

Up!

DECEMBER 2022

CHRISTMAS



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

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Tyneside Welcomes

Up Front!

Come on then, what's your favourite Christmas film? Whatever it is, we're guessing that it features the best of humanity - a generous spirit, the downtrodden overcoming adversity and at least one angelic soul embodying everything we'd love ourselves to be on our best day. Our favourite - *It's A Wonderful Life* - has all of these plus (little known fact) Clarence the angel was played by a Geordie!

Now, unfortunately, Clarence was unavailable for interview this month, but we've certainly got plenty of the spirit of Christmas for you, whatever your beliefs. You may have seen the subjects of our main feature on your TV screens recently, when they won the Pride of Britain Special Recognition Award. We are, of course, talking about the fabulous 3 Dads Walking. If you haven't come across them before you're in for a treat, but be warned ... their extraordinary story of hope has its roots in heartbreaking personal tragedy.

We also have a real life angel for you in the shape of Mrs Sybil Phoenix, an immigrant who took the phrase 'make a difference' to new heights! Talking of people coming from abroad, we speak to an organisation whose sole purpose is to help those who arrive on our shores as victims of war and persecution. Giving hope where there was none - what could be more Christmassy than that?!

Bridget & Harry x



Step Up!

3 DADS WALKING

Meet Andy, Mike and Tim - 3 inspirational men who are using their personal tragedies to help try and prevent the same thing happening to others



Emily

Beth

Soph

Can you share with our readers the story of what first brought the three of you together?

A – We lost Soph to suicide four years ago and when we were looking for a suicide prevention charity to support at her funeral a friend introduced us to Papyrus. Soph was training to run a half marathon and her mates were still going to compete, so I decided to run it with them. Entries were full, but the organisers let me run on Soph's entry. I really got my teeth into that and raised quite a lot of money for Papyrus and I've continued raising funds ever since.

M – Beth took her own life on 28th March 2020. Tim's daughter Emily had died about five days beforehand. About 3 weeks after we lost Beth, I was in an indescribable place of complex grief, and one of my other daughters got a message from Norfolk from Tim's eldest daughter. She'd seen an

article on social media about Beth and reached out. I ended up talking to her, but she suggested I might talk to her Dad. I started talking to Tim and, basically, we never stopped.



We are here to help you support somebody with thoughts of suicide:

HOPELINEUK

call: 0800 068 4141
text: 07860 039 967
email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

9am to midnight, every day.

PAPYRUS
NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION CENTRE



It's about being in the same place, supporting each other. I was in a terrible place at that time, suicidal myself. Different things have kept me in the world and talking to Tim was one of them. We started from there. Quite soon I was introduced to Papyrus. They work so hard to prevent young suicide. Through them I met Andy's son, Gregor. I'd already started forming an idea to walk from Manchester, where I live, to Norfolk, where Tim lives, and with the thought of Andy living in Cumbria it all came together.

Last year the three of you did a 300 mile walk. This year you went even further, finishing an epic thirty-day hike on World Mental Health Day. What was the thinking behind this year's route?

T – We knew we wanted to do something at the end of last year but weren't sure what. Then a doctor from Edinburgh contacted us to say "Suicide is across the UK, can you do something around all four nations?" That got us thinking. We'd already said we'd support a Suicide Bereavement UK conference in September in Manchester and thought we could expand that and potentially walk between all four capitals of the UK. Within the capitals of course are all four seats of power. So Andy got all his maps out!

Obviously you can't really walk from Northern Ireland to Scotland because it's a bit wet in the

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3 DADS WALKING

middle! So we thought we'd just start in Northern Ireland, walk to Stormont and catch the flight to Edinburgh, going onward from there.

We understand people were welcome to join you for part of the route. Did you get many takers?

A - Hundreds!

M - Sometimes we did a couple of miles by ourselves, but that was rare. Then someone would come out of nowhere. We had a tracker with us, so people could track where we were, and literally they just jumped out of hedges!



A - (laughs) Harry in Caerphilly, who jumped out of a hedge with his long coat and wellies on!

M - We've got loads of memories. Walking down the sea wall in Lincolnshire, in the distance we could see a figure waiting, a lovely woman standing by herself, not dressed for walking. Wind blowing in her hair and she's there because her son had just recently taken his own life. Such powerful stories! We're still in contact with so many of these people, but what we learned in the first walk was the extent of what's really going on out there.

Suicide is the biggest killer of under 35s in the UK. So shocking - nearly 200 schoolchildren a year are lost to suicide. This built our belief that we could do something about it. Our young people are not being equipped through school to deal with the pressures of life. They don't know how to keep themselves safe.

Being able to talk openly about our mental health is so important, particularly for young people, and yet we so often find it



difficult. What can we, in our communities, do to help, do you think?

T - First we as a society have got to accept there's a problem. The Office of National Statistics says there's about 6000 suicides a year. That's a load of tosh. We met so many people who lost their sons and daughters, who'd clearly taken their own lives but the Coroner or Procurator Fiscal in Scotland recorded an open verdict or death by misadventure. We're hiding. 6,000 is four times as many people that lose their lives on the road - yet we're still not willing to talk about it.

If we talk about the risk then we can start to address the risk. That's where the stuff that Mike was talking about, bringing it into schools, comes in. We were at a school in Cumbria this week where we saw suicide prevention being delivered to 12 year olds and 16 year olds. Incredibly powerful. We need to own it and then we need to do something to address it.

A - Suicide is one of those things that affects other people, it's a very sad thing and you'll

Step Up!

3 DADS WALKING

know people who've taken their own lives or families who've lost people to suicide, but it's somebody else's problem. Until it's yours. Until it lands on your doorstep.

Why are we not talking about it? Surely we should? We've contacted the government to ask why isn't suicide prevention a compulsory part of the school curriculum? We've still not got an answer from them - at the moment we're waiting on Gillian Keegan, Secretary of State for Education, to come back to us. We've got a petition running to make suicide prevention a compulsory part of the school



curriculum. We've got over 152,000 signatures on that, so we've got a written response from the

government - which I think on BBC Breakfast I described as a word that begins with B and ends in -ollocks'! *(they all laugh)*

It now has to be considered for debate in parliament, so we're hopeful it's going to be debated and that we'll get to see Gillian Keegan as well. The critical thing amongst all of this is that somehow we as adults have to bite the bullet and talk to our young people about a really, really tough subject.

M - there's different ways of doing it like drama and it has to be age appropriate, but it's the compulsory bit that's key and it needs to start

from an early age. Teach kids about their emotions and then build on it through the school system. Universities have got a huge problem at the moment sadly, with suicide and mental health issues. Kids are leaving school with plenty of qualifications yet without the life skills to keep themselves safe.



We imagine the experience of walking and talking together could be a therapeutic one ... or is it just hard work, do you just get on each others' nerves?!

M - Yes to all three!

A - Yes exactly! *(laughs)* My background is actually in the outdoor trade, I ran an outdoor shop for many years. I spent my life outside walking and running, so I've always known its mental and physical health benefits. Walking does you good, but walking and talking together is incredibly powerful - you just relax into it. Because we've been so open about the losses of the girls and what we've been through, the people who came and walked with us opened up, so we were having very powerful conversations. When we were just walking by ourselves we managed to get on alright though, didn't we lads?!

Step Up!

3 DADS WALKING

M - We're all very different characters. You see us laughing and smiling now - and we do, that's very much part of it - but we carry enormous grief with us too. We shared this grief and people came to share theirs. Both walks have been an absolutely amazing experience.

T - The charity were really worried about us at first. Worried about suicide-bereaved mums and dads coming up to us, sharing their stories, how that would impact us and our mental health. But it was a real privilege to hear their stories. And because you were out in the big wide open, navigating, your feet are hurting, you're aching, thinking about where you're going to and you just feel so small in that world, there's something so therapeutic about that. And we took in all their stories, but at the end of the day the worst thing that could have happened to us already had. Helping other people has to be a good thing. Some people we met on the first walk - who were in absolute despair - returned for the second, and their lives were very different. They were running marathons, fundraising, volunteering, just being proactive, each doing something positive in such a

horrible situation. The whole thing was good for all three of us mentally.



Here at Up! we're great fans of the folk group, the Young'Uns. How did it feel when you first heard the 3 Dads Walking song that they'd written about you?

A - My brother saw them at a folk festival and handed them one of our cards, which has got pictures of us and our girls on it, and he told them the story. Shaun (Cooney, who wrote the song) picked it up from there. Just before we walked, I got an email from him with the rough version of it. Well, they said it was rough - I thought it was fantastic! I was a snivelling mess, not surprisingly. I fired it to Mike and Tim and we all had a good cry. It captured such a lot of what we're about in a very, very powerful way, so we said to them "Great, go out and sing it, but every time you sing it, tell our story as well and point people at Papyrus and the petition". And they've been fantastic.

T - They interviewed us on Shap summit, that was so powerful. They came and had a chat with us and then they sang it, just the three of them. I cried then - I always cry! But it was so



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3 DADS WALKING

surreal to be standing on this hill with beautiful scenery in Cumbria, with three strange blokes singing about our daughters.

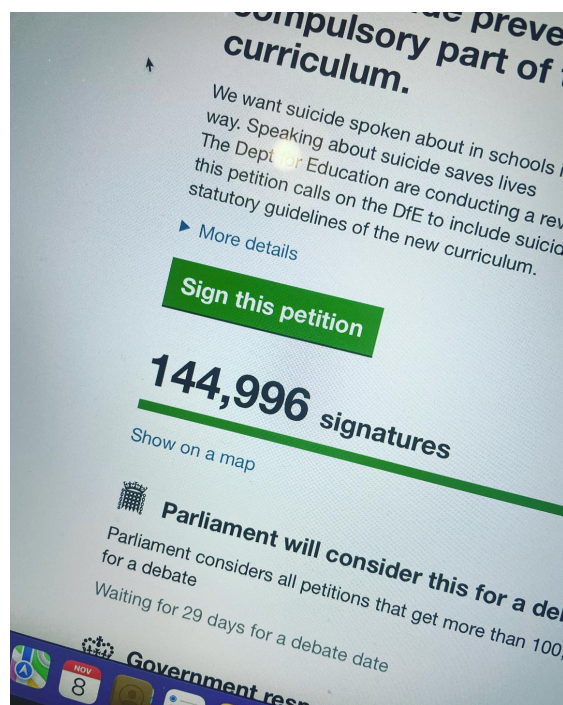
M - We've had poems, songs, all sorts of bits and pieces that people want to do. It's amazing that we've inspired these people, but I think it shows you the scale of the problem around mental health and suicide out in the world. As Tim says, to have it sung on a hillside ... I got a fly in my eye, by the way, I wasn't crying, it was a fly!

Perhaps it's best to leave the last wise words to Mike ...

M - There's help and hope. Hopefully we push through our own grief but hope is a very important word.



Since meeting the 3 Dads, we were saddened to read the following news from them ... 'On Tuesday 13th December, George, who was Sophie's mum, passed away. George was an incredibly powerful lady who positively impacted so many people's lives. Way before the 3 Dads met, George had walked the Camino Trail, producing a calendar and poster to raise money in memory of Sophie for Papyrus. She set an example which we followed. She knew that our work, to prevent young people taking their own lives in memory of her beautiful daughter Sophie, would continue after her passing xxx'



At the time of going to press, the total number of signatures is now 152,653.

If you would like to add your support to the 3 Dads' mission to make suicide prevention a compulsory part of the school curriculum, you can find their petition [here](#).

If you'd like to learn more about the 3 Dads Walking, you can find them here:

<https://www.facebook.com/3DadsWalking>

<https://www.3dadswalking.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/PAPYRUSCharity>

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF CHRISTMAS

It's The Week Before Christmas, Nineteen Fifty-Nine

I've broken up from school, walk with Mum
to the local shops. We stop at G.H.Brown's,
greengrocer and Mum pays the last instalment
on our turkey. I won't stay near the till
where fish stare from marble-cold slabs
but stroll past crates of carrots, sprouts,
potatoes, parsnips, turnips and swedes.
On the opposite side, blood oranges
are cupped in silver foil. Russets nestle
in blue tissue paper. I see boxes of Eat Me
dates, hope the sugared lemon slices
will be in my stocking. Mum buys hazel,
brazil and monkey nuts sorted into orange
string bags, chooses three unripe pears
for Dad, a tin of peaches and a 1lb.of russets.
I dawdle outside in front of advent wreaths,
boughs of mistletoe, bunches of holly.
Pine trees shiver in metal buckets.
I touch one and its branches wave.
Mum says we can't afford it - anyway,
they shed their needles all over the place.
She presses a russet into my hand.
I crunch it noisily as we amble home.

Sheila Jacob

NIGHT OWL

Driving home from the coast
we interrupt an owl in flight.
It brushes our wing, is unhurt.
At bedtime we hear a triumphant hoot.
Out here in the rural dark
the galaxy envelops us.
Clouds of glory in the heavens
if you know where to look.

Greg Freeman



Nature's Christmas decorations

Red cardinals perch
on snowy evergreen branches
Nature's Christmas tree.

Frozen lake, dark night
Against the mountain sky glows
Nature's Christmas lights.

Nivedita Karthik

Queue Up!

JAM JAR CINEMA

Up! meets Dan Ellis, the brains behind a unique community cinema

We're sure you get asked this a lot, but can you tell us the history behind the cinema's name?

Originally, Jam Jar Cinema was going to be called all sorts of names 'Spartan Arts', 'Dream Shed' and 'Film Central' are some terrible ones that spring to mind! It was one chance drive through North Shields when my dad said 'I used to get in there to go to the cinema with a jam jar.' Aghast and surprised he went on to tell me that 'back when he was a lad' jam jars had a small deposit on them and when you took them back to the shop you used to get the money back. As most gents worked down the mine, or on the shipyards - got paid cash on a Friday and gave over housekeeping money, mum couldn't be seen to give cash to the 'bairns' to go to the pictures.



So, cinema owners spread the word to send kids with jam jars, and in turn they collected the deposits. From our reckoning it started here in North Tyneside and spread to other towns and cities of heavy industry through the CIU clubs - Sheffield, Manchester

and Glasgow, where it was known as 'Jeely Jar Cinema'. It continued until the mid 70's when the value of glass dropped with the rise of plastics. My closest experience was 20p back from the 'pop man' - but it's our story here in the North East so it was a great thing to call the venue.



The Jam Jar has been a big part of Whitley Bay for a while now, and you've undergone quite a few changes to the building recently. How have these improved the services you're able to offer?

In mid 2019 we invested over £300,000 into expanding the venue. We spent all of our savings, took on some finance and ran a small crowdfund campaign to take on a derelict unit next door. The headline for us was that we managed to install a small lift in the building and add 2 extra screens to the venue. With becoming more accessible it future-proofed who could attend plus enabled more people to get in and out of the venue. Similarly, the additional screens revolutionised the business enabling us to show a real breadth and depth of cinema.

This year we will have shown close to 300 films and over 2800 screenings. Compared to 2018, that was about 60 films and 700 screenings. It means local people can stay local and we now attract a regional audience to the venue to see just about anything and everything. If we didn't have the 3 screens we would have gone under with the pandemic. At one point the social distancing meant we could only have 30 people in across our 110 seats.

Queue Up!

JAM JAR CINEMA

We love the ethos behind your 'pay as you feel' initiative. How does this work in practice?

In all honesty, it was quite tricky at first. However, the idea is simple. We don't believe you should get a discount just based on age, or what your job is, or if you're studying. You could be out of work but be a millionaire! So we ask people to pay the price that is right for their financial situation. So we have 3 tiers to choose from. A cheaper price, a mid price and a higher price. But as soon as you use 'tier' or 'level' people assumed it was like a traditional theatre – the more you pay the better the seat. Whereas all the seats are the same price (to be honest we don't have any bad seats).

It's about making sure our offer is fair for everyone. You could be a bit far from payday, or not have one coming. You might be a bit flush this month. You might be getting dragged along to a film you don't want to see or likewise want to pay more and book the day advance tickets go on sale. It's entirely up to you to pay what you think is right and fair.



There have been so many great Christmas films over the years, but for us at Up! the ultimate classic has to be, 'It's a Wonderful Life'. What do you think it is about this particular film that keeps people coming back year after year?

It's A Wonderful Life is a marvel and you're right people book months in advance year after year. Interestingly, when the film was first made it bankrupted its studio, Liberty Films. It was a colossal box office bomb and James Stewart was an expensive star at the time. In the USA you had to renew copyright every 10 years and as the studio went bust no-one did. So by the early 1960's all of the television channels could play it for free, and thus a Christmas tradition was born.

It's a great film and it's looking better than ever now it has been restored. I'm a traditionalist – I like the black and white version, though!

Okay Dan, give us your personal top three Christmas films and maybe throw in an additional wild card, too!

So, my favourite Christmas movie is The Muppets Christmas Carol and it's just been restored. Jingle All The Way with Arnold Schwarzenegger is another favourite. He plays a dad desperately trying to get a 'Turbo Man' doll for his son's Christmas present. I love Tim Allen in The Santa Claus. All of these are the

Queue Up!

JAM JAR CINEMA

Christmas films of my childhood and the 90's made some brilliant ones. As a bit of a wildcard I love the remake of Miracle on 34th Street. It holds a soft spot as it was Jam Jar's first ever Christmas film, even before we had a cinema. We played it in St Mary's Church, Whitley Bay. The heating was broken so about 60 of us huddled around in coats, drinking hot chocolate and there was a sly hipflask of Cointreau being passed around. We've come a long way in the last 10 years!



You can catch up with Dan and the friendly team at the Jam Jar Cinema here:

www.jamjarcinema.com
www.facebook.com/jamjarcinema
[@jamjarcinema](https://www.instagram.com/jamjarcinema)



Cinema is the most beautiful fraud in the world.

Jean-Luc Godard

I think cinema, movies, and magic have always been closely associated.

The very earliest people who made film were magicians.

Francis Ford Coppola

Cinema is a mirror that can change the world.

Diego Luna

Cinema is universal, beyond flags and borders and passports.

Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu

Now more than ever we need to talk to each other, to listen to each other and understand how we see the world, and cinema is the best medium for doing this.

Martin Scorsese

Rise Up!

HARRY GALLAGHER

Angels aren't just for Christmas. Meet a truly remarkable woman who symbolises hope

At the heart of the traditional Christmas story is a baby born into the poorest of circumstances, followed by his parents taking him to a different country, in order to avoid persecution. It seems some things never change.

Well there's an angel in this particular story - and it's an entirely true one. This also concerns an immigrant who went on to live out a remarkable life, spreading positivity and making a huge difference to everyone whose lives she touched ... and she touched an awful lot of lives. Meet Mrs Sybil Phoenix. Not heard of her? Read on.

Born Sybil Theadora Marshall in 1927 in British Guiana (then Guyana), at age 9 she was effectively



orphaned when her mother died, her father working many miles away and rarely returning. At this point it was decided she should move to what was known as 'The Big House' - a rectory of the local Congregational Church where her

grandfather preached. Within three years, her grandfather also died, whereafter she lived with an aunt.

But as far as Sybil was concerned, her time in the frankly scarily-titled Big House was what laid the



Photo: guyanesegirlsrock.com

foundations of the woman she would go on to be. For her, it represented community, an extended family and it was also where she developed her faith. There she sang in the choir - quickly being offered and taking up the opportunity to become a classically-trained singer - and contributed to an open youth club, learning what enables people to develop and live peaceably together.

At the age of 29, she became engaged to Joe Phoenix. The couple had heard about the British Government's call out and promised welcome for workers, plus a cousin had come here already and appeared to be doing well. Despite her cousin cautioning her not to follow in his footsteps, she couldn't resist and in 1956 she and Joe arrived in London, marrying within months. The terrible racist abuse the couple were routinely receiving here did nothing to quell her enthusiasm for their new life together.

Moving to Lewisham, she began fostering children in 1961. During this time, she also became a community worker, providing support for unwanted children. Such was her

Rise Up!

HARRY GALLAGHER



determination, dedication and tireless work rate, by 1972 she had been awarded an MBE. Sybil remarked, "As the first black British woman to receive the award, I am proud that it was for something I really love doing." By this point she had already fostered

over 100 children.

She quickly went on to found a supported housing project for homeless young women. In 1974 tragedy struck, when her daughter Marsha was killed in a car accident. Working through her own grief, she continued her one-woman crusade to help the less fortunate and in 1979 her housing project was re-named the Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust.

In the midst of all this, in 1971 Sybil had founded the Moonshot Youth Club. Named in honour of the moon landings, the club quickly became known as a supportive space where young black people could gather and socialise. She soon broadened its purpose offering academic classes, a lending library, dances, a football team, daytime drop-in classes, support for young mothers and social evenings for the elderly.

The youth teams at Moonshot excelled at a range of sports and won trophy after trophy. She also oversaw classes in academic subjects, mechanics, woodwork, photography and the arts. Before long the building was too small to fit everything in! So

in 1977, Sybil launched an appeal and the centre received a grant of £50,000 from the Sports Council towards a re-building programme, which included a gymnasium.

Sadly, during all this time, the blight of low-level racism that was regularly aimed at Sybil and her work had been building. In November 1977, an article appeared in a national newspaper, saying that the National Front were determined to burn down the building.

Sybil herself doubted such talk; her instinctively positive worldview wouldn't allow for such an awful notion. Sadly, she was wrong. Only a month later, in the early hours of a freezing December morning she received a call from the police asking her to attend the newly rebuilt and refurbished centre. She arrived to find the building - her pride and joy - burning to the ground after an arson attack by the National Front.

Wiping away her tears, she responded in typically determined fashion: "My name is Phoenix and I will build a new centre from the ashes of this club, so help me God!" Four years later, in 1981, the Prince of Wales was present for the grand opening of Moonshot, at the new Pagnell Street Centre, the first purpose-built community centre for black people in the UK.



Rise Up!

HARRY GALLAGHER



And still her work went on. In 1981, after the tragedy of the New Cross house fire (another fire started deliberately, where 13 young black people

died, aged between 14 and 22), Sybil hosted the first subsequent meeting to discuss the provision of help for the families. 18 years later she was still on the case, contacting MP Joan Ruddock to campaign for a memorial. Ruddock later described her as “remarkable”.

And her list of achievements does indeed make for remarkable reading. As well as those I've already covered, here are a few more:

- She has contributed to research about Stop and Search
- She has been involved in welcoming Lewisham people who have become British citizens, after their citizenship ceremony
- Her life has been used in Black History Month
- A Methodist local preacher for many years, she worked closely with the British Council of Churches to forge links between peoples of all faiths
- While based at Clubland Methodist Mission on Walworth Road in South London, she was instrumental in setting up anti-racist training for members of the clergy, as Director taking this work around the world

- She occasionally acted as a Minister without portfolio for Guyana, and for this was awarded the Medal of Service by Guyana in 1987
- She worked for the Community Liaison Scheme, and as Vice-Chair of Lewisham Council for Community Relations
- In 1993 she was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by Goldsmiths, University of London for her services to the local community
- In 1996, she was made an Honorary Freeman of the Borough of Lewisham
- In 1998 she was awarded the Freedom of the City of London
- From 1998 to 1999, she was Civic Mayoress of Lewisham
- She was elevated to OBE by the Queen in June 2008

I don't know about you, but I'm exhausted just reading them! Now aged 95, Sybil is still with us and continues to be a Director of the [Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust](#), providing accommodation and support to 27 young women.

The last words on Up!'s Christmas angel go to our beloved NHS, who made Sybil Phoenix the face of NHS Oxleas Foundation Trust: “The work she has done in south-east London is beyond compare and she continues her busy life in a borough that is still inspired and touched by her work every day.”

Merry Christmas to a truly remarkable woman - Mrs Sybil Phoenix!

Sybil's work, like that of the 3 Dads Walking, is also immortalised in a song by the Young'uns. Called 'These Hands' you can find it [here](#).

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF CHRISTMAS

Northumbrian Carol

The wind will be your lullaby,
the geese will serenade your birth,
seas will swell and fold around the coble,
rock you safely in to shore.

Lighthouse and harbour beacons
guide you in and promise warmth,
in the deepest turn of winter, when
the frost lies through the day.

Coast and hill, birds and sheep,
hedges deep with twisted thorn:
briefly granted powers of speech,
beasts will murmur, 'Welcome, lamb.'

Ali Rowland



SILENT NIGHT, 1962

Slipped feet in the garlanded hall.
Muffled exchange of hoarse whispers.

Voices solemn as Sunday prayers
insinuating themselves up the stairs.

Crouched in the shadows I suck in my
breath.
Little pigs may be listening.

I don't let on. Later they tell me.
Grandad has gone to be a star.

Abigail Ottley

Solstice

Dark days in cold air.
Craft fairs and recycled songs on
long nights as lights blaze.
Raise your sights
above the tinselled puff:
We're here in hope, and
that's enough.

Gerda Pickin

Drink Up!

STEVE LOWE

Season's greetings from Up!'s Outdoors Man

Scandinavians are preparing for the Yuletide celebrations, which they call *Jul* (pronounced Yule).

As much of the world celebrates “Christ mass,” it is good to reflect on some of the pagan but nature-based origins of some of the centre pieces of the festival. Indeed, they both celebrate similar themes of renewal, rebirth, and unity – bringing life and light into the world.

Yule was a pagan festival that followed the midwinter solstice (usually around 21st December) and as the longest night arrives, it seems as if the darkness stretches forever. No surprise that this led to a celebration of the return of the sun, as the days slowly started to get longer again. Around the village fire, the yule log burns (symbolising the return of the sun), and people enjoy the festivities, which involved lots of drinking and consuming of slaughtered animals (sound familiar?). This lasted up to 12 days, hence the 12 days of Christmas.



In the centre of the hall stands a tall oak tree, festooned with holly and ivy, which brings



evergreen colour to the festivities in contrast to the leafless oak. The Norse believed this was a time when the spirits of the dead passed to the Otherworld and animal sacrifice and feasting honoured them. Gifts would also be offered to the gods asking for favours in the coming year. It all sounds so familiar! But the essence of the celebration is about nature and what it provides – light, warmth, food, shelter and a host of other things which today's consumerist society take for granted.



A recent trip to Jarrow Hall (previously called Bede's World) brought much of this into sharp focus. My friend and I huddled in the gloom, sipping warm apple juice and watching as our breathing formed clouds, the crackle of the yule log in the hearth and the “villagers” gathered in the Great Hall simulated those pagan days well.

The Bard (or Skal) was persuaded to entertain us

Drink Up!

STEVE LOWE



with stories handed down verbally and recounted in the traditional manner (people could not read). One epic story was the everlasting battle between

the Oak and Holly Kings, which goes thus:

“During the warm days of summer and when in full leaf, the Oak King is at the height of his strength. On the approach of winter and with the loss of the Oak King's leaves in autumn, the Holly King regains his power which peaks at the winter solstice. At this point the Oak King is reborn. As his new leaves open, the cycle perpetuates.”

It was great to relive Yule in such a fantastic location, surrounded by all the trappings of Anglo-Saxon village life (I especially love the pigs) and I would recommend this for next year, as well as a



visit to the site at other times of the year because it is fantastic. If you have not been, there is no excuse, it is on the metro

and bus routes and is close to the pedestrian (wow) and vehicular Tyne Tunnels!

Yet, it is also slightly anomalous because this is also where St. Bede lived, one of the greatest Christian scholars of the Anglo-Saxon period. Bede produced a large number of works on subjects as varied as science, music, poetry and biblical commentary, but he is most famous for his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, one of our best-written sources for early English history. For this reason, Bede is sometimes regarded as the father of English history.



Equally important was his historical ‘martyrology,’ a list of martyrs and saints arranged in calendar order, according to their feast days. In his work, we find the first record of Yule, which is shown as an Old English word “giuli”, which was the name used by the early English ('Anglo-Saxons') for the months that roughly correspond to modern December and January. Both months had the same name, or else it was a double-length month.

So, we know the name because it was recorded by Bede in his book *On the Reckoning of Time*, written in 726 AD. That is almost 1300 years ago, making Yule one of the earliest recorded English words.

He tells us that Giuli (Yule) is called after the day when the sun turns back and begins to increase again - in other words, the shortest day of the year or the winter solstice. Even in today's

Drink Up!

STEVE LOWE



society, where food is (allegedly) in abundance and we can get light at the flick of a switch, most of us welcome the longer days and

its promise that the sun is going to come back with the spring. This was essential to early farmers, who depended on growing crops and raising livestock.

They made it the start of their year and celebrated it with a festival called "Modranecht", Mothers' Night. Bede says it was the same date as the Christian celebration of Christmas (in the Julian calendar, which was used in Bede's day, 25 December was the date of the solstice. Since then, the calendar has been changed, so the solstice now falls on 21 or 22 December).

As a very devout Christian, Bede does not explain the "Mothers" of Mothers Night but is likely they were related to the goddesses of plenty and good fortune (these are honoured in inscriptions in Germany, Holland, and Britain in

the first century AD). Nor does Bede expand on the associated ceremonies, so it is largely open to the imagination!

But as they were goddesses of plenty, it is a fair guess that a great feast was a central part of the celebrations! Fill up my drinking horn!!



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.



Kindness is like snow; it beautifies everything it covers

Kahlil Gibran

What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness?

John Steinbeck

In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy

William Blake

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF CHRISTMAS

The Christmas *je ne sais quoi*

Tell me what it is
about the bare branches
burdened with snow
that makes our heart sing for joy

Tell me what it is
about mountain roads
slicked with snow
that sets our soul free

Tell me what it is
about those glass baubles
fragile and cracked though they may be
that makes our eyes sparkle

Tell me what it is
about the mistletoe
poisonous as its berries may be
that makes our lips tingle

Tell me what it is
about the cold, dreary winter
long and gloomy though it may be
that makes us celebrate.

Nivedita Karthik

Christmas Crow

We watched the crow with fascination
as it tap tapped on the window pane,
saw its black eyes gleaming,
its wet feathers shining
in the moonlight.
And we understood.

We understood that it wanted to join us,
to perch amongst the baubles
on our shining tree
to share our fireside warmth
on Christmas Eve
and escape
the cold winter rain.

We heard it promise
to sing for us
We opened the window
and let it in.
It crowed a Christmas carol.

Lynn White

Next month's theme is:

SCOTLAND

Feel free to interpret the theme
as you see fit and send up to 3 poems
(no more than 20 lines each please) to:
admin@positivelyup.co.uk

Full submission details can be found
on our website:

<https://positivelyup.co.uk/poetry-submissions>

Up Sticks!

TYNESIDE WELCOMES

Those of us who have followed the recent trend of having our DNA analysed, and then marvelled at the results, will already know that we are all the product of many different lands and cultures. As already seen in this issue, the heart of the Christmas story concerns a refugee. Meet the organisation working to help and resettle today's refugees.

Thanks for agreeing to talk to us. Tell us a bit about how Tyneside Welcomes started off ...

We started off as a group of people who wanted to make a difference to the lives of people fleeing conflict, and had heard about Community Sponsorship through Tyne & Wear Citizens. Since we began, a new chapter of Community Sponsorship started in early 2021 with the launch of the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). It focuses on resettling those who are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in host countries in the Middle East, North Africa and elsewhere. The UKRS was designed to welcome the most vulnerable families, who have been waiting the longest for resettlement and has a broader, global scope.



Most of us couldn't even imagine what it's like to have to leave your home for life in a new land.

Could you outline for us some of the challenges faced by people coming into this country ...

Some of the challenges people have faced are huge; they are often deeply affected by their experiences of war and conflict, and not feeling safe for a long time. Getting approval to come to



the UK is a difficult process because of the very limited number of opportunities to come through approved resettlement schemes.

Community Sponsorship offers opportunities over and above Government targets, but it can take a long time. One family told us they have been waiting for nine years to get to the UK. Arriving in a new country can feel strange and disorientating, with barriers to getting bank accounts, registering with GP practices and gaining access to available financial support. All this, combined with a sometimes hostile environment, means that having a warm and welcoming support group is a real benefit.

Your work must be equal parts challenging and rewarding. Give us some high and low points since you set up ...

The low points were, firstly, going through the bureaucracy to become an approved charity and jumping through the hoops to set-up policies and procedures to meet Home Office guidelines – although this did help the original group bond together, and reinforced our determination to succeed!

Secondly, we had a real low point when, just after we had secured a property with the

Up Sticks!

TYNESIDE WELCOMES

housing association Home Group, Covid struck and all flights to the UK were cancelled. This put things on hold for over a year, but we kept motivation going by organising online fundraising events and meeting together on Zoom, to keep alive the belief that we could do it.

One real high point was finally meeting a family at the airport in July 2021 after the long lead-in. Other high points? Being able to act as a lead sponsor for interested community groups. There's an Amnesty North-East group, a group aligned to All Saints Church in Gosforth and another group recruited to work with the Catholic Diocese to host a refugee family in one of their properties in North Shields; they have all become branches of the Tyneside Welcomes 'one organisation' structure.

We have also now welcomed a second family in Gateshead in November and a third family in North Shields in December. The Gosforth branch have located a property through a private landlord in the Ouseburn area, so there will be at least one other family arriving in 2023.



Not everybody can welcome a refugee into their home, but what can ordinary folk do to help or make a positive impact?

Welcoming a refugee into your home is a big commitment but with community sponsorship you can work with others to find accommodation and provide the support and help that newly-arrived refugees need in order to help them to feel welcome and to establish a new life in the UK. This makes a real difference to individual lives, and also enriches local communities.



Although they were forced to leave their homes, all the families we have worked with have brought tremendous energy and a determination to contribute to life on Tyneside. It is a joy to be part of that.

Looking forward, what would make 2023 a happy new year for Tyneside Welcomes?

We are always looking for donations - we are required by the Home Office to have £9,000 ringfenced in our bank account for each family we sponsor, and costs often exceed this. Anyone can make a one-off donation or set up a standing order to support our work - and we make sure that every penny counts in supporting our families.

<https://www.tynesidewelcomes.org/donate>

You can also help by volunteering and giving up some of your time to help re-settle families.

<https://www.tynesidewelcomes.org/volunteer>

Any support we get will help us to help others and that makes for a happy new year all round!

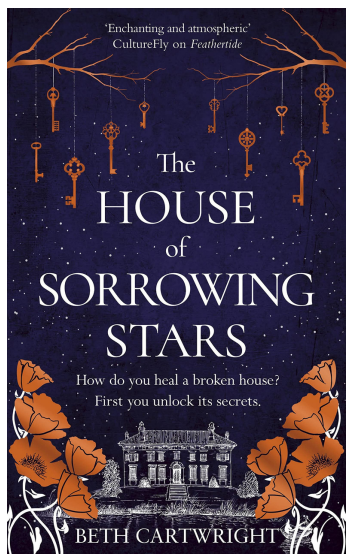
Read Up!

JENNA WARREN

Up!'s resident book reviewer shares her favourite reads of 2022



I can't believe I've been writing this column for a whole year! It has been so lovely to share my recommendations, so for my last article of 2022 I thought I would talk about some of my favourite books of the year. These books didn't quite fit in with the themes of previous columns, but they've stayed with me, so I think they all deserve a mention here.



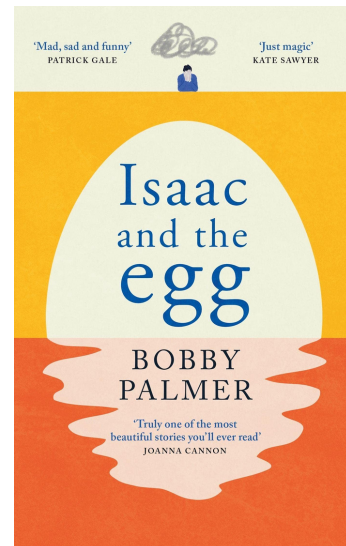
First up, there's the absolutely beautiful *The House of Sorrowing Stars* by Beth Cartwright. I think this could best be described as a Gothic fantasy novel. The premise is a familiar one: Liddy, a young woman, feels pressurised to marry a man she doesn't love. Instead, she accepts an invitation to a grand, isolated house filled with secrets. The novel is like a cross between *The Night Circus*, *Rebecca*, *The Secret Garden*, and various ghost stories, but it combines these ingredients in a very interesting, original way.

The house of the title is a place where people go who have experienced a loss. They can visit the house's magical library, where they are given the chance to see whoever they have lost one final time, in the hope this will offer some closure. Liddy has never experienced a loss, and is invited by the house's owner, Vivienne, to make marchpane. But upon arrival, she discovers that there may be more to the house than meets the eye. A sinister presence haunts the building.

This is a fairy tale for adults, with beautiful prose which swept me along. I was completely enchanted by it.

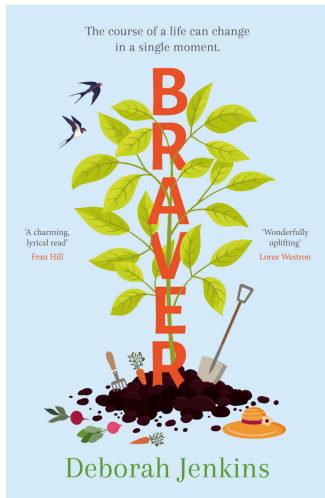
My next choice is *Isaac and the Egg* by Bobby Palmer. It's almost impossible to talk about this novel without spoilers, so I'll do my best to capture the feel of it without giving the plot away. We meet the hero, Isaac, on the darkest day of his life. He has driven to the woods and is standing on a bridge, staring into the river below. He screams. Then something screams back. Isaac goes to find the source of the noise and discovers Egg. Isaac has no idea what Egg is, but he decides to take him home. An unlikely friendship begins.

This is a novel which deals with a serious subject – grief – with a real lightness of touch. If you enjoy the work of Matt Haig, especially *The Humans*, you will enjoy this book. It looks at real life through a surreal lens and uses humour in a very effective way. I loved it and intend to recommend it to a lot of people.



Read Up!

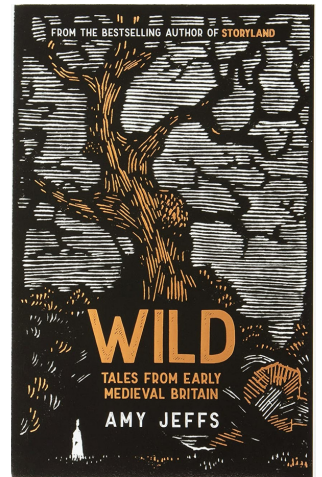
JENNA WARREN



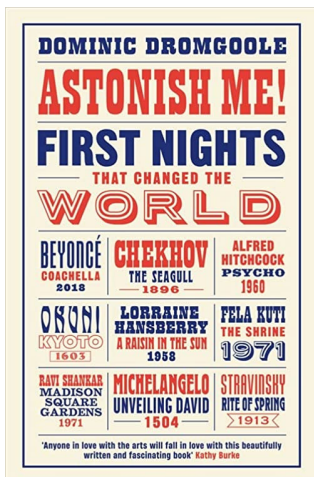
Braver by Deborah Jenkins is a gentle novel about friendship and community. Hazel, the main character, is a young woman struggling with anxiety and OCD. She works as a teaching assistant but has isolated herself socially. Then a chance meeting sparks a friendship with Virginia, a local church minister. Hazel becomes involved with the community activities at the church hall, and her confidence grows as she forms new friendships. But Virginia has problems of her own, and Hazel finds that she has new hurdles to overcome.

This is an uplifting, character-driven novel with wonderful observational writing. It's set in suburban London, and the author creates a wonderful sense of place. I also love the way the backgrounds of each character are gradually revealed as the novel progresses.

For those of you who are interested in folk tales, *Wild: Tales from Medieval Britain* by Amy Jeffs may be a perfect winter read. I loved the author's first book, *Storyland*, which retells ancient stories set between the prehistoric period and the arrival of the Normans in Britain. I was so intrigued by this beautiful book, which also offered historical context to the tales, so I was delighted when Jeffs published a follow-up.



In *Wild*, Jeffs takes early medieval manuscripts as her inspiration, particularly the Old English poems contained in the Exeter Book. She uses these poems as the basis for short stories set in the wild places of Britain. I particularly loved 'The Wanderer and the Hall', a haunting story based on two Old English poems and the epic of Beowulf. Once again, Jeffs weaves real history around her tales, writing about their possible origins. Before reading her books, I was interested in folk tales but had no real interest in early British literature. But these books fascinated me, and I now want to explore the subject further.



I highly recommend *Astonish Me! First Nights That Changed the World* by Dominic Dromgoole. This fabulous book would make a great gift for anyone interested in the history of the arts. Dromgoole takes events that have had a great impact on the development of art and culture globally: everything from the invention of Kabuki in Japan, to the premier of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in Paris. This isn't a straightforward history of art or theatre, and the events aren't arranged chronologically. Instead, Dromgoole mixes up time periods and genres, which I found tremendous fun, as it left me wondering what he would explore next. It also makes it a lovely book to dip into. I love the way he captures the sense of wonder and anticipation of an opening night or the unveiling of a new work of art. This is a hugely enjoyable book which explores the cultural impact of its

Read Up!

JENNA WARREN

subject matter, while never losing sight of the fact that many of these important events were also meant to be entertaining. A wonderful introduction to many artistic subjects.

Merry Christmas, and happy reading!

Jenna Warren is a bookseller and writer from Teesside. She studied Theatre and later Creative Writing at university. She runs Book Corner, an independent bookshop in Saltburn-by-the-Sea. Her debut novel, The Moon and Stars, was published in October by Fairlight Books.



Write Up!

Up! is delighted to announce a new opportunity for all you scribblers out there! Whatever your preferred medium - poetry, prose, script - from January 2023 we will be hosting a monthly online Zoom creative writing session.

We'll be there armed with writing prompts for those who'd like them, but basically this is an opportunity for you to carve out an hour's free writing time and to 'meet' other writers.



All you'll need is pen and paper (or laptop) and a cup of your preferred beverage to keep you going.

Our first session will be on **Thursday 12th January, 7pm - 8pm (GMT)**

If you'd like to join us, just send us a message via Facebook or email admin@positivelyup.co.uk and we'll forward the meeting details.

Coming Up!

So here we are, almost at the end of 2022 - a mixed old bag, wasn't it?! Looking back we've lost count of the amount of government ministers we've been through, not to mention Prime Ministers! Seriously folks, we know times are hard right now with many of us struggling to make ends meet. But our aim this month (as indeed every month) was to show in some small way that even in the darkest days, hope is out there.

The features in this December issue have shown that it really can be a Wonderful Life if we continue to look out for each other and work together. Remember, whatever our creed or colour, to quote the late Jo Cox, 'we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us'.

Wherever you are, whether warm at home, freezing on a picket line or (as in the case of at least one reader who wrote to us) living amidst the ravages of war in the Ukraine, we wish you a happy, peaceful festive season and a much improved 2023. We hope you don't meet too many Mr Potters and you come across at least one Clarence along the way!

Until next month, when in best Hogmanay tradition we are venturing north of the border for a 'Scotland' special, stay Up!

Much love
Bridget & Harry xx



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