queens Silver Jubilee, Muhammad Ali and his wife attended the South Shields mosque with their baby daughter, to have their wedding blessed by the Imam.

In 2001 after 9/11 the mosque were attacked but the community relations stay peaceful in South Shields.

The Yemenis community is the best and oldest Arab and Muslim community in the UK. Many of local girls married to Yemenis men.

Falak Naz

Do Broadcast It

“No! No! DO broadcast it! Don’t worry! It’s important that people across the world know about what is happening here. Don’t worry!”

With those words, Robert and his tiny film crew, consisting of Mike, the sound man and Will, the camera man, finished the interview and began to put their equipment away. Their interviewee, Floribert watched saying nothing. The three of them soon completed the task as they had had to work quickly with as little equipment as possible.

Floribert quietly opened the front door to his tiny ground floor flat and looked furtively up and down the street.

“It’s O.K. It’s quiet”, he whispered. Mike and Will quickly crept out of the flat and made their way towards the camper van, the three of them had hired, a camper van which made them look just like three tourists. Robert was last to leave. He turned and quickly shook Floribert’s hand. Floribert looked into Robert’s eyes and knew exactly what he was thinking. He spoke quietly and quickly.

“Don’t worry about me. What you are doing is good, so good. Get the film out so people will know the truth”, Floribert said and with that he turned, went back inside and gently closed the front door.

Robert, Mike and Will were all very quiet on the way back to the airport. They would soon hand over the keys to their hired camper van, conceal the film in their travel bags and board the flight back home. The worst that could happen would be that their film would be confiscated, before being unceremoniously deported. They were going home anyway. Soon Robert, Mike and Will would be safe back home, friends and family.

But what of those they had filmed?. Those who had gone on film, describing the daily harrassment of opponents of the regime, the desperate prison conditions endured by dissidents, the routine torture, the unexplained deaths. What of them? What of them when the regime sees the film they had been making. What would happen to the brave, principled people they had left behind?

“I’m not sure we should even show the film”, Robert said when all three were safely flying home, enjoying a beer courtesy of British Airways.

“We must”, countered Mike. “We went all the way to do it. Remember what Floribert said”.

“I know. But it’s so easy for us isn’t it? WE’LL be alright. Is it worth it?”

“Well, if the film can put pressure on our government to stop arming the regime, then it could save so many lives”, suggested Will.

“I know, I know”, was all Robert could say in return, staring out of the window at the cotton wool clouds as they opened up and closed again.

A few weeks after they returned home, one of the major television channels showed the film. It was widely praised and tipped for awards.

“Look at this review”, Robert’s boss said to Robert, the next morning, showing him his newspaper.

“Yes, that’s good”, replied Robert, but there was a faraway look in his eyes.

Robert determined to phone Floribert two days after the broadcast which had been watched by 6 million people on British television and a day after Ian Fearn, an Opposition M.P., put down an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons deploring the situation in Floribert’s country and the support the UK government was giving the regime. There was talk that the Foreign Secretary was going to have to come to the House to make a statement. Robert dialled Floribert’s number carefully, deliberately. He knew he had done it right. There was nothing at the other end. The line was dead.

Peter Sagar

The Sun Shines Brightly Today

The sun shines brightly down today
But on the horizon far away
Dark clouds gather with menace
An invading army waiting for the day

The cold winds of austerity are screaming
Through the land far and wide
Sweeping people along in their wake
Blowing away their hopes and their pride

But this has happened to us before
And people learnt to stand together
Marched to London with dignity and pride
Not looking for scapegoats for ever

Tensions rise like unwanted weeds
Amongst the flowers of hope and love
Threats are uttered in voices
Where thought has been strangled at birth

Books are burned on the internet
So easy to forget the plaintive view
Of the man who said that where you burn books
You will later burn people too

Yet we have had our violence before
When fiery riots and sly attacks begun
Misunderstandings were overcome
As we learnt to live together as one

Whilst well-mannered thugs sitting in judgement
Pass new legislation
Eroding hard-won rights
So their media masters can run the nation

Remember those who were taken from their rivers
Like cattle to the new world where they were sold
Remember how people stood with them
By the banks where our own river flows

Whilst differences are highlighted
For life can seem so much easier to understand
When a whole people can be summed up in a few spiteful words
Uttered out of hand

Once we built our communities carefully
Human bricks cemented with love
Showing how different materials
Can fit neatly together like a favourite glove

Now hatred drops through the letter box
Or hangs in the fetid air
Like in other places when

Darkness engulfed the light anywhere

Remember how we rejected those who came
Dressed in sinister black
Remember those who saved the living dead
And slowly brought their life back

Beware all those who will say
We have to turn our backs on neighbours and friends
That there is a bigger picture
That means are justified by ends

Beware the false prophets who promise Utopia
Of the perfect future ahead
If we are just prepared to shed our humanity
On a road paved with the dead

If we fall again into the abyss
Allow the brave and the innocent to die
The voices of the future will accuse us
Echoing down the years: Why? Why? Why?

Peter Sagar

A Ukrainian in Newcastle

My name is Victoria Simanovski and I was born in what was then the Soviet Union. I know live in Newcastle after coming here to seek asylum.

One story I remember from where I come from was about my friend's son. He had leukaemia when he was a small child and I have never forgotten their attitude towards him – they always felt he was strong, they had no doubt for a second in it. They were a really happy people during his disease.

Now he is an adult and the disease never came back to him.

I like Britain very much. I like everything. I've met so many great people here and I've learned so much about myself.

The best thing about living in Britain is that people can achieve what they want.

There are many good things about living in Newcastle; the people, the sea, the history and the culture.

Life in Newcastle could be even better if there were better transport links.

We can learn much from the past to help us now and in the future. We should always remember about some of the things which seemed eternal but do not exist any more like the idea of a flat earth, slavery e.t.c.

Victoria Simanovski

Not Seeing the Light

“Victory over the EU! An End to Loony Lightbulbs!”, screamed the headlines of two of the tabloids being sold in Mark’s local newsagent.

Mark saw the headlines out of the corner of his eye, as he made his way into the shop for a packet of Locketts to help him ease his raging sore throat, a condition not made any easier by the oppressive, muggy atmosphere that day.

Ahead of Mark in the queue in the shop was Mr Hutchinson, a tall balding middle-aged man with narrow dead eyes and a seemingly permanent sour expression. Mark tried to avoid him usually, but his sore throat was really bothering him that day. As he was wont to do Mr Hutchinson was expressing his opinions about the news, to Mr Jones, the long suffering shop owner.

“That’s good isn’t it?”, exclaimed Mr Hutchinson

“Er, yeah....”, replied Mr Jones.

“The news. About the lightbulbs. Daft lightbulbs the EU wants to force us to use...I mean honestly...we are no longer a sovereign nation...”

“Oh, the new lightbulbs which save energy?”, asked Mr Jones.

“Yeah.....the new lightbulbs. Stupid shape...I mean who invented lightbulbs? We did, so we can decide what shape our lightbulbs are going to be can’t we? It’s not the position of the EU to tell us. And the lightbulbs are so dark at first. They are useless”

”But they come on alright after a few seconds....and they say they save energy and help to combat global warming and climate change...”

“Global warming? Climate change! + Ha! You don’t believe that do you? A bit of rain and it’s the end of the world.... It’s all a myth! You will be telling me next that we’re going to get lots of funny weather! Or that refugees are all poor innocent victims! Oh, well it takes all sorts...”, and with that Mr Hutchinson picked up his newspaper and strode triumphantly out of the shop. At least he was smiling for once.

Mark went up to the counter and asked for his Locketts. His eyes briefly met those of Mr Jones – without having to speak, they both agreed with Mr Hutchinson about one thing; it does indeed take all sorts to make a world.

Thousands of miles away in a little town by the sea in Bangladesh the monsoon season was in full swing. The Chowdhury family watched as slowly, but surely, the flood waters rose and their home became a swimming pool.

“The monsoon is worse than ever”, commented Mrs Chowdhury.

“It is”, agreed Mr Chowdhury. “And the sea is higher. I’m sure. No wonder the river is flooding so easily at high tide.”

“What can we do? It will be better when the monsoon ends. But next year will it not be worse again?”

“It may well be. Soon our house will be washed away. We have no future here. Nearly all Bangladesh is so low. Only one metre above sea level....Where could we go?”

"What about your sister in Britain. Where does she live?"

"A place called Newcastle I think".

"Could she help?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. I just don't know."

.....
Two weeks later and Mark's sore throat has cleared up. The Lockets helped and he also decided that he felt better partly because the muggy weather had cleared up. He has popped into the newsagent for a pen for work.

"A pen please".

"Certainly, Mark", replied Mr Jones. "Did you forget one for work again?"

"Yes", replied Mark with a sheepish grin.

"The weather is fresher now", commented Mr Jones.

"Yes indeed. Since the storm last week. What a storm though. It was so dark when that cloud appeared...I thought it was the end of the earth".

"Well it wasn't.... not yet anyway".

"No, you're right. But it took me four and a half hours to get back to Newcastle from South Shields. It should only take twenty minutes. I was really looking forward to watching the match. Still I did get back for the last seven minutes. Oh, I tell a lie. The last eleven minutes. There were four minutes injury time as well".

Mr Jones smiled in return and handed Mark a black biro.

"Thanks", said Mark looking round furtively. "No doubt that Mr Hutchinson will have had something to say about the floods. I think I'll make my escape before he turns up..."

"Did you not hear?"

"No. Hear what?"

"He got flooded out in the big storm. He's had to go and live with his sister in Coventry."

Peter Sagar

Out of Africa

My name is Rodrigue Mba. I was born in Gabon in Central Africa, but now live in Newcastle.

I came here because I love the English language and I like to learn a new culture.

Here is an interesting story about a man in the Gabon. One man in my country used to live in the forest and he didn't like to live in a city or a village. Although the people used to ask him, "why do you like to live in the forest?", he used to say, "I love nature. Because it is the only place where we can find peace and quiet. So people called him, 'Man of Peace, Quiet and Truth'. Well, he spent his life living in the forest, sharing his time with the animals.

In my opinion British people are very reserved, but also they are very helpful. They love to party and go out at the weekend.

There are a number of good things about living in Britain. I love the freedom and justice. I like the educational opportunities for everyone.

Newcastle has a number of good things about it. There is the education, the way people go out at the weekend and also the accommodation.

Newcastle could be better. There could be less racism although I admit that is getting better. There also could be better job opportunities for all, like they give opportunities at school and education.

We can all learn from the past. I think people are better than a few years ago. There is less racism and people are absolutely involved in everything.

Rodrigue Mba

Phone hacking

Many people have had their mobile phone hacked into by newspapers. Newspapers hacked mobile phone from their offices and called their newspapers. Therefore they hacked the peoples mobile phones and to become famous for their stories.

One of the people hacked was the murdered school girl Milly Dowler. She was murdered when she was going home from school .Her family did not know about her.They thought that she was missing. She was missing for many days. The newspaper hacked her mobile. When the family contact her,her mobile was ringing. That way they thought that their flighter was alive. But after some days the police found the girl deat. She was not missing,She was killed.

This is a very bad thing the newspaper want to make a news story on her and create a suspense. The mobile phone hacker should be punished. The phone hacking should be stop and have a low about phone hacking. Former editors of the newspaper should also be punished.

Falak Naz

Reflections on the phone-hacking

The phone-hacking scandal raises a number of awkward questions about both the media in particular and society in general, in relation to human rights.

The invasion of privacy which was at the core of the phone-hacking was clearly in contravention of Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Article 12.

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

That it should happen to a dead schoolgirl or to somebody like Sara Payne, who had developed a friendship with Rebekah Brooks, makes this even more shocking.

Clearly newspapers have to get their stories from somewhere. However, it is also clear that they must use ethically responsible means and must also be careful how they use information they receive. They must be sure that they are doing everything they can to print the truth. The disgraceful coverage of the Hillsborough Disaster in The Sun, seemed to be caused by an editor taking someone's word for the information he received, without checking it from other sources.

There have been numerous other cases where newspapers have reported issues around minority groups such as asylum seekers unfairly. These stories give the general public a false view of what is happening in society and stir up prejudices and ill-feeling. It has been argued that the reaason why some newspapers do this is to cynically sell newspapers as there are enough prejudiced people around to buy them. It works neatly as their prejudice is then further increased by the one-sided stories.

Another point which the phone-hacking scandal raises is why did those working for the newspapers, especially The News of the World do it? Clearly they wanted to get access to information which would help them to write stories which in turn would be sensational enough for many people to buy the newspapers and make the newspapers money. They must have known it was morally wrong, especially in the case of hacking Milly Dowler's phone. Yet they still did it.

Perhaps they just thought that they were somehow above the law. Perhaps they assumed that because they were powerful and had in friends high up in the political world they would get away with it.

If so, what does that tell us about society? Nearly 250 years ago the Rev James Murray was speaking out against the corruption in North-east England, whilst others across the country were doing similar. What has changed? Do we need people to speak out again?

A Living Tradition

Languages

My first language is Pashto. The Pakistan national language is Urdu. All over Pakistan people speak Urdu. There are so many different languages in Pakistan. But in school and colleges they teach Urdu and English and speak in Urdu and English. In Pakistani school and colleges they teach other languages but people like most English.

I also learnt English in school and college. Some subjects in our school and colleges are in English. English is an international language. That way it is very important for all of us. English is used and spoken in every country. If we need a job or for high level studies English is best. English help us every time and in every place.

I know a little bit of Spanish. But it is very hard for me. I think it is little bit like Arabic, because the Arabs ruled Spain for so many years.

Urdu and English are very different from each other, but Urdu have also tenses like English. In English there are three main tense Past, Future and Present and Urdu have also three main tenses.

It is very difficult for us. We first think in Urdu and then write it in English. English is different in Pakistan from U.K and USA. In Pakistan we read "H" in a different way and in UK they read in different way. The difference is between speaking. Urdu is right and reads from right to left and English is straight and right from left to right. In phone or mobile numbers if the first number is "0" in Pakistan we says Zero but in UK it Zero comes first they says "0" for the first number.

We use many English words in our language. Most of the things names we says in English. we says pen and pencil like in English.

Nowadays most Pakistani use English words in their language. They speak any language Urdu, Pashto, Punjabi they most use English words. They show that we are educated and modern people. Now English is a symbol of modernity and style.

Both English and Urdu have idioms, sayings which don't make sense literally but have a special meaning. In Urdu we say, "a monkey can't eat cookies", meaning it's no use giving something to somebody who doesn't know what to do with it, and "it is like playing music to a cow", when people can't understand what you mean.

If someone has no degree and high level education but he or she most speaks English, the people like them and think that he or she is a very modern and high educated person because they know English.

Most of people in Pakistan and also in other countries they put their children in English schools. They think their children have to learn the English.

Most people from Pakistan also from other countries they speak English in their home with their children. Some of the boys and girls don't know their own language because they speak English in schools and also in their homes. But I think this is not a good thing. This is good and great thing to learn other languages but not forget our own language. Our national language is our identity. We don't forget our identity. We should respect all languages.

Many writers write their book in English because English is now the international language. Most people read English books of other languages. Most of English books translate into other languages. Because most people don't know English but they love different kinds of book from other countries. Most people like English novels, stories and books.

Conclusion: English language is not used only in schools, colleges and in job but it helps us in different parts of words. If you don't know other languages and it is hard to know and learn every language, if you know English it helps you in every step of your life. Now in the UK I realize that English is very important. If we want people to understand us and our religion and tradition we must communicate with other people.

Falak Naz

A Terrible Decision

This is a fictional account of a conversation but it is based on a true story.

Christine looked tired as she sat on the new sofa, a scented candle placed carefully on a small table, next to where Christine was sitting. She sighed and stared ahead at nothing in particular. Christine was grateful that her daughter had offered to look after that particular evening. It was only a week since her husband's funeral and Christine was still feeling very fragile.

They had been married for 39 years, since before the Second World War. And that was where the problems had started, problems that they had overcome in ways which had made their marriage so special but which now in bereavement had left Christine feeling so numb and empty.

Although Christine was English born, she had moved to Germany with her family when she was four and her husband Helmut, a very capable administrator, had been a German. They had been married when Christine was only 19, in 1932, and they had begun life together in Germany, just before the darkness descended like a terrible long shadow. Helmut had two parents who both had health problems, so they had opted to stay in Germany where by 1939, they were the proud parents of two young children.

At the outbreak of war Helmut had been called up to the German army, but due to his administrative abilities he had been given a desk job in Berlin, helping to organise the logistics of keeping the German people fed. Both Helmut and Christine had come to despise the Nazis and what they stood for. Helmut's job, while helping the war effort at least was involved in something which seemed honourable. It could have been much worse....

Christine of course, had been expected to stay at home and bring up her two children. She had wanted so much to do more, but it couldn't be – especially after Germany had invaded Poland in 1939. So she had settled down for a life of quiet domesticity, with both herself and Helmut trying to get through the war quietly, whilst fervently hoping for the downfall of the Nazi regime.

Then one day in 1943, as the fortunes of the war had begun to turn, there had come a knock on the front door...

Christine was thinking of all this, while still staring at the wall aimlessly, when her daughter Amy came in with two hot cups of tea.

"There you go mum", said Amy, as she put the cup down on the table next to the sofa. As Christine bent down to pick it up, the aroma of the candle filled her nostrils and she sat back again, without picking up the cup.

"Are you alright mum?", asked Amy with a note of concern.

"Yes. I was just enjoying the scent of the candle".

"You look like you could do with that cup of tea".

"Do I look that bad? Oh thanks...."

"I didn't mean it like that...oh mum..."

"It's alright...I was only joking. I probably do look tired. I haven't slept at all well these past two weeks."

"I know. Well, you will be well looked after tonight".

“Thanks Amy”

There was an uncertain pause, whilst Christine took the first sip of her tea.

“You seemed to be deep in thought when I came in”, said Amy, mentally kicking herself for being so clumsy. Perhaps her mum didn’t want to be reminded of what she had just been thinking. After an uncertain pause it seemed like her fears had been unfounded.

“It’s O.K. I was just thinking back...back to the early days....I have been doing a lot of that recently.”

“Of course”, Amy replied, as a small tear glistened in Christine’s right eye.

“It was hard you know. What with the war and the Nazis and all. Helmut was involved in the resistance...Only on the edge, but I often wonder how we got through it all alive. We were always under suspicion with me having been born in England. And then there was the bombing.”

“You both did so well mum. I’m so proud of what you and dad have told me.”

Yes, well....there is one thing I never told you. I don’t think your dad did either....”

“Oh?”

“One day in 1943, there was a knock on the front door late in the afternoon. It was early February, just after Stalingrad and it was getting dark.... The woman asked me if she could speak to me, so I let her in.”

As she spoke Christine clasped her two careworn hands together and rubbed them gently, resting them on her skirt. Amy sat transfixed waiting to know who the woman was.

After another pause, Christine went on in a whisper, which was barely audible.

“Well it turned out she was looking for people to shelter Jews. There were still a few who hadn’t been rounded up. She asked if we could help. She said there would be two, a man and a woman. The woman was only half-Jewish and would probably not raise any suspicions. Her husband was fully Jewish, but he was happy to stay in the cellar at all times.”

“What did you say?”

“I wanted to help, but I wasn’t really sure what to say, so I asked her to come back the next day, when I had thought about it. I then went next door to my neighbour. She was trustworthy and I wanted to know what she thought.”

“What did she think?”

“Well, I was shocked. She said ‘Don’t do it! Don’t do it! You will be caught and they and you will be sent to a concentration camp! I thanked her for her advice, before returning home”.

“What happened then?”

“Well, then your dad came home from work and I told him what had happened. He shook his head and spoke very quietly. He said, ‘my dear, a dictatorship is like a snake. If you hit in anywhere but the head it will rise up and bite you. The only way you can defeat it is to cut off its head.’ It was then that I realised that your dad was thinking of getting involved in plots to kill Hitler...”

“What did you say to the woman when she came back?”

“She came back the next day. I said that we could only look after the two Jews for two days and nights. They came two days later early on a Thursday morning, while it was still dark. When I awoke on the Saturday morning they were both gone. The man had neatly made up the little camp bed we had put up for him in the cellar”.

“Well, you did your bit...”

“No. I didn't. I found out later what happened to them. They were both captured and sent to Auschwitz. They both died there. Hitler turned me into a murderer.”

Christine and Amy sat in silence looking at each other. On each of them two teardrops were racing each other down their faces.....

Peter Sagar

Oleg and Nasrin

Oleg Bebenin

Oleg Bebenin is a newspaper writer. He was against the government and wrote against the government. That way the government did not like him. The Belarus government wanted to stop him from writing. After some time Oleg found dead in his home.

He committed suicide in his home but left no suicide note. He had no family and health problem. He was a very brave man.

But I think he did not commit suicide; somebody killed him. The people and his family think that the government did this by someone's hand. The government killed him and hanged him in his home, and it seemed that he had committed suicide.

Oleg wanted the people of Belarus to meet together and protest against the government. That way the Belarus government were not happy about this.

Nasrin Sotudeh

Nasrin is a lawyer in Iran. In June 2009 there was a disputed election in Iran.

The Iranian people think that the final results were not expected. They think that cheating had taken place in many parts of Iran. After some days the people protest and came out to the streets. The government wanted to stop them and some were being killed.

Nasrin defended them in court and she spoke against the Iranian government. The government arrested Nasrin in September 2010 for spreading propaganda against government. She was sentenced to prison for 11 years, and banned from being a lawyer for 20 years.

Nasrin Sotudeh is a woman in Iran, who is against the Iranian government. Women are second class citizens by Iranian law. They do not have the same rights as men.

And 100 years ago there was same thing in Britain. The women had no rights to vote. Some women wanted to change this law. The British government put them in prison.

Emily Davison was one of them. She wanted to change the law, but she was killed in a horserace.

Nasrin and Emily their are same. They both wanted to change the law. They are against the government. They protest against the government.

Britain

Some days ago I read about mobile phone hacking in Britain. I did not think those things would happen in Britain. Many of the newspapers were hacking people's mobile phones.

They hacked the mobile phones of famous people for their newspaper and make stories and wanted to make their newspaper famous. In the big countries like Britain this is a very bad thing. The British government should make a law for them and stop the newspapers and should punish those people involved. Britain is a civilised and most powerful country in the world. Nobody thinks these things would happen in Britain.

When I am came to Britain I did not think those things in Britain because Britain's law is very strict. Nobody can do bad thing against law and nobody can break the British law.

Falak Naz

A View From the Millin Centre

My name is Kirsty McDine and I am the community development worker at the Millin Centre in Benwell. My role involves working directly with the local community and tailoring courses and services to meet the needs of members.

This enables me to meet new people on a daily basis, many from diverse backgrounds, allowing me to learn lots about different cultures. Millin Centre holds many courses and events which bring people together to develop their skills, improve their confidence and meet new people.

People who attend the Centre are often keen to learn from each other. For instance, our cooking programmes encourage people to share traditional recipes and teach others how to make it. It is nice to watch how people support each other in what they are doing and see how people benefit from taking part. Some centre users have not lived in the UK for very long and regularly find Millin Centre a place where they can make friends and learn about the area.

Although our service users are from a variety of different backgrounds, they often share the same values. I have found that everyone is happy to help and support one another as they have all experienced times in their lives where they have needed this from others.

During my time at Millin Centre, I have been able to watch as people have joined Millin Centre programmes not knowing many people and lacking confidence but who have then went on to attend several projects at Millin Centre where they have played an active role in sessions and building strong friendships with other members.

In the future, I would like to see even more people using the Millin Centre to develop their skills, become more confident and make new friends. The centre is open for everybody to attend, and we tailor make our courses in line with local need. We are also on a journey and are happy to learn from others to develop what we can offer the community. There is much we can learn from the past by how people have learnt to work together. This is something I look forward to seeing more of in the future.

Kirsty McDine

Coming to Britain

My name is Akhtar Majeed. I was born in Azad Kashmir in Pakistan. I now live in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The reason why I ended up coming to live here is that I married a girl and she made me come to live here!

Back in Pakistan, in the Punjab Province, people like to fly kites to welcome Spring. This is called Basant. They use the top of their houses to fly the kites. Sometimes this causes tile to become loose and they fall down from the house roofs.

Britain is a good country to live in. People are very nice and helpful.

The best thing here is the rule of law and the equal opportunities for everybody.

Newcastle is a beautiful small city, where the people are nice and friendly. It could be better if more jobs were created.

Akhtar Majeed

Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?

"I'm sorting out Dad's estate. Both your children get thirty thousand pounds."

"I thought that once the minor legacies were paid, and expenses of course, all four grandchildren were to get a quarter share of the residue and he had over two hundred thousand, mostly in shares. He often showed me his documents: he was proud of what he'd achieved."

"Yes, but he changed his mind. He decided to share it out different."

"So who gets it?"

"The children share a hundred and sixty thousand."

"That's not too bad then, forty thousand each."

"No, it's not equally divided. My two get fifty thousand each and your two get thirty."

"Why the big difference? He was always in favour of treating the four grandchildren exactly the same."

"It's because their mum died. Sort of compensation. I suppose you'd call it sentimental reasons. Anyway that's the way he wanted it."

"Who drew up this will, and what happened to the other?"

"Oh, I drew it up and saved all those fees. I've still got the other one."

"Yes. I've got my copy as well, drawn up by a solicitor of course. But you say you drew up the new will. How did you know what to do?"

"You think I'm not capable, don't you? You always have. I got a president from the law centre. It only cost £4.50."

"A precedent?"

"Yes. It's all in there. I didn't read the notes though. I just copied the precedence and filled the details in and saved the lawyer's fees."

"And you got two witnesses?"

"Yes, I got my two children. I would have got your two as well but there wasn't time."

"I'm glad you didn't."

"Why's that?"

"Well, if you'd bothered to read the book instead of just copying out something you didn't understand, you would have seen that witnesses can't inherit."

"So that means the will's no good?"

"No, the will's valid alright. It was properly witnessed so what it means is that your two get nothing and my two get eighty thousand each. As someone* said centuries ago, "A man who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client." But I don't want you to be out of pocket. Here's a fiver. Keep the change."

*usually thought to be Dr. Johnson but many authorities dispute this.

Colin Jenks

The Sins of the Grandfather

This is a fictional story, but is based on a real event.

Willy couldn't sit still in his seat in the station in the little German town he called his home. There were still a few minutes until his train was due and so he paced around the platform like a restless tiger stalking his cage. After what seemed like an eternity, Willy saw the train pulling into the station. He picked up his bags and with a heavy heart, climbed onto the train and found his seat in the standard class.

As the train made its way East, so Willy tried to read the novel he had brought with him. However, he soon found that he couldn't concentrate on more than a few paragraphs at a time and so he gave up and looked listlessly out of the window. The darkening grey sky as the afternoon slanted in from the East and the flat monotonous landscape calmed Willy's nerves, but only at the expense of a deep melancholy feeling. Thankfully at length, he was able to drift into a listless sleep.

In a dream he saw the face of his grandfather, the grandfather he had never known personally, but knew only too well from the commentary of others. Willy's grandfather was standing proudly in his gleaming uniform, with a sly, smug smile on his face, just as in one of the photographs Willy had seen of him, still taunting Willy from beyond the grave. Over time, the face faded into a deep, dark void.

When Willy awoke it was dark but outside of the window he could clearly see the lights of a large city. The train slowed down and shortly platforms appeared, with signs bearing the name of the station. Warsaw. Willy found his way to his hotel and was soon tucked up in bed, drifting in and out of sleep. When he awoke a few hours later in the first light of dawn, he found that one of his pillows was on the floor and the rest of the bedding in utter disarray.

Having spent most of his time at the breakfast table, lethargically playing with his food, Willy gave up, settled the bill and made his way back to the station. There he had to make a phone-call.

"Aleksander I am here. Are you still coming with me?"

"Yes, yes of course. You sound tired."

"I did not sleep well."

"I understand. It is not easy for you. Still you have got this far. I will help you the rest of the way."

"Thanks...I am at the entrance to the station now. The next train is in 40 minutes."

"That is O.K. I will be there in 15 minutes."

Aleksander was as good as his word and soon Willy and Aleksander were on the train south. They sat in silence for a while, before Willy chose to break it.

"Thank you for coming with me. It's not easy. I feel so bad."

"But you shouldn't. It was nothing to do with you. You weren't even born. Your own father was only a child."

"I know. I know. But I still feel responsible for all...."

"Well don't. And you are doing the right thing. Stick in there Willy. It will be O.K."

The conversation drifted into other areas and the journey passed uneventfully. Eventually the destination hove into view and Willy could see a sign for the station. Oswiecim. A ghostly shiver went down his spine.

“Well, here we are Willy”, said Aleksander.

“Yes. Here we are”, Willy replied quietly.

It took them both a while to locate where the buses were that would take them to the camp. Willy’s stomach churned over like a food mixer. When Aleksander offered to share a sandwich with him, he politely said no. After a short time they found the buses and boarded them. Willy hesitated as he began to climb on board.

“Nearly there Willy, nearly there“, Aleksander whispered.

Willy did not reply, but with a great struggle, he did manage to get on board the bus. The door soon closed, the engine was revved up and then there was to be no turning back. The bus made its way through the grey landscape, which even the sun seemed to have forsaken.

.....

In one of the Education Rooms a small group of Jewish students had been listening intently to a moving talk from Avi Cohen, a Holocaust survivor. He was just finishing a question and answer session, when Willy and Aleksander entered. Avi turned round to greet them.

“Ah, here are our special guests, as I was saying”, Avi said with a slight smile.

“Hello everybody”, said Aleksander. Willy said nothing and looked at the floor.

“Do you want to introduce yourselves?>”, asked Avi.

“Yes, sure”, replied Aleksander. “I am Aleksander and I am the Director of the Polish Institute for Community Relations. And this is.....”

“My name is Willy and I, I am....”, Willy’s voice trailed off.

Willy looked at Aleksander and gently shook his head. He stepped back. It looked as if he just wanted the corner of the room just to swallow him up. Aleksander looked at Avi and the group of students, who by now were puzzled as to who this particular special guest was. After an awkward pause, Aleksander decided he must speak again:

“This is a friend of mine. His name is Willy and his grandfather was the Commandant of this death camp from 1943 until it was liberated by the Soviets in January 1945.”

There was a clearly audible gasp from the students present. Willy stepped forward slowly and stood in front of the students, willing his right leg not to shake so clearly. In a quiet voice, which was almost a whisper, he began to speak:

“Yes, it is true. My name is Willy Hoess and my grandfather was the commandant of this death camp for two years, He oversaw the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews....of gypsies....homosexuals....he was a mass murderer”, Willy’s voice trailed off into a distant place, somewhere where a deep pain smothered everything in its wake.

After a long silence, Willy began to speak again:

"But I am only 47 years old. I was born long after the war. My own father was just a child during the war. He used to play in the small stream, which ran past the camp, while....while...." At that point Willy found he could go on no longer. A small tear broke free from his right eye and slowly made its way down his face. Willy just stood there in front of the students, flanked by Aleksander and Avi.

"I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry..."

One of the students tentatively raised his hand. Avi suggested that he ask a question if he wanted to.

"Why are you sorry? It was not your fault. You were not even alive. And why have you come here?"

"I feel guilty, because I know that I had a mass murderer in my family. It has always been there in my life. For years, I tried to hide it....but I always knew. I have come here because I hope for something, anything to lose this bad feeling inside of me. I am haunted as well, by what happened here, all those years ago."

"That is such a shame", the student said. "It seems like you are a victim of the Holocaust too. Perhaps the last victim."

At that point another tear welled up in Willy's right eye and began its journey south. Avi walked slowly over to Willy and embraced him. Willy returned the embrace and as a rare shaft of sunlight broke through the nearby window, so Aleksander saw a gentle smile cross Willy's face.

Peter Sagar

The Bishop's Visit

I am originally from the South Western tip of India. Around 52 AD St Thomas one of the disciples of Jesus Christ came to this part of the world and brought Christianity. Our Church is similar to the Russian Orthodox, the Egyptian Orthodox and the Greek Orthodox churches with regards to the service. Our Bishops wear long black gowns with a head gear. Our Bishops also wear long beards. Recently our Bishop came to Newcastle to celebrate the festival of a saint.

The Bishop and I were walking up Westgate Road looking for the shop specialising in making garments for members of the clergy. The Bishop, felt cold in the freezing weather and accordingly was wrapped up head to toe in his long black gown, with his head covered with an embroidered head dress with 12 crosses representing the 12 disciples. I was wearing a pair of jeans and a cardigan and was clean shaven. As we walked up the street, we were being given suspicious looks from passers by and from passengers in cars. A police car that passed by with two policemen in it did not take their eyes off us.

When we reached the shop, the attitude and behaviour of the receptionist and the seamstress took us completely by surprise. They were very polite and friendly to us and very respectful towards the Bishop.

The main purpose of going to the shop was to get a maroon shirt and collar worn by Bishops in the Western World. This would identify our Bishop as a Christian and not as a suspected Muslim terrorist....

Later on we went to the Central Station to escort the Bishop on to the train bound for London. As we went on to the station again we were faced by suspicious looks by the other passengers. When the train arrived and we boarded the train, there was a white gentleman eating a sandwich in the corridor. He gave us all sour looks and what appeared to me, looks of hate. Once the Bishop had been settled in it was time for myself and my friend to leave the train and we bowed our heads for the Bishop to bless us by touching our foreheads. As he did this we each crossed ourselves. The gentleman who had been eating the sandwich and had been watching the whole scenario looked at us this time and smiling, nodded his head at us in acknowledgement!

Raju George

What of the future?

What Was all the Fuss About?

It is the year 2050. and the NewcastleGateshead Quayside has become the major tourist attraction in the country. The new museum of Northumbrian life, outlining the rich history and great achievements of the people of North-east England, sited along the southern bank of the Tyne, between the old Baltic Art Gallery and the Gateshead International Stadium has become a model for many other cities. To be fair, some people are voicing concerns over the inexorably rising river, as the temperatures worldwide continue to rise and to children the Arctic ice becomes something that is seen on film from the old days. But otherwise Tyneside is doing fine.

Indeed it is doing so well that people look back at the past with some amazement. Was it really so hard in the old days forty or so years ago?

Many prefer to look further back, to the 19th century. They remember how North-east England had been at the forefront of so much that was new, that was exciting. They remember how a great monument was built to commemorate the start of the drive towards Britain being a democracy, how people had worked together to build networks of mutual support and solidarity through their trade unions, through their cooperatives, through their chapels. They remembered the great scientific achievements too; the invention of the railways, the invention of the lifeboat, the world's first turbine-driven ship and how Mosley Street in Newcastle was the first street in the world to be lit by electricity. They remember how the Mauretania held the Blue Riband as the fastest cruise liner across the Atlantic Ocean for nigh on 20 years; even if the rest of the world still only seems to remember the ill-fated Titanic.

People today are not so keen to remember the bad times. The terrible struggles of the time between the two world wars, the sufferings that led to the General Strike, the unemployment in the coalmines and the shipyards, the Jarrow March all seemed like a bad dream. The same is said of the 1980's when Consett steelworks were closed, as pits closed and then eventually in the early years of the 21st century, even the mighty Swan Hunters shipyard sold off its cranes and an end came to centuries of shipbuilding on the Tyne.

Yet even these hard times are seen by some as a source of inspiration. No more can the North-east be pushed around, be at the whims of national or global economic priorities. The cold winds of economic recession can still blow over the North-east, but no longer can they blow the economy off course. The resourcefulness of the people has made sure of that.

What people really look back in amazement at, is the furore about immigration in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The children do a course in schools as part of their history lessons looking at bias in the press and how we should always have a press which tells the truth. Freedom of the press is still seen in 2050 as vitally important, but now the press and media, which these days is mostly online, have to tell the truth and present balanced stories. Children are sometimes amazed at how it used to be, how some newspapers used to be so bigoted and used to tell so many lies. They are even more amazed at how so many people used to believe them.

The great turning point had come with the Leveson Inquiry in the early 2010's. The corruption and bad practices of some sections of the media were exposed and the industry, in association with the National Union of Journalists, began to clean up its act. The

Hillsborough Report, back in 2012, which showed how one particular newspaper had lied appallingly in 1989, reinforced the feeling that things had to change. Many ordinary journalists were delighted that their honest reporting was now being represented properly by those who owned and managed the newspapers.

The stories which people now look back at with such disbelief were the stories about immigration and asylum seekers. It is hard for people now to imagine why they were written and even more why they were read. It looks like such a brutal, savage time, when some people seemed so afraid of those coming to live amongst them.

Some had indeed been racists. These were people who couldn't understand how people who looked a little different, or whose cultures were slightly different still shared most of the same human characteristics. They still needed to feed themselves and still needed to look after their families, which they loved. They still bled when they were cut, they still cried with joy or sadness depending on the circumstances. Hard-core racists couldn't understand any of this. But the real racists were on the margins of society ignored by most.

Then there was another group. These weren't really racist, but could act in racist ways. They were just a little worried about what was going on. They seemed to see more people around who weren't quite like them. Then a mosque was built and it looked different to the familiar churches, the minaret somehow alien compared to the reassuring church steeples or towers, although all pointed upwards to a vision beyond the clouds. Then somebody said that there was going to be an Islamic Centre in the neighbourhood and some people had visions of terrorist cells working there. The truth was that nobody really knew what it was and that bred uncertainty and fear.

There were those who looked back to their youth with nostalgia, just as older people do now. They remembered years like 1953, huddling round a neighbour's television to watch the Coronation, or to watch Stanley Matthews at the age of 38, causing the Bolton Wanderers defence so many problems that Blackpool could come back from 3-1 down to win the F.A. Cup Final 4-3. They remembered the pride in Britain when Everest was conquered, although in reality it had been scaled by a man from Nepal and another from New Zealand. That's O.K isn't it? Don't we all look back wistfully to the days of our youth, when the sun always seemed to be shining and our lives were ahead of us full of hope and promise and sometimes want to turn the clock back?

With people worried about immigration and fed exaggerated and one-sided stories by much of the media at the time, it is perhaps no wonder that there were those who would try and manipulate people's genuine fears for their own ends, to make money or for political gains. But it still looks strange looking back from now, in 2050.

It was perhaps in the schools that the real change took place. There young people became friends and if you liked someone that was enough. If your friend could make you laugh and help you through all those changes, which still seem to come thick and fast when you are in your teens, then what did it matter what colour they were or what their surname was?

The fear of terrorism subsided as well. It was interesting how that happened. The governments of the world, for all their fine talk in the end had little or nothing to do with it. It was ordinary people who made friendships with those around them and started talking to each other about what they had in common; love of their families, their hopes and fears for the future, the joy and sadness at the heart of all our lives.

They got sick of all the extremists on all sides and those who peddled hate soon melted away like springtime snow.

In the end it all settled down. People remembered that the history of Tyneside, indeed the history of Britain was a history of immigration. People started to recognise just how much incomers could add to our economy, to our culture, to our lives. Even by the late 20th century, over 50 years ago, it was said that the British national dish was no longer fish and chips, but chicken balti. Even the much maligned asylum seekers, many of whom had come here to escape war or persecution showed that they had much to offer. It was even whispered that many of them held degrees and had skills we needed and that many had had to flee their homes because they were clever and talented and seen as a threat to the regimes where they lived.

Now in 2050 so many fears have gone. Some of our children might have Asian or Eastern European surnames. But they all speak with Geordie accents and many proudly wear the black and white shirts of Newcastle United. The mosques are now hidden by new housing and people walking past them notice them no more than they would a Roman Catholic church. After all it is still the traditional church steeples and towers which dominate the skyline. It is so hard looking back to the early 21st century, to understand just what all the fuss was about.

Peter Sagar

And finally

It is a cold day and Alan and Tony are talking in their café. Alan is telling Tony about how he has just learned some of the great stories from Tyneside's heritage and community cohesion. Tony is less than impressed.

"Well that's a II very well, but all these old stories.....what have they got to do with us now? What use is all this history?"

"Lots of use"

"How?"

"Well we can learn from the way people did things in the past. We can see how people fought for their rights, helped others across the world, learnt to live together...."

"Yes, but it's all in the past... How can history really be relevant to us today?"

Alan sat for a moment, thinking, while Tony looked on patiently. Well, reasonably patiently.

"Come on then.....what has it go to do with us?", Tony asked.

"Well, it's like this, I suppose...."

"Yes?"

"Well, as I was saying, it's like this. Imagine you were kidnapped by someone on the way home from here. They blindfold you and take you many miles to somewhere you have never been before"

"Right, O.K., but what has this to do with history?"

"Well....now imagine that you got to the same place by driving there using a map or sat nav to help you get there. You would know where you were, you would understand where you were....."

"Yes, but what has this got to do with history?", asked Tony somewhat perplexed.

"Well, it's the same with history as the scenario above. If you read history and learn from the past, you know how society has got to where it is and it helps you understand society. If you don't learn from the past, then you are like the person who is blindfolded and ends up somewhere and they don't know where it is or how they got there. Understanding our past is the key to understanding our present..."

"So, if we learn how people fought for their rights, we might value them more, if we learn how communities came together, we might be able to keep them together, if we learn how we helped others across the world, we might be inspired to do the same....."

"Exactly!"

Peter Sagar