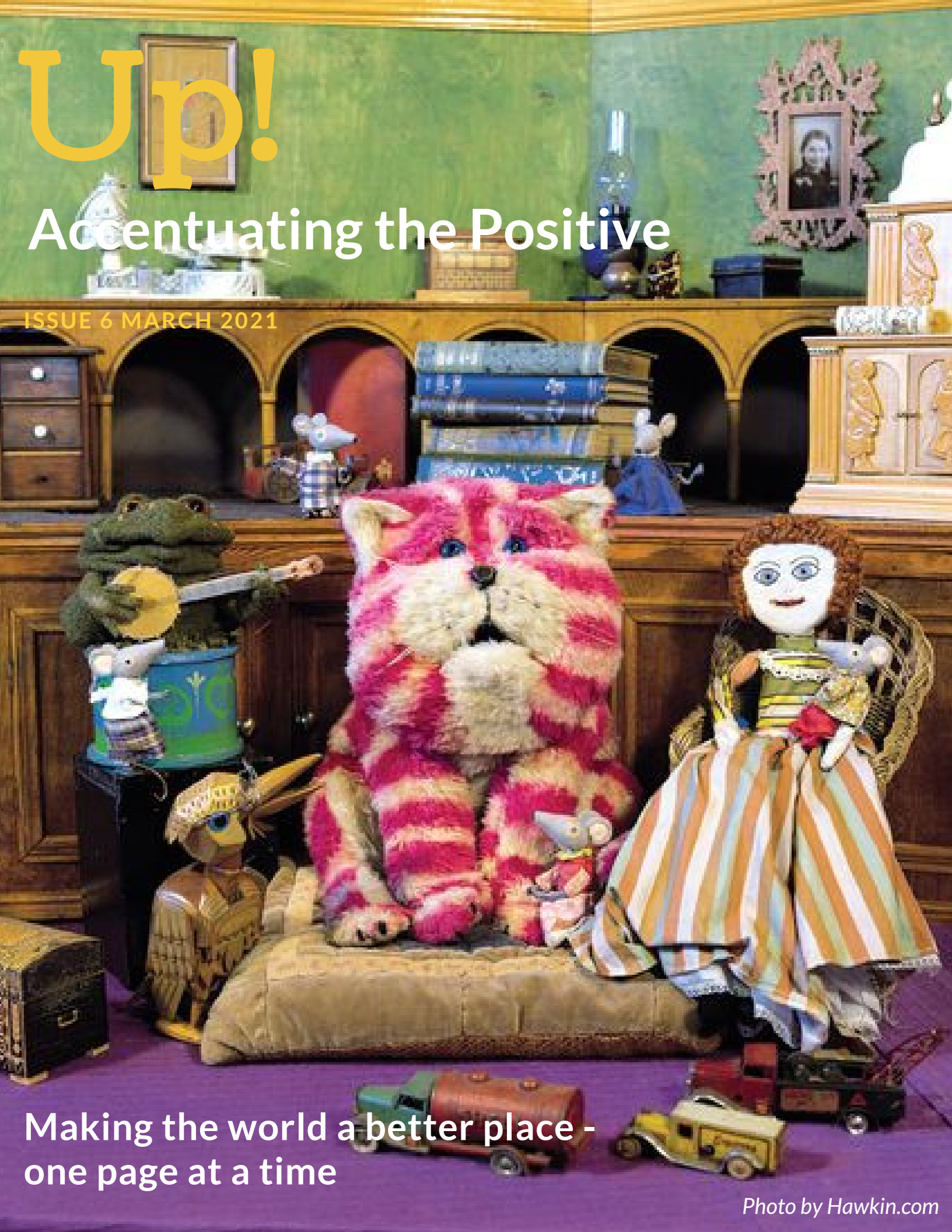


# Up!

## Accentuating the Positive

ISSUE 6 MARCH 2021



Making the world a better place -  
one page at a time

Photo by Hawkin.com

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Photograph by Steve Lowe

# Up Front!

Welcome to the new edition of Up! - we are 6 (months!) Whilst for now any birthday celebrations will have to remain virtual, we are so pleased to see light at the end of the Covid tunnel, with the national vaccination programme now well under way, thanks to our marvellous NHS. In particular we'd like to thank all of the NHS staff and other volunteers who've selflessly enabled this to happen by so generously giving of their time to help the rest of us stay safe.

So what are we doing to celebrate our 6 month anniversary? Well, by the time you've finished this issue you'll see that we're looking to the long term. We don't know about you, readers, but we reckon that good news will always be needed, not just in the dark times of a pandemic.

For now though, put the kettle on and enjoy March's 'Childhood Memories' issue with our usual mix of fantastic features, poetry, interviews etc. We're particularly thrilled to feature two north-east stalwarts - the legendary Sandra Kerr and BBC favourite Bob Fischer - both of whom have been involved in some top vintage TV. So put your slippers on, grab your favourite saggy old cloth cat and pour yourself a glass of summer wine!

Bridget & Harry x

# Catching Up!

BOB FISCHER

**Up! speaks to Teesside's Renaissance Man about the joys of being a 'Summer Wino'**

**Bob, you're a man of many interests. Writer, sometime broadcaster and aficionado of niche vintage culture – we're not sure where to begin! Tell us about your current project, your 'Summer Winos' book ...**

Well, I have this friend. Drew. Or Andrew T. Smith as he's known professionally. Nowadays he's a proper film producer and director, he works with puppets. On Thunderbirds! But when I first met him back in 2005 he was but a callow youth from Gateshead with an unhealthy interest in Last of the Summer Wine. Which was something I shared, and we kind of bonded over it. We'd spend hours in the pub perfecting our Wally Batty impersonations.

In 2010, when Last Of The Summer Wine ended, we watched the final-ever episode at my house and - as the closing credits rolled - he flippantly suggested we then watch the first-ever episode, and keep going until we'd done the lot. As we're both incapable of having a hobby without turning it into a "project", that quickly became a blog ([summerwinos.co.uk](http://summerwinos.co.uk)) where we posted a few rambling thoughts about every single episode in turn.

And then it really spiralled out of control. We made little location-hunting films in Holmfirth, we made friends with Jonathan Linsley - who played Crusher in the show in the 1980s - and brought him back to Sid's Cafe for a sold-out "Evening With". We took a show about our obsession to the Edinburgh Fringe



in 2018, and toured nationally in 2019. We played London's glittering West End! To about 50 people, but it was wonderful. Alexei Sayle had been on the same stage the night before. Probably to more than 50 people.

And the book is the next step. It's a hugely-expanded version of the blog, so in 371 pages we manage to cover the first five years of Last Of The Summer Wine, 1973-1978. Reviewing each episode in turn, and digging out some fascinating stuff - audience feedback from the time, contemporary newspaper reviews, and we keep a close eye on the changing prices on the blackboard in Sid's Cafe. 12p for a steak pie in 1973.

**Tell our readers something about The Last Of The Summer Wine that they might not know ...**

What's fascinating about the very early years is how dark and melancholy they are. The first few series were basically post-watershed comedy... it went out on Monday nights at 9.25pm. And they're very much a reflection of early 1970s, post-industrial Yorkshire: the buildings are coated with soot, the countryside is dotted with abandoned mills.

It's not about "old people" having fun in the late summer sunshine, it's about three single fiftysomething men who have been written off by society. And are hiding in filthy barns smoking roll-up fags because they've been thrown out of the library. It's desperately sad and shocking at

# Catching Up!

BOB FISCHER

times, but also beautifully funny. Those early years are like Alan Bennett directed by Ken Loach.



In addition to Summer Winos, you've also had a book, 'Wiffle Lever To Full', about cult TV fan conventions. What is it about 70s & 80's culture that fascinates you?

I maybe have an odd relationship with nostalgia. I don't know... I'm very much not an "everything was

better in the old days" kind of person. I don't want those days back. But I am fascinated by raking over the tiny details of 1970s and 80s pop culture. It was just an incredibly fecund creative period, and a time when culture was maybe more of a shared, communal experience.

When Tom Baker regenerated into Peter Davison in Doctor Who, that was a seismic moment for kids of my generation, and we all watched it at the same time and re-enacted it in the playground on the same Monday morning. And that influence has lingered. It was intriguing to visit conventions and find fortysomethings who were still talking, decades later, about the impact those few seconds of TV had on them as children.

I think we were maybe the first generation of kids for whom TV was an absolutely vital, all-consuming part of our childhoods. And the TV of that era was wildly inventive and unfettered. And often deeply inappropriate with hindsight, but it made a lifelong impression. All of that fascinates me.

Readers of a certain vintage will also remember with shudders the Public Information Films of that era. 'Lonely Water' for one scared the bejaysus out of your interviewer ("I'll be back...back...back...back"). You've written about these things for the Fortean Times, just what was it with that era? I mean, was there something in the tea leaves?! There's definitely an aesthetic. Just a feeling. It's kind of nebulous, but that's part of the appeal. There's just something melancholy and sinister and yet oddly comforting about so many of those things: Bagpuss, Public Information Films and the Open University programmes on BBC2. A kind of rustic charm. I was late to the party, but I began to realise about 10 years ago that there was an artistic movement exploring these feelings of almost cosy unsettlement... it's become known as "hauntology", although naturally a few people don't like that label.

Up! first got to know you when you were broadcasting every day at BBC Tees. Now that you're on a break from the studio and writing, what are you working on - what's next?

I've a few more magazine features commissioned - one of which is really niche 1970s nonsense, even by my standards! And I'm working on a Haunted Generation book. Drew and I have the next Summer Winos book to start, too.

I'd like to write a novel, and a couple of short films. More live performance when I can get

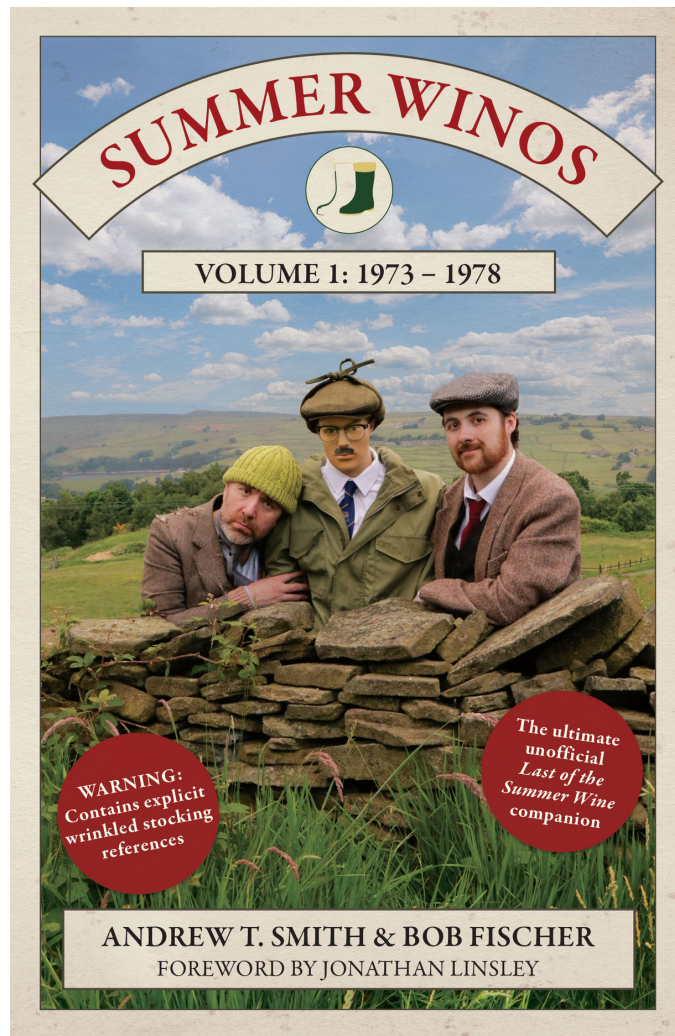
# Catching Up!

BOB FISCHER

back to it: we're scheduling more Summer Winos dates, and I'm also keen to tour again with Ste Brotherstone and Dave Lawrence, the two guys who wrote the brilliant Scarred For Life books about 1970s and 80s TV. We'd just started doing that when the first lockdown hit. Is Sandra Kerr in this issue as well? We've done live shows together too, and I'd like to do more of those! I'm quixotic, really. Full of crazed ambitions, and racing against time a bit. I feel like I maybe should have been doing all this stuff years ago.

*You can discover more about Bob's  
fascinating world here:*

[www.summerwinos.co.uk](http://www.summerwinos.co.uk)  
[www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk](http://www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk)  
*@bob\_fischer on Twitter*



**Nora Batty:** *"I wonder sometimes if you would ever miss me if I left."*

**Wally Batty:** *"We could give it a try."*

**Ivy:** *[yelling] "When are y' going to look at me sink?"*

**Sid:** *"Any time you can arrange to sink, love, I'd gladly come and have a look."*

**Clegg:** *"It's the only thing that worries me about going to Heaven. Would I ever get used to the height?"*

# Write Up!

## POEMS ON THE THEME OF CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

**Mr Kreb**

Stick-dry he stalks the aisle between the desks  
dragging his stink of tobacco and wet tweed.

Speaking in tongues, riddles of quadratic equations,  
I cannot understand his explanations.

Formulae repeated, incantations, shouted  
louder for those he believes are hard-of-thinking

who gaze dismayed at unfamiliar sigils,  
chalked symbols, letters replacing reliable numbers.

Classmates answer hesitant or confident.  
Correct gets a grunt; wrong a snort of derision.

His yellow eyes light on me, he rasps my name  
then groans, "Never mind, a waste of time."

Wafts a dismissive hand and like death's angel,  
he passes over and I think that suits me  
just fine.

**Tom Moody**

**Summer Days**

Bull Island Sanctuary, Dublin.

My mam set out with four of us on the bus -  
bag laden with cosies, sandwiches and spare clothes.

Infinite blues; sea and sky merging, no frontiers.  
Bird beat; waders, oystercatchers, zen-like herons.

We stood on one leg until we fell, splashed about,  
ate our sand filled lunch, as mother's nose twitched.

Trudged home across the long bridge trailing  
wet wool togs and towels. Back to order.

My heart's in those grainy dunes.  
Keening sea birds summon me home.

**Rona Fitzgerald**



# Tune Up!

SANDRA KERR

Up! talks to a north-east music legend

So, Sandra Kerr – singer, songwriter, musician, tutor, choir meister, Bagpuss soundtracker and all-round folk legend ... anything we've missed out?

I think you've more or less covered it... I suppose what I'd most like to add is the politics, really. I grew up in the East End of London in a working class family of socialists, and that philosophy and set of principles has stayed with me ever since. It was nurtured and deepened through my contact with Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, with whom I lived for a while as an au pair/folk apprentice, and worked with for some years after in the (some say notorious, some say inspirational) Critics Group. I am also an unashamed feminist and continue to embrace the term, and the aspirations of women who 'refuse to sit at the feet of Fate'.

My party politics tend towards the Greens rather than Labour, though I supported Jeremy Corbyn, and still feel furious at his treatment by the Party and an electorate, not enough of whom appeared to want as their leader an honest and good man with a history of supporting all the major struggles in the world – inequality, racism, exploitation, imperialism – you name it. Politics has always been an underlying influence in all of my work, whether writing, or teaching or performing – Bagpuss being no exception. I applaud and am proud of its message of recycling, making do and mending and looking after everyone and everything in your community, even if that is just a strange shop that doesn't



sell anything, populated by stropmy mice, a banjo-playing toad, and a wooden book-end with a professorship.

We quite often ask this question of our star interviewees – describe a typical working day for us ...

This is hard, since, as someone who wears a variety of artistic and occupational hats, I don't have a typical day. They are all so varied, and how lucky am I that that is the case?! However, looking at this week, for instance – I have:

- Filmed a lecture with slides and sound files for music students at Newcastle University on the subject of Gender and Identity.
- Researched music for the above and read up on folk and feminist history for the same.
- Delivered an online 'Singing Chair Yoga' session (love it!)
- Led a Zoom rehearsal (a weekly event) with my wonderful Northumbrian women's choir 'Werca's Folk' (love them!)
- Grappled with technology required to execute all of the above. (Grrrrr!)
- Responded to a storm of emails on all manner of subjects, many of them requesting my help with projects, or wanting information from my presumed store of knowledge (eg, political song, local dance traditions, Sandy Denny, publishing children's literature...)



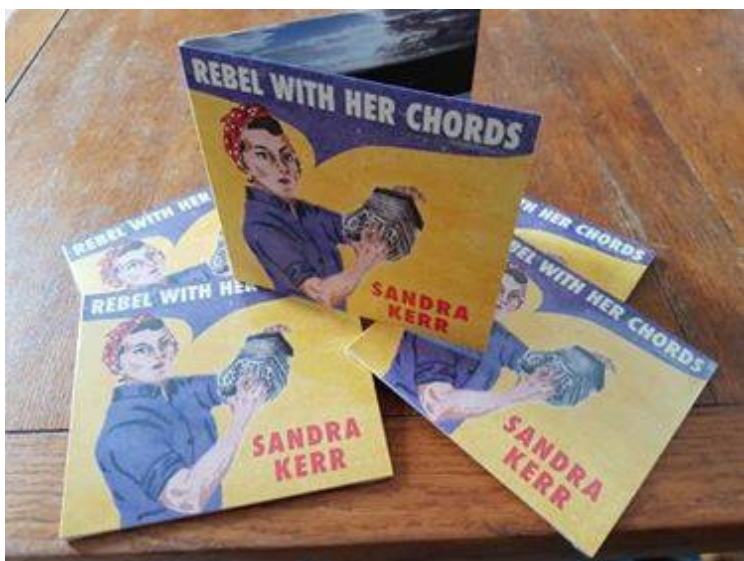
# Tune Up!

## SANDRA KERR

Real life gets fitted in between, though an absolute must for my week includes doing my own yoga practice, feeding and watching our birds, walking in fields or on the shore, and keeping in contact with my absolutely wonderful family. Incidentally, not one activity mentioned above could be accomplished without the constant help and support of my partner, David Malone. He is a rock.

**You've obviously acquired a whole set of skills over the years. Performing and teaching for example might seem like completely separate things. What's the favourite aspect of what you do?**

Where to start?! With the English concertina, I think. This is by far my favourite instrument, however I engage with it. For instance, when I came to record my latest (and probably my last) solo album 'Rebel With Her Chords', this instrument was the 'go to' one for both instrumental tracks, and to accompany songs. I love its potential for creating gorgeous, rich and sometimes deliciously 'crunchy' chords in



arrangements, and feel there is still much I can do to explore that.

On 'Rebel' I'm joined by my daughter, Nancy Kerr, and her husband, James Fagan, without doubt my favourite musicians both to listen to, and to play with. Their support and input were invaluable and it was all great fun, as well as challenging. Needless to say, I'm enormously proud of Nan and her many accomplishments. Dead chuffed when she and I did a gig together in London in 2019 (happy days...) and the organisers - Stick In The Wheel - called us a class act, and me a 'kick a\*\*e concertina player'! Love teaching the instrument too. In fact, working with groups, whether it's students, or choirs, or instrumental or vocal workshops is always a joy - those moments when participants suddenly 'get it', and start singing, or playing in a different or more creative way. It's magical. Nurturing other people's creativity has always been important to me, I don't know why. Perhaps I'm just naturally bossy....

**For someone not originally from the area, you're a strong advocate for maintaining and promoting Northumberland's musical traditions. Tell us a bit about your work in this area.**

My late husband and Nancy's Dad, Ron Elliott of Broomhill, was a wonderful Northumbrian piper. He introduced me to the music associated with that infuriating and marvellous instrument, its repertoire and styles, and to the songs from the region (he was enormously proud of his Northumbrian roots, this beautiful county and its history). I loved all of it from the first, and tried to embrace it in my playing and singing (no attempts to 'do' the accent mind - totally elusive!) and in my writing. My compositions, both instrumental and song-based, have tried to emulate the best and most distinctive aspects of the repertoire of the NE, and this would seem to be a trait that both Ron and I have passed on to

# Tune Up!

SANDRA KERR

Nancy. I truly believe Northumberland's traditional music is some of the most stunning, challenging and exciting in these islands, and I hope to get it right one day....

**You've had a quite unbelievable journey in music, working with the great and the good, plus producing a great folk music star yourself in your daughter Nancy. What advice would you pass on to someone starting out in music now?**

It is an unbelievably hard time for musicians, and artists of all kinds, of course, at the moment (Sandra Kerr on the b\*\*\*\*\*n' obvious). But it can be used positively. I would say, take this time to see and learn about what has gone before. Listen to the elders, the carriers, the guardians of the tradition - that is the way folk music has always worked. Apply yourself to your craft - apprentice yourself to the music



and its great exponents. But think about it deeply. Have something to 'say' about it when you sing or play, so that you don't just immaculately reproduce melodies and texts, but actually have the intention and ability to move people. That comes from your head and heart, as well as your fingers and throats. Study the music, and discover why it was made as well as how. Our traditional music represents people's lives, histories, hopes and dreams, and you can be part of that continuum. A great privilege, and a way of 'going on'.

I hope this question wasn't meant to be an opportunity for me to tell people about making albums, finding agents, getting gigs and all that. I can't do that stuff. I seem to have been incredibly fortunate in my own career in actually not being overly concerned with all that. My sense is that if you focus on doing what you feel passionate about, and doing it well, and with dedication and principle, you will be heard.

Did I mention how proud I am of Nancy?



<https://nancykerr.co.uk>  
[www.sandrakerr.net](http://www.sandrakerr.net)  
[www.wercasfolk.com](http://www.wercasfolk.com)

# Climb Up!

STEVE LOWE

**Up!'s outdoor man on the benefits of a childhood spent outdoors**

I feel sorry for kids (and parents) nowadays. Outdoors was my Playstation. I would leave the house after breakfast only to reappear when I needed a jam butty or a drink of delicious pop, or a few pennies for some sweets. I learnt how to run and climb, to take and manage risk, how to make an owl hoot from a blade of grass, even some basic hydrology, biology, construction or engineering. The countryside was my empire and I filled it with dams, ditches, defensive structures and dens.

Jam jars were filled with newts, frogs, beetles, grasshoppers and a host of other little treasures. I even had a penknife in my pocket, along with string, bubble-gum, a conker, pencil and a hankie (usually unused – that is what sleeves were for). Even my shoes had an inbuilt compass and left impressions in the soil making my mates think they were tracking lions or tigers!

It was all great fun, and full of laughter, bruises, grass stains, mud, clarts and snot. My patch included some woods, fields, hedgerows, the rugby club car park with its tempting damson trees, a little stream and a grassy bank next to a railway which was full of butterflies and stridulating grasshoppers that were a pain to catch. The trains that hurtled past were a fascination too, spewing smoke or fumes. Yet we never felt too far from home, or in any real danger and Mum and Dad were probably glad of the space.

Sometimes we would be allowed to spend the night in a tent or would walk with a "grown up" teenager to see the canal or a bigger pond, or some other



wildlife highlight. We built rafts or go carts out of junk. We knew the names of birds and joyously filled in the I-Spy books. Even packets of tea came with free information guides in the form of collectable cards, with a collector's album, which you could swap with mates.

It seems a far cry from the nature experience for many children nowadays, where access to green space is often limited and where the outdoors can sometimes be a place of fear for parents. Somehow, we became disconnected from nature.

It is really interesting to me that the enforced lockdown reminded many of us about the value and comfort to be gained from being outdoors and experiencing nature, not just seeing it.

I am not in the least surprised though because it's something inherent in us all and I firmly believe the "inner child" never leaves us. When I am rock pooling, for instance, it's usually the parents who want the net, either mum or dad who shouts, "just another half an hour". That is because nature is fun, it's interesting, it's all around us but sometimes we are way too reserved by convention to just enjoy it.

I was recently chastised by a lady walker. To be honest, I could barely hear her from the branch I was sat on, but she really wanted to know why I was up there. I could only respond with "I want to

# Climb Up!

STEVE LOWE

be! It feels different to be up here!” It was a harmless adventure, I got some exercise, a different perspective to normal and had to use my motor and cognitive skills to get me up and down. Hey, and above all else, it was fun!

Nature helped to shape me; of that I'm convinced. All those hours spent re-enacting battles, playing hide and seek or scrumping for apples were great ways of learning what we now call “life skills”. To me it was play, so it's great to see a renewed interest in “nature studies” and the fact they are returning to the curriculum.

Linskill Nursery in North Shields, for instance, has started Forest Schools - a long-term program of play, exploration and supported risk taking. It develops confidence and self-esteem through learner-inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural setting. In their case they are using a purpose built space, but equally there is a nearby park with kingfishers, squirrels and a host of other opportunities.

Forest schools are brilliant. Children get to be “in charge” in a safe, supervised way. It really works too, and I have seen withdrawn children blossom into group leaders, full of confidence and bravado. Once mums get used to their offspring dragging home half a field (on their clothes), they also see the benefit. Kids arrive earlier and earlier on those particular school days. It's great that parents also take away ideas from “education” sessions and use them at home or on family outings.

There are no reasons not to be able to encourage an early love for nature. Learning resources are easy to get hold of nowadays and there are a multitude of



ways for children to get “in touch with nature”. These include the obvious books, DVDs and online resources but I suggest these perform the function of being “support tools”. Groups such as the Brownies, Scouts, Young Ornithologists and Wildlife Watch provide an easy way into enjoying and respecting nature, and there are events all over the place normally. If you have a garden then you have access to your own nature reserve, one in which you can become a warden. Putting up nest boxes, building bug hotels or planting wildflowers brings the wonder of nature right up close. It has been a source of delight for many during the enforced imprisonment of the pandemic.

Whatever your age, do not let your inner child become an endangered species. Join me up a tree or in a rockpool soon for a splash and a laugh. Have fun!



*An experienced wildlife professional, Steve currently works freelance with Northumberland Rivers Trust as well as undertaking work with volunteers on local heritage and archaeology projects. His hope is to leave the world a better place.*

# Write Up!

## POEMS ON THE THEME OF CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

### Coatham Sands, Redcar

I remember that day trip to Redcar, ice-creams and sand.  
We tucked matching C & A dresses into our knickers,  
Carried shells and sea water in plastic buckets,  
Too old for sandcastles, really.  
I remember nana got out the folding deckchair -  
The one with green and orange stripes and white handles.  
Packed in the boot of the car with flask and towels  
And orange cool-box.  
I remember she watched as we moulded a world from  
The empty space inside coloured pails, digging and filling,  
Carefully tapping with spades, pulling them away to reveal  
Perfect cylinders.  
I remember we waited for the tide to come in, slowly lapping  
Round our city, filling the moat and protecting our fortress.  
Shoes off, wet feet, hair in plaits, broad smiles and sun-hats -  
Gullivers in Lilliput.  
I remember we paddled in the sea, jumping the waves  
It felt like hours, but it wasn't more than a few minutes.  
Standing there on the edge of the world, everything  
Before us.

*Jenny Thompson*

**Next month's theme is 'Music'**

**Send up to 3 poems (no more than 20 lines) to:  
talktoup@gmail.com**

### The girl who can talk to birds

strides into the woods. Her unicorn bag  
packed with toy bread, sea shells,  
magnifying glass, she's prepared.  
In dapple-brightness she stops and  
whistles. Her special whistle. The one  
the birds know. The one she taught them.  
A pigeon croos. She smiles. Baby-boned  
arms outstretched, she twirls and calls.  
Flap your wings birdies then up, up  
she flutters all spangles and pink tutu.  
Perched cloud high she branch-dances,  
in flurries of blue-tit, greenfinch, red robin.

*Finola Scott*

### Fighting monsters

the red tartan tin held all my Lego  
not much - just enough to build a small castle,  
a medium sized helicopter,  
a large tower

the green base was the beginning  
of a hundred different stories  
on a cold afternoon  
rain humming on the roof  
running down the windows

hiding from raised voices  
muffled cries into a pillow  
the sharp clip of a slap  
around an already swollen face

my sister and I spent hours sorting it into piles  
yellow  
red  
white  
black  
blue

*Jem Henderson*

# Up Sticks!

PATRICIA SANDERS

**Up! meets the woman who chose the Good Life for real**

**Tell us a bit about how you ended up living where you do.**

It definitely wasn't my initial life-plan. After university I had a very stressful job which involved lots of travelling and very little sleep. My blood pressure was too high, and rather than put me on tablets at 26 my GP told me to lose weight. In retrospect I find this hilarious. 30 years on, my blood pressure is the same as it ever was, and I weigh a stone and a half more. To all those 50 something ladies out there - eat, drink and be merry, darlings. You are simply gorgeous as you are! I decided to cut out sugar and discovered this is not possible if you eat processed food. I started cooking from scratch and lost weight immediately.

It soon became apparent that I am simply not built for the rat race and needed to change my lifestyle. I left my job with no plan other than escape. Fortunately, my husband was able to support us both financially, but I felt incredibly guilty about not contributing and got an allotment to put food on the table. In addition (and this will sound ridiculous) I started entering competitions. I adopted a "scientific approach" and won. One of my favourite prizes was a year's supply of toilet roll, though I suspect they did their sums based on a very tiny vegan. It ran out much sooner!

My most valuable (and ultimately life-changing) prize, was an all-expenses-paid cookery course in Aldeburgh with the food-writer, Thane Prince. A



single moment on that course changed my attitude to food completely. Thane put a jar under my nose and asked me to identify the spice. It was obvious. "Cinnamon," I said with confidence.

"Wrong!" She took a cinnamon stick, ground it and pushed it right under my nose, "THAT is cinnamon." I nearly fell off my chair. The difference was overwhelming.

From that point on I started investigating different herbs and spices, ultimately building up a collection of over 80 varieties in our own garden. It was clear we needed more space, which is why we now live on an acre of chaos on the edge of the fens.

**Some people may have a romanticised vision of what it's like living "The Good Life". How does the reality match up to the 70s suburban self-sufficiency TV series?**

Well, for starters I have a home-made jumper exactly like Tom's! You are absolutely right about the romanticism. People usually visit in the summer when everything is calm and sorted. We sit in the orchard with a glass of wine, home-made bread and beautiful salads which

# Up Sticks!

PATRICIA SANDERS



my guests have picked themselves. Their children climb trees to pick fruit and everybody is really envious of our idyllic life; and then they offer to “help” with the watering. They get bored after 10 minutes (it takes

at least an hour) and I end up doing it all when they’ve gone home. Watering is the easy bit.

Every season brings its own trials and joys. Yesterday we spent 6 hours just walking up and down the garden moving pruned wood and garden debris. We’ve sorted it into fencing, chipping and burning. Like Tom and Barbara, we don’t live on a farm, we just have a huge garden. We only have domestic equipment. We should really have a more industrial setup; but who wants their home to feel like a food processing plant?

Between March and May, my days are spent trying to get plants safely established. From September until Christmas I am on my feet 14 hours a day: weeding, watering, harvesting, sorting, preparing, cooking and preserving. On Christmas Eve I finally sit down. I drink my home-made liqueurs, listen to Carols from Kings and watch A Christmas Carol. Don’t ever get in the way of that!

You cook all your own food from scratch. After years of practice, have you found ways of streamlining what must be quite a time-consuming process?

My cooking tends to be dictated by whatever is screaming, “Eat me before I go off!” We produce several hundred kilos of food, very little of which can be frozen without some intervention. During harvest I have a preserving pan of fruit stewing every day. I freeze this and over the coming year we eat it with breakfast, or as a pie base if we have guests. Any vegetables which I can’t use immediately are mixed together, doused with basil or chilli oil, roasted and frozen. When we need a quick meal I can defrost them and supplement them with pasta, grains or a tin of tuna. Yesterday we were exhausted. I grabbed an interesting looking dish that I made months ago. It was delicious and so welcome.

Another “learning outcome” is that I now only buy top of the range kitchen equipment. I have killed 2 juicers, and a cheap preserving pan which is now being used as a plant pot. I don’t need fancy clothes. I need good wellies, food processors and stand mixers!



# Up Sticks!

PATRICIA SANDERS

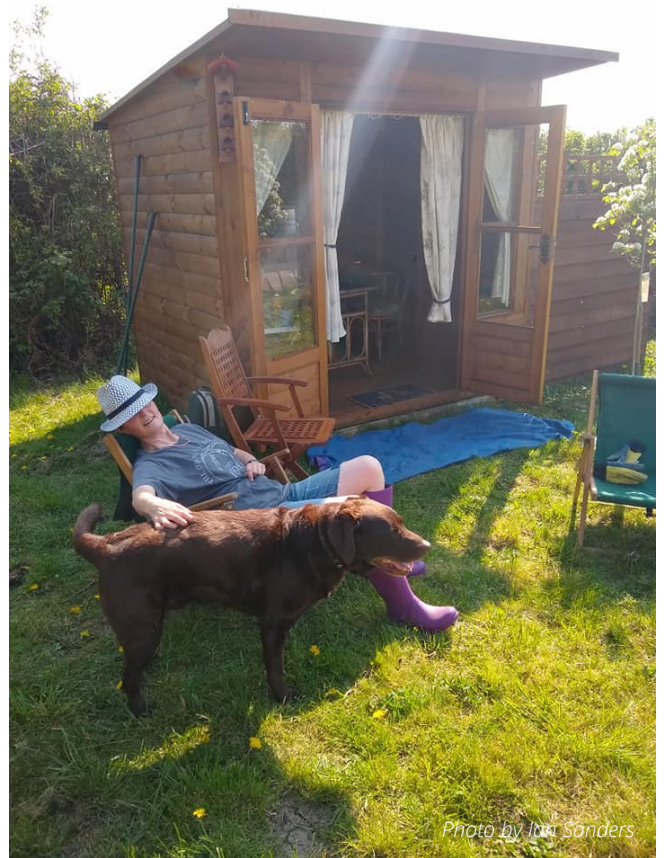
**Do you have any tips for those folk who'd like to try growing their own food, but who have limited outdoor space?**

Yes. I have given this a lot of thought recently. We won't be able to do another 10 years of this.

It's too demanding physically. When we eventually downsize there are several plants I hope to have. Growing your own herbs is the best thing that you can do as a cook. Last year I grew 12 different varieties of basil. In supermarkets I've only ever seen 3 or 4 and they are expensive. I can't eat pesto from a supermarket, not even the fresh stuff; but if you make your own, it's a completely different thing. I make herb oils, herb salts, liqueurs and even "lotions and potions." Herbs are fascinating and wonderful things which can transform a meal; especially if you use them with extravagance.

And don't forget your windowsill! You can sprout your own seeds: cress, mustard, alfalfa, fenugreek, mung beans. These all provide vitamins and freshness when nothing is growing outside. I also love growing pea shoots. I use those horrible plastic mushroom boxes, pierce holes in the bottom and add a bit of compost. If you do have outdoor space, then tomatoes are a must. I can no longer eat a supermarket tomato because I know how they are supposed to taste.

I would start with some plants from a garden centre and then graduate to growing from seed as this gives you access to far more varieties. This year I have stripy, yellow, pink and black. If you grow from seed it would be good to



find a "garden buddy" with whom to swap plants so that you can broaden your range.

My version of "The Good Life" is less about self-sufficiency (not realistic in our situation) and more about variety and quality. Commercial growers have to think about maximum yield and storage qualities. Garden varieties are grown for flavour.

Another advantage of my lifestyle? You will never hear me whingeing about lockdown boredom and gym closure!

***You can catch up with Patricia on her blog - [www.patriciaweston.com](http://www.patriciaweston.com)***

***Or why not listen to some of her songs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0iqUp1OxALs&feature=youtu.be>***

***or***

***<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDqWoTr6xjE>***



# Read Up!

VIC WATSON

This month, in celebration of International Women's Day, I'm going to introduce you to some of my favourite reads by women. Some of you may disagree but I didn't want to go for the obvious choices. Lots of you will be fans of the Brontes, Jane Austen, Bridget Jones and *To Kill A Mockingbird* but I wanted to introduce you to some books that might be slightly less well-known.

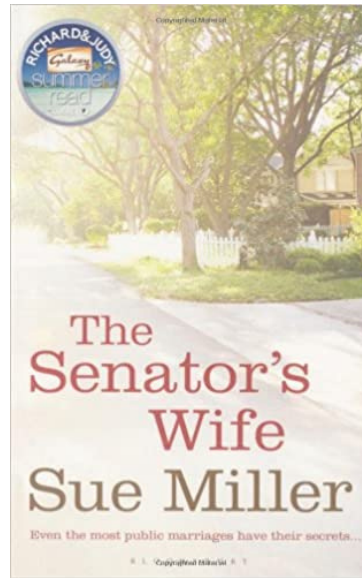
## ***'In the Land of Invisible Women: A Female Doctor's Journey in the Saudi Kingdom'* by Qanta Ahmed**

This is the story of Dr. Qanta Ahmed, a Pakistani Muslim woman who, after completing four medical specialties in the US, travels to Saudi Arabia to work in one of the world's most modern hospitals, for two years. But outside the hospital, things are very different for Dr. Ahmed - and any other women who live in the Kingdom. This is a society where women need a male relative's permission to leave the country. Who, at the time this book was written, were neither allowed to drive cars nor wear seatbelts because that made their breasts more pronounced.

Dr. Ahmed juxtaposes the beauty of the land around her with the tyranny of this patriarchal society. I found this book enlightening, educational and inspiring.

## ***'The Senator's Wife'* by Sue Miller**

Meri was 36 when she met Nathan. A month later he moved in and a month after that, they got married. Having moved to New England in their own house, Meri is living a life she's not sure she wants. Nathan, however, is supremely excited that their new next-door neighbour is one of his political heroes - Senator Tom



Naughton. Meri strikes up an unexpected friendship with his wife, expecting to learn a lot about marriage, love and motherhood from her much older neighbour. But soon Meri comes close to a terrible breach of trust that could ruin everything.

*The Senator's Wife* is beautifully written with complex characters. The descriptions of place are absolutely perfect. I love that Miller manages to capture the nuances in her characters' behaviour and she gives the reader space to think and make their own judgements. I read this book about 13 years ago and I have been enamoured with Sue Miller's writing ever since.

## ***'I Am I Am I Am'* by Maggie O'Farrell**

A memoir with a difference, *I Am I Am I Am* is novelist Maggie O'Farrell's life told through near-death experiences. As with anything by O'Farrell, this memoir is beautifully written and insightful. Painfully aware of the fragility of life, O'Farrell imbues this autobiography with a sense of how precious life really is.

With each chapter - or brush with death - O'Farrell expertly frames the narrative in a different way. The terrifying encounter on a remote path, for example, could be the beginning of a crime novel. Her tales of a childhood illness that no-one expected her to survive, and the repercussions, stick in my mind as a classic Roald Dahl (sans fantastical elements). An unforgettable read.

# Read Up!

VIC WATSON

## **'Olive Kitteridge' by Elizabeth Strout**

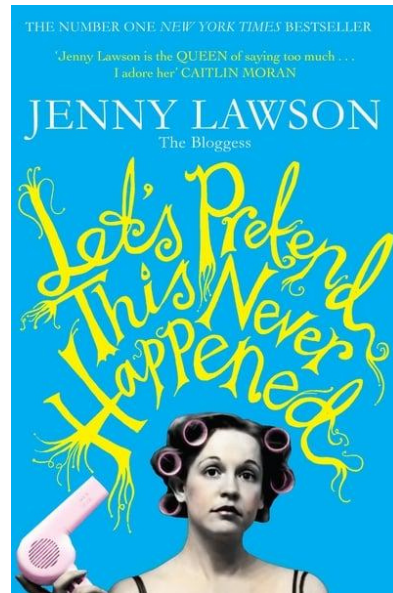
Some might call her a battle axe, others say she's the kindest person they ever met. The indomitable retired schoolteacher Olive has always been 100% confident in everything she does or says, but lately she's found that her certainty has diminished. Olive appears in each of the narratives that make up this supreme novel. In each vignette, we see her struggling to understand the changes occurring in her life, as well as the lives of those around her.

Elizabeth Strout paints the title character perfectly - a caustic, cantankerous woman with enough humanity to make you fall in love with her. Strout's strength lies in her ability to capture the light and shade in life. Within a page, she will have tears streaming down your face and then laughing in deep recognition. She recognises what people are able to understand about themselves - and what they miss. No wonder *Olive Kitteridge* is a Pulitzer Prize winner.

## **'Let's Pretend This Never Happened' by Jenny Lawson**

Ever wished your family could be just like everyone else's? Ever mistaken a marriage proposal for an attempted murder? No? How about being followed to school by your dad's herd of turkeys? No? Oh. Maybe Jenny Lawson is unconventional.

Jenny Lawson, AKA The Bloggess, writes about her life candidly and in such a way that I don't think I'll ever be able to forget these stories. As a woman whose father constantly told her untruths



and left me to discover such falsehoods (did you know it's not illegal to tell people who you voted for? I learnt that on the day of my thirtieth birthday), I adored the stories of Jenny's childhood with her crazy dad and, despite the poverty the family lived in and the fact that they were

different, they had fun. Conversely, though, Lawson's honesty around her mental health issues (her new book, *Broken*, is out now) is inspiring and, surprisingly, a comfort. This fearless woman is a total inspiration - and a brilliant example of resilience.

If you're easily offended, do not pick up this book. If you're looking for belly laughs, it made me cry with laughter to the point I wondered if I'd ever be able to stop. The more I tried to stop laughing, the worse the laughter got.



**Victoria Watson is a writer, reader and host of Noir at the Bar in Newcastle, connecting readers and writers from all over the world. She runs creative writing groups through her business, Elementary V Watson. She is also a copy editor and proofreader.**  
[www.elementaryvwatson.com](http://www.elementaryvwatson.com)

# Write Up!

## POEMS ON THE THEME OF CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

### PYLON FOLK

It's a wonder we survived at all  
but insulated by balaclavas -  
antidote to words now lost; croup, whooping cough delirium-  
lured to the Football Magnets and Kite Catchers  
disguised as Electricity sub-stations humming  
below pylons with lightning sign warning of attraction.

Our naked knees took out the nettle-high barbed wire fences  
protecting the lake from the Angel of Death safety films,  
or the submerged pike still barbed with the treble hook  
looking up through the frozen water,  
predators' eyes on revenge  
tempting us out onto the signposted DANGER THIN ICE.  
[Crack scream splash/Squelching dash  
The Corner Shop dialled 9-9-9/  
A neighbour lent a washing line]

Above them on Pathe News Screen  
Sean O'Malley starred in The Pylon Men,  
shinned up the ceramic insulators in folded over wellies  
shirt flapping in the wind.  
His dare devil mate bareback trolley-riding the power lines  
fixing the safety spacers.  
They brought us power to electrify knives  
freeing bread wedged in toasters,  
or ignite chip pan lard splashing the blackened element.  
A single streetlight fogging the mischief night shenanigans  
all fed by the pylons and power lines  
stretching to the horizon and back  
of a dangerous electric childhood.

*Steve Harrison*

### Growing up

I am ten years old, but you, sister,  
you are thirteen, shooting up high,  
a sunflower stretching for the sun.  
"Nearly a woman!" But not right now.

Our hands entwine like roots  
in the earth and we start to run.  
Your joy carries to me on the breeze  
and my joy answers yours aloud.

People turn to gaze at you,  
eyes blooming in wonder,  
laughing at your youthful frivolity.  
They're in awe of your blossoming.

I try to prune the words men shout  
but they've taken root in your mind  
and you wilt under their gazes,  
each call a petal falling to the ground.

*Megan Hamilton*

### Questions from a five-year old

Does an earthworm  
have muscles? asks Frank.

Does friendship  
smell blue?

If you peg roses  
between the washing  
does hope grow?

*Sarah L Dixon*

# Power Up!

SOPHIE LIVELY

**Up!'s global correspondent on a unique project creating energy and empowering women**

Founded on principles of equality and social justice, Barefoot College, based in India, provides a range of initiatives that are transforming lives. One such example is *Solar Mamas*, a project which works to provide sustainable and clean energy to low-income communities whilst simultaneously addressing gender-based power relations.

Working specifically with rural communities, Barefoot College (operational in over 90 countries, predominantly in South-East Asia, Africa and Latin America) offers women the opportunity to stay on campus during their training. Those who enrol on the programme are largely mothers and grand-mothers, many of whom are illiterate and from communities where women are unlikely to be involved in any form of regular paid labour.

A collaborative approach provides them with the knowledge and associated skills to learn to build, install and maintain solar panels and batteries - thereby bringing reliable, clean, and sustainable solar power to their communities.

## **Overcoming Barriers**

Established in 1972, Barefoot College has almost 50 years' experience of overcoming barriers, such as illiteracy, in novel ways. Visual tools and colour-coded manuals are just some of the techniques used to help the students. With



sheer determination, peer support, commitment and drive, women work individually and collectively to decipher diagrams, share knowledge and interpret the relevant information needed throughout the learning process. As a result, not only are they able to successfully learn how to build and maintain solar panels, they're also able to pass on the literacy skills they've learned in the process to their children.

## **Challenging Norms**

Patriarchal norms, which are often deeply-rooted in such marginalised societies, largely dictate women's opportunities from birth. Changing the attitudes not only of the women involved, but also the men in the communities, can have lasting and positive effects.

Through the *Solar Mamas* project, women are empowered to not only view themselves as homemakers and mothers but as skilled and entrepreneurial individuals. The programme develops their self-confidence and empowers the women to collaboratively solve problems and articulate their needs. Returning home after their stay, they are able to challenge the

# Power Up!

SOPHIE LIVELY

status quo, confident to use their new-found skills to change the dynamics of dominant relationships and improve their social and economic standing.

## **'An Illiterate Woman Can Become An Engineer'**

Having no light after darkness is a huge barrier to undertaking crucial everyday tasks, and lamps which give off harmful emissions or fires releasing toxic fumes are commonplace. Solar panels and water heaters provide clean and sustainable power for lighting, heating, and cooking, adding to the self-sufficiency and safety of individuals and communities.

Providing women with the space and time to develop skills through the *Solar Mamas* project, and Barefoot College's other initiatives, has immediate and life changing benefits.



*Photograph from Barefoot College*

Knowledge is power, and through *Solar Mamas*, women exclusively are socially and economically empowered to take active ownership of solutions that meet their community's needs. Why exclusively women? What has become clear over the years of Barefoot's existence is that women are more likely than men not only return to, but also to stay in their communities upon completion of the programme, thereby directly benefiting those communities. As a direct result of this initiative, women can provide communities with new knowledge, self-sufficiency, and the ability to transform lives through their power and solar power – empowerment indeed!



*Sophie Lively is currently studying for an MSc in Global Development with the Open University.*

*She is passionate about social justice and life-long learning, and spends as much time as possible out of doors with her 2 young boys and chocolate labrador.*

*An avid reader, you can find her on Instagram - @whatsophieisreading*



*I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.*

**Audre Lorde**

# Keeping Up!

## UP! COMMUNITY GROUP

So here we are, almost at the end of issue 6!



When we started Up! back in October we never imagined it would take off like it has, and we're delighted. We absolutely love putting the magazine together each month, from planning future features, to contacting interviewees, to keeping in touch with you the readers, to formatting the magazine - plus the myriad of other jobs needed to ensure each issue sees the light of day. Whilst this is a labour of love, we're sure you understand just how much time it takes! All of this we do unpaid, but if we're going to be able to continue producing the magazine, we need Up! to be sustainable.

What all this is leading to is this month's big announcement: Up! is now an official Community Group. We're delighted to introduce you to our two new board members, Ruth and Penny, who will be helping us out with all of the behind the scenes activity from now on. Welcome both!



**Ruth Donnan** is an Occupational Therapist working in the NHS in older people's mental health. Originally from Northern Ireland (and still has the accent to prove it) Ruth has been in Cullercoats for 30 years now. She loves the beach, walking her daughter's dog and searching for sea glass treasures. An avid reader, she particularly enjoys books with a local setting.



**Penny Blackburn** is originally from Yorkshire but has lived in her adopted home of North Tyneside for over 25 years and is proud to be called an 'honorary North Easterner'. She teaches young adults in a local FE college and spends her spare time writing, swimming, cross stitching and doing zumba. She hopes this doesn't read like a bad dating profile ...

# Round Up!

AND COMING UP ...

So there we are, 23 pages gone 'just like that' as the late, great Tommy Cooper might have said!

We hope you've really enjoyed this month's mix of features, interviews, articles and poems on the theme of 'Childhood Memories'.

Speaking of which ... we'd like to introduce our new cartoonist, the wonderful John Pickin. Each month John will create a 'toon based on our chosen theme. Here's number one - you 'saur' it here first!



*John says: "I am and always have been a compulsive doodler. During April and the first lockdown I set myself the challenge of drawing an ape-a-day. And in January - renamed Buguary - the task was an insect cartoon each day. I just love knocking out those 'toons .."*

Contact John at [pickinjohn@gmail.com](mailto:pickinjohn@gmail.com)

Once again we wish you and your loved ones good health and happiness. Let's all keep looking out for each other and we'll see you back here next month for our 'music' themed April 2021 edition.

Much love  
Bridget and Harry xx