

# Up!

AUGUST 2023

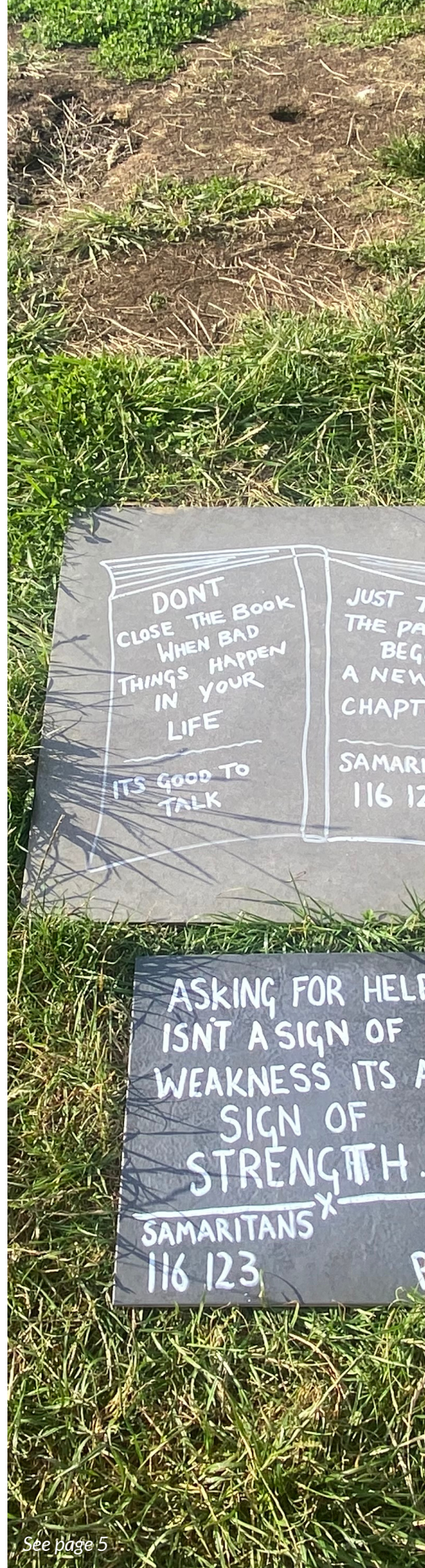
HEROES



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

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Emma Solomon Photography

# Up Front!

Welcome everybody to the 'heroes' edition of Up!

We write this only hours after the final of the Women's Football World Cup. Many congratulations to Spain, and commiserations to a truly heroic England team. When you think about heroes, what attributes occur to you? Bravery? Good intentions? Selflessness? We at Up! would suggest all of these and more. But our favourite kind of heroes are of the unsung variety.

In this month's edition you can meet some folk who are truly heroic by anyone standards, putting themselves at risk with no reward other than the truly selfless notion of helping another human being see another day.

We hope you enjoy this issue and remember that we can all make a difference to somebody.

Bridget & Harry x

# Saving Up!

JENNIFER C. WILSON

Up!'s marine biologist on her aquatic heroes

This month was one of those rare, delightful moments, where the topic landed immediately for me. Which is handy, given that I've previously written about two of my own biggest heroes (David Attenborough and Jacques Cousteau). As a coast-dweller, and a former diver, some of the biggest 'everyday' heroes in my book are those who go out onto the sea (voluntarily) to rescue people who have found themselves in danger. Given that a lot of the time, that danger has arisen due to treacherous conditions, that means the heroes are also braving some of the worst that the waves can throw at them.



These heroes? Members of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), and others who serve in similar enterprises. And there's even a lovely north-eastern link to this fabulous organisation, with the Tyne seeing tests of the UK's first purposely-designed lifeboat in January 1790, although there's dispute as to who actually invented the boat, and a long time between that test and the RNLI formally coming into existence in 1824.



Keeping that north-east theme going, there are two famous maritime rescue stories along this bit of the coastline, both of which still inspire people today, although neither are directly related to the RNLI...

In September 1838, a young woman spotted a wrecked ship from an upstairs window in her island home. That wreck was the Forfarshire, the island was Longstone Island off the Northumberland coast, and that young woman was, of course, Grace Darling, a name now synonymous with maritime rescue and bravery. Clearly, her story has been written about before, including by me, but the fact that a young woman



was able to work with her father to rescue five people stranded on the rocks is still incredible after all this time. It's a great tragedy that she didn't live long after her

# Saving Up!

JENNIFER C. WILSON

amazing feat, and didn't actually enjoy the fame it brought her; if she had survived the illness which claimed her, I suspect she'd have retreated from everything and (I hope) enjoyed her rise in financial security. A rare thing for an unmarried woman in those days...

Another famous rescue is that of the *Lovely Nellie* on New Year's Day 1861. The ship had been wrecked in terrible weather off Whitley Bay, with the same storm meaning the lifeboat stationed at Cullercoats couldn't be launched. Instead, the boat was towed three miles along the coast to Briar Dene, where it was hauled down the steep slope to the sea and finally launched, successfully rescuing six of the seven crew on board. Once news of the rescue was reported in local newspapers, it became famous across the wider region, and ultimately, the subject of a now-famous painting held in the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle, by John Charlton.



Back to the RNLI itself, it is estimated that ~140,000 lives have been saved by its efforts since it came into being, thanks to its volunteers, who numbered ~32,000 in 2021 (see also this month's feature with RNLI veteran Frank Taylor - Ed.). Clearly, the volunteers who physically put

themselves in danger out in the lifeboats are heroic, but at the same time, the institute relies just as heavily on people who contribute financially with their donations or time to the RNLI. And for over fifty years, viewers of a certain children's television show can be counted amongst them. I have strong memories of religiously collecting every scrap of recyclable material (we went through a LOT of Mr Kipling during those periods) to send off to the Blue Peter Appeals over the years. The RNLI has been gifted with 28 lifeboats over the years, at seven stations around the UK - not a bad legacy, and one which has always made me feel an even greater affinity to the charity.



So, heroes come in all shapes and sizes, and as the oft-quoted saying goes, "not all heroes wear capes". Sometimes, they wear really uncomfortable dry-suits, and vanish off out into the waves at ungodly hours of the day. And if that doesn't warrant getting through an extra couple of boxes of cakes, or dropping some spare change into a collecting bucket, I don't know what does.

*As well as being a full-time marine biologist,  
Jennifer also writes historical fiction.*

**Facebook:**

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

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/inkjunkie1984/>

**Blog:**

<https://jenniferwilsonwriter.wordpress.com/>

# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF HEROES

### Unsung

In my pantheon there are many women,  
woven into the world like spider spun silk -  
supporting the weight of tungsten steel.  
Holding everything, together.

I see Emily Davidson hurl herself  
in front of the king's horse to protest  
women's lack of franchise. Her slight frame  
shudders as Amner lands on her.

I see Rosalind Franklin, working in dark,  
day after day. Illuminating the twisted ladder  
of our DNA. Her colleagues thought her  
aloof, too focused on her work.

I see my mother in a Dublin hospital  
telling the surgeon; 'I'll have the operation  
without an anaesthetic, as long as my baby  
is safe.'

I see my friend at old girls' ballet class,  
grimly holding the barre, easing into a plié -  
her leg stitched after cancer cells  
are scraped from her thigh.

I see all those women with pain, with terminal  
illnesses, keeping going. Making meals,  
creating a warm loving home. Seeking joy  
for their precious families.

They could run the world but that're too busy -  
loving, caring, teaching, enduring  
being a girl, a woman  
a hero.

*Rona Fitzgerald*

### Heroic

The villain of the piece?  
Anxiety - a scowling cloud  
of doubt, that battens  
self-belief from view,  
storms into action whenever  
opportunity raises its head,  
strikes a destructive blast  
at any possibility of something new.  
It hovers, an angry front,  
on the border of the comfort zone.  
Down! Back! You shall not pass!

The hero's response?  
It would be tempting  
to sit back, bleak, ignore  
what lies beyond.  
Instead -  
one step at a time  
wade through the flood of fear,  
until the storm has passed.  
The view will be worth it.

*Nikki Fine*

### Next month's theme is: WRITING

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](mailto:admin@positivelyup.co.uk)

Full submission details can be found on our  
website: <https://positivelyup.co.uk/poetry-submissions>

# Listen Up!

PAUL WAUGH

Up! meets a clifftop life-saver

Hi Paul, thanks for agreeing to talk to us. You've made the news several times over the years for your activities on the Cleveland Way. Tell us a bit about the stones you leave, and how and why you started doing it ...

I started leaving the slates about 5/6yrs ago. I was a coastguard for 14 years and was second in charge of a cliff team; we covered all the area, so I'd been on the bad side of things where people had jumped, and we had to recover the bodies. I also suffer with depression, so I know where some are coming from.

I started leaving the slates because every time I walked the cliff path, there would be people stood on the edge to either look over or take pictures - the cliff is falling all the time. So I couldn't walk by without saying something. Then I got the idea one day to put a sign up; I'd had some round slate given so I used them. I wrote "DANGER! Crumbling cliff edge, please stay on the path and take care on the coast." I also put another one next to it saying "God bless the people who have lost their lives on Huntcliff." I put the two slates together everywhere you could walk to the edge for about a quarter of a mile.

**Were they effective?**

In ways I never expected! People came up on Huntcliff to jump off but saw the signs and changed their minds but they messaged me, or bumped into me in the street usually in Saltburn if I was shopping with my wife.

Then the first person I talked down was an Asian



man living in Saltburn. I was walking the cliff path and he was sat on the edge, so I sat with him and as we started chatting he told me his problems for about 30 minutes. At the time I never thought of calling anyone but he came away with me and walked off towards Saltburn.

I run and walk the cliff path often as I raise money for charity but soon it got that no matter what time I went out, there was someone with a problem, so I would sit and chat and get them back on the path. Then I started calling the police because they will get them the CRISIS team on the phone or a triage team.

Eventually I decided to change the signs I put up

# Listen Up!

PAUL WAUGH

and put positive stuff on them to get people to read and to think and change their minds about jumping. They have done very well - people have read them and changed their minds and messaged me. For myself, I have physically stopped 36 people from jumping by talking to them and getting the police to come. I will sit and chat for as long as they want but I tell them that I'm calling the police for their safety. I can also contact the cctv people, who can see so far along Huntcliff, and I tell them I've got someone and can they keep an eye on us while the police are coming.



Sometimes I'll have been chatting for 2 or 3 hours while the police have been waiting. When I first started doing this, I left at 9pm and a lad came up and jumped after I'd gone. I found his body the next day.



**This must take a fair old level of commitment from you, how often are you up there?**

I'm there every night - Christmas, New Year, birthdays - and in any weather. I've been up in torrential rain and blizzards and there has been people up there needing help. Mental health doesn't have a day off.

I'm a carer for my wife who has a lot of illness and the time I go up is my time off. It's a beautiful area we live in too. I just try and stop as many as I can. I can't help everyone, some people that go up are determined to jump and they will just go and do it. Others go and sit - they are the ones hopefully I can get help for. So yes, I try and be up there every day.

**Can you give us a few examples of the messages you've left over the years, perhaps some favourite ones?**

Over the years I've had about 60-70 signs smashed or thrown off the cliff, but because they work I replace them. Things like "Don't close the book when bad things happen in your life, just turn the page and start again." Or "One day someone will hug you so tight that all of your broken pieces will fit back together."



# Listen Up!

PAUL WAUGH

**We at Up! think what you're doing is pretty heroic. Do you ever get any feedback from the public?**

I had a message off a lady from Harrogate who came up, read the messages, sat down, had a cry and then went home, but she found me through Messenger. So yes, I do get feedback from the public - all positive and from different professions, plus people who themselves work in Mental Health, who love them. People have come up to me on the cliff top and wanted to hug me because they lost someone not from jumping off the cliff but by taking their life some other way. They see my signs and get emotional. Two weeks ago I had 3 people up wanting to jump - a lady on the Sunday, a man on the Monday and a different lady on the Wednesday. Different problems but we managed to sort it and get them all help.

I suppose I'm well known now on the Cleveland Way. A lady from York recently approached me and said her daughter said to say 'hi' if she saw me. Turns out I had spoken to her daughter the year before. And I've made a few friends who have been travelling through - one man I stopped

last year is now walking around the world! He messaged me to ask if I'd walk past the place where we were sat with him as he was walking for MIND. Absolutely brilliant!

**If you had a magic wand to wave, what would you change in our society to improve people's mental health?**

I would get rid of the internet and mobile phones, facebook, playstations - the lot! So people would have to talk to each other, not send messages or slag anyone off online. We



have to speak to people face to face, like we used to. Once, if you wanted to meet a friend you had to go knock on their door, you had to leave the house.

And one last wish - no waiting list for people with mental health problems please!



*What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candour,  
and more unashamed conversation.*

**Glenn Close**

*There is hope, even when your brain tells you there isn't.*

**John Green**

# Serving Up!

FRANK TAYLOR

**Up! meets a true local hero who has devoted his life to serving those in peril on the sea**

**Frank, what led you to first get involved with the RNLI?**

My great grandfather, Frank Taylor, was Bowman of the Cullercoats Lifeboat, my grandfather, Joe Taylor, was coxn of the lifeboat (later coxn of Tynemouth lifeboat) and when I was born my father, Jimmy Taylor, was coxn of the lifeboat. My three uncles - George, Frank and Robert - were all in the lifeboat too as was my half-brother Raymond and my cousin Albert Taylor and also my brother-in-law Raymond Oliver. So not joining wasn't really an option!

But seriously, I wanted to be involved so it was an easy decision. Growing up, many of my friends were also involved with the lifeboat. I crewed a few times in my late teens and early twenties, and when I was 22 I was offered a job in Milan, Italy and I was out there for 4½ years, then I did 6 months in Greece.

Eventually after returning home I went fishing for a living and got back in with lifeboat work again, becoming a "Launching Authority" (LA), a role I held for 14 years before becoming "Lifeboat Operations Manager" (LOM) for 13 years. On reaching 70 years of age I had to stand down as LOM, so dropped back to being a LA for 12 months, and then standing down from operational duties.

**Wow, that's some service record, right there! Could you give us some highs and lows of your time in service?**

My proudest moment probably was being awarded



the RNLI's Gold Badge and I also won an award for "Excellence in Volunteering". Of course the real work is in saving lives so I'm very proud of all the lives the lifeboat has saved over the years, especially with my family's involvement.

The saddest moments are when we launch to save someone and return having not being able to save that life. It's traumatic for all on station.

**Talk us through what happens practically when a call for help comes in ...**

The pager will sound to task the lifeboat, whereupon I will immediately phone the coastguard for the details and location of the casualty, and agree to launch the lifeboat on service. Once having received the details, I ask the coastguard to alert the crew pagers.

As the crew assemble, I phone the boathouse and relay the details to the first helm on Station, then I would hightail it to the boathouse myself. Then on reaching the boathouse I would record who was in the boat, who's driving the tractor and who was shore crew etc. Then I had to keep a log of what the lifeboat was doing and keep a log of the timing. For example, when the lifeboat was paged, time launched, time on scene, time left

# Serving Up!

FRANK TAYLOR

casualty, type of casualty, time boat is rehoused and ready for service. And more besides, following the service all the data is entered in the PC.

## How have things changed over the years of your service?

Oh, the boats and all the PPE has improved tremendously. Our current Boat *Daddy's Girl* has radar, direction finding equipment, satellite navigation, depth sounder, VHF radio, inter-crew communications system and buoyancy bag - in case of capsizing the boat can be righted. The boat herself is capable of doing 35 knots.



Emma Solomon Photography

Included with the PPE all crew carry Personal Location Beacons (PLB). These allow the crew to be found in the dark or fog, should they fall overboard, by using a satellite navigation system.

Training of crew has improved tremendously too, with all crew being continually assessed and reassessed at regular intervals. With all these assessments being carried out, naturally the administration burden has increased dramatically too!

## Lastly, the future. How are things looking for lifeboat services in the future?

Fortunately for the RNLI, the general public are very supportive of the work that they do and generally dig deep into their pockets to support the RNLI. Last year, 2022, it cost the RNLI £188m to run the service.

Migrants and Stand Up Paddle boarders (SUPs) are the cause of many call-outs at the moment. There has been a 21% increase in call-outs to people on paddle boards this year.

The RNLI is currently putting a lot of effort into education, for example teaching people how to stay afloat should they find themselves in the water and in difficulties.

I guess as more and more of us buy inflatables for children, and inflatable paddle boards and inflatable kayaks, the load on the RNLI will continue to increase; some stations are seeing an increased turnover of crew and officials as the load on their personal lives increases due to high volumes of call outs.

***So there we are - even for experienced life savers, the seas continue to be choppy, with new challenges every day. The lads and lasses of the RNLI - true heroes in every way!***



Emma Solomon Photography

# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF HEROES

### **An Ode to Badass Boss Ladies**

When she thanked me for being  
a badass boss lady,  
I smiled—  
I always wanted to be one of those.

My childhood heroes were many.  
The princess who was no damsel in distress,  
taking charge with the blaster—  
“Somebody has to save our skins!”

The Angels with brains and beauty:  
Smart, strong, and stylish,  
cracking the case  
while sometimes cracking skulls.

Spinning into a flash of light,  
emerging—a Wonder—  
dodging bullets, demanding truth,  
and actually hanging from that helicopter—  
no stunt double necessary.

And then, there was Julia Sugarbaker—  
no superhuman strength or out-of-this-world weaponry,  
Just sheer will and a tongue that could cut you in two  
“And that, Marjorie, just so you will know,  
and your children will someday know,  
is the night that the lights went out in Georgia!”

So, yeah, I’m happy to be a badass boss lady,  
just as I always dreamed of being.

**Elizabeth Wolfe**

### **Miss Riding**

Thank you!  
In a world of Sirs, Misters and Misses  
you were Jo, vibrant, exciting  
stylish in your conker corduroy pinafore.  
I arrived a snarl of threads  
you teased yarns short rambling fantastical  
loosely wound thetwine to tame  
unconventional spelling : grammar gently  
you tugged the rope loose  
nudged me to climb feel the breeze, gales, hurricane  
and be grounded  
you reverently separated the multicoloured silks  
staged connections discordant and harmonious  
ignited sparkle and spice  
stimulated babble, play, exploration, explosion!  
I began to weave, conduct, sing and write my glittering  
wings  
my unadulterated freedom  
I took flight I’m still soaring

**Alison Raybould**

### **Orange**

So much itself  
that nothing  
rhymes  
with it.

**Gill McEvoy**

# Draw Up!

## OSCILLATING BROW

**Comic maker Alex - aka Oscillating Brow - on why the best superheroes are just like you and me**

What's even more super than a hero? A superhero! Faster than a speeding bullet! Bold! Brave! With elaborate costumes and incredible powers! What a bunch of weirdos.

When it comes up in conversation that I like comics, sometimes, naturally, politely, the next question is about the currently ubiquitous Marvel Comics films. It's understandable - they are the most recognisable comics-related media in popular culture today. However, I reply that I'm not much of a fan. They seem to me to be based around eye-wateringly expensive special effects spectacle, and the plots don't grab me. The unique powers of the superheroes seem to have been rounded off into generic abilities of zooming around, zapping, and punching each other.

I'll usually go on to say that it's not that I don't like any superhero stories. My conversational acquaintance may nod vaguely, unsure of what they've got themselves into. I'll generally lead with a brief overview of the essential distinction: 'comics is a medium not a genre'. Whilst I tend to prefer comics of other genres, I do like some superhero stories - quirky ones, with heroes with absurd powers, or with amazing powers which are unhelpful for the challenge they face, or postmodern superheroes, subverting expectations or messing with the comics medium. There are many good superhero comics.

The lineage of superheroes can plausibly be traced



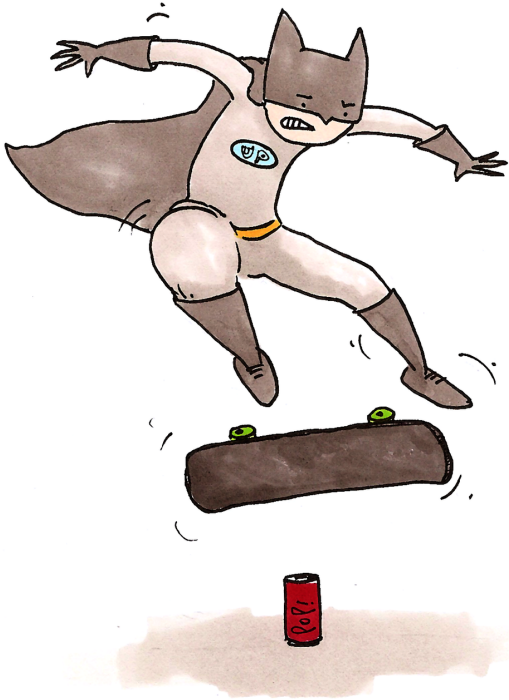
right back to folklore and mythology; some of humanity's oldest tales tell of characters possessed of extraordinary powers acting as protectors and avengers. However, superheroes of today are a distinctly modern subgenre, an iteration of the 'masked vigilante' character that developed in the early 20th Century, shaped by developments in printing techniques and trends in popular culture. As the century wore on, so this niche subsection of a subgenre came to be almost synonymous with the whole sequential art medium in the USA - and by extension, many anglophone cultures. Audiences could not get enough of costumed oddballs saving the day!

The narrow bounds of the genre and publishers' attempts to stay relevant led to innovation. Even within the fifty years following the appearance of the first recognisable comics superhero (the Phantom, in 1937), spoof, satire, and postmodern deconstruction of the tropes of the form had proliferated. As a genre, it was folded over on itself so many times that it reached a continuing state of being simultaneously instantly recognisable, totally worn out, and totally novel.

# Draw Up!

## OSCILLATING BROW

I mentioned to my mum about writing this piece and my ambivalence about superheroes. She, being wise, pointed out that these Marvel film superheroes aren't for me. Sure, publishers like to keep the same characters in circulation, to keep older fans invested and to maintain brand recognition, but part of the reason for all the reinvention is that young people want characters they can root for, designed to appeal to them – and that's brilliant.



When you're a child, life can seem rough; it can feel like you don't have much power to address the challenges around you. The history of the 20th century is one of myriad threats – both existential and specific. To see someone who has supernatural powers that they put to direct physical use to do good – despite all the obstacles in their way – that's inspiring. That's what superheroes are for, to show that good can defeat evil. You can't get too elaborate around that point; stick with the basics: power and responsibility, do good, be

brave, defeat evil.

It is, therefore, entirely understandable that I, middle-aged and sour, might seek a different kind of superhero. Maybe the idea of superheroes with weird powers that don't conveniently solve the challenges they face feels more appealing to my view of the world. Clad in costumes that are ridiculous not stylish, these people are noble fools who have chosen to make themselves 'other', with good intentions but demonstrably impractical methods.

By this point, the person who asked me about the Marvel films is usually so overwhelmed by my insights that they feel like they would like show how they understand my position (and maybe that they would like the conversation to reach a conclusion) and sum up their view of my position: I like weird sad superheroes, not the Avengers, or the X-Men or Batman, and when I draw comics I never draw superheroes, right? "WRONG!" I interject! When I can't think what else to draw, I usually draw Batman. Is Batman my favourite superhero? Maybe. He's not even really a superhero. He doesn't have any powers. He's just extraordinarily rich, has loads of gadgets, is good at punching, and, crucially, is tremendously serious.

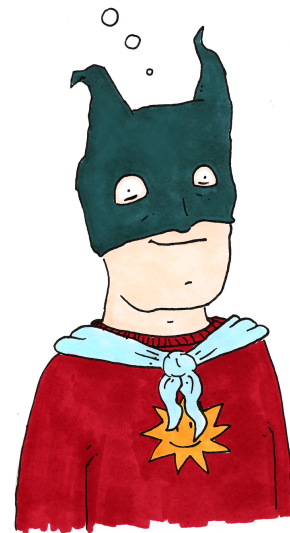
I remember seeing the 1960's Adam West Batman television show in my younger days and enjoying the high kitsch. What is rather embarrassing to admit is that it took me a long time to recognise how fully intentional it all was. The deadpan absurdity was deliberately turned up to maximum, cementing the character's iconic status and setting his inherent contrast between seriousness and absurdity that has persisted in the character through myriad iterations (each abstracting and refining the Batman-ness away from any specific iteration), through to, for example, the cinematic Lego Batman of today.

# Draw Up!

## OSCILLATING BROW

Thus it's possible to draw Batman doing almost anything and it will naturally have a delightful sense of absurdity and bathos. He, despite his lack of powers (or maybe because of it), is the archetypal superhero. He's just a guy, dressed up in tights and a mask, trying to do good, in utterly impractical ways.

If the person I was talking to hasn't run away by this point, I might then do a mediocre drawing of Batman (or a legally distinct non-specific superhero with a similar vibe) to prove my point. And they might shrug and go "yeah, I suppose". And I nod sagely, and disappear into the night, my mission accomplished.



# Write Up!

Come and join Bridget and Harry for a quick chat followed by a precious hour of your own creative time. There's nothing like being able to set aside a little time in the company of other creative people and seeing what you come up with!

These regular zoom sessions take place on the 3rd Thursday of the month, so the next one is **Thursday 21st September, 7pm - 8pm (GMT)** with joining instructions [here](#) and on the Up! facebook group page.



# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF HEROES

*While I was waiting for the Intensive Treatment Team to assess you, I googled 'hero'*

I was at my wit's end after another night in A&E, but despite my dark circles & palpitations,  
I knew that in some way, you were building up my muscles. Making me stronger.

The next day I read the words:

A hero is a person who sets you a perfect challenge. Someone that takes you to your full capacity, then says,  
'Now. Just a bit more'.

The showy costumes on superhero films are a decoy.  
A bit like spiritual people who wear kaftans and pose by holy wells with beads and drums, but cheat on their partners & kick their dogs and watch dodgy porn behind closed doors.

A real hero wakes, every morning, with a keg of dynamite in their head.  
Sometimes it gets pushed behind snacks and sodas and episodes of Young Sheldon. The words in the opening credits make the hero's mum cry:

"Yesterday I moved a mountain. I bet I could be your hero. I am a mighty little man".

Sometimes the keg goes off with a bang. On a good day, the hero only does their OCD ritual twice before breakfast. On a bad day, breakfast is the OCD ritual.  
Sometimes the whole day is one long drawn-out OCD ritual.

Some weeks, the hero can laugh and watch stuff and have days out.  
Other weeks, it's the High Chaparral, meltdowns at dawn. Furniture and bad words fly around the room and people nearly get broken.  
Every morning, however bad a hero feels, they still show up to give it another go.  
However hard it gets. I'll always show up and give it another go.

**Michelle O'Connell**



# Looking Up!

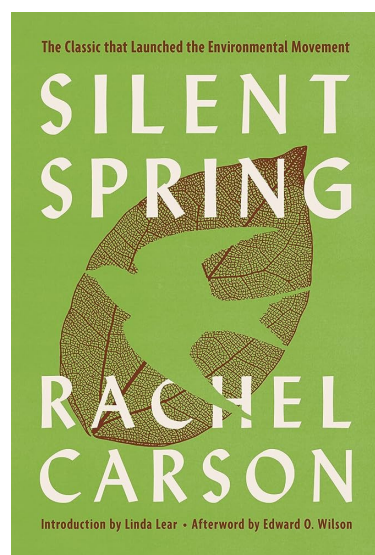
STEVE LOWE

Who does Up!'s outdoors man look up to ... ?

There are too many!!!

That was my first thought when I saw the theme of this issue. My eyes took a stroll around my books (that takes some time let me tell you - I can't walk past a book without thinking "one more won't hurt") and before my eyes so many names jump out at me.

John Muir strides next to sheets of polar explorers, held up by titanic peaks of mountaineers. I took voyages across unknown lands, from Thesiger on camelback, to Lewis and Clark in canoes. Retold the Viking sagas and folk stories in my mind's eye, as well as noting scores of names that echo through the pages of history: Joan of Arc, Marco Polo, Hereward the Wake and others. Imaginary names and entirely fictional characters like Boromir, Jon Stark, Flashman, Elric and Sam Vines, inhabiting fantastic worlds penned by immortal authors; Pratchett, Tolkien, Sharpe, Conan-Doyle, Moorcock and a host of others.



My natural world greats, the likes of Joseph Banks and the towering genius of Charles Darwin and more recently Rachel Carson, whose *Silent Spring* started a wake-up call against pesticides. George Clayton Atkinson and his *Remarkable Tree Survey*, using new



fangled photography in 1974 to capture images of trees damaged by industrial processes in Tyneside. Even two William Turners - the first an outstanding

landscape painter who fills my brain with suggestions of light, tone, texture and colour; and the second the author of the very first English herbal in 1551 (I just bought a copy - it's a reprint but amazing) and the father of UK botany.

You can see, I have a lot of shelving and way too much choice. And no mention yet of musicians (Frank Zappa, Robert Johnson) footballers (George Best and King Kev) or other sports people (Ali, Gretzky), or Film Stars (Alastair Sim, Gene Wilder, Will Hay) - because my CD and DVD collection is almost as huge.

So then, a tough choice. But I want to base it on what a real hero actually is.

I think we all have "heroism" (or bravery) inside us and it sits there waiting for the opportunity to jump out, usually when you least expect it. It may often simply be doing something you do not want to or are uncomfortable with. The risk may be relative but it requires resolve and application. Sometimes just "doing your best".

Humanitarianism would be the word describing the type of hero that I look to. Often, someone you will pass on the street who has (or will) do something extra-ordinary.

I have always been drawn to the sea. Once quite literally when my Dad pulled me out of the deep at

# Looking Up!

STEVE LOWE

Cricieth when I was little, ruining his best suit in the process. Obviously, my Dad (John) is one of my heroes (every boy should have this blessing) but he was also a mariner and we spent long periods chatting about the sea (and his experiences – good and bad). Perhaps that’s the main reason I’m looking to this area of human endeavour for heroics?

I will start with anyone who goes to sea, in whatever capacity – for SHE is a mighty mistress, full of threat and danger and worthy of every respect. The sea connects us, protects us and also feeds us and this is my (perhaps unexpected) first choice. Fishers.

Working the sea for a living is one of the most dangerous jobs out there. It’s tough work and I have huge admiration for this hardy career choice. Read books like Peter Mortimer’s *Last of the Hunters* or *The Silver Darlings* by Neil M. Gunn to feel as if you are there and not safely tucked beneath your duvet! I have worked the boats (not nearly as much) and can vouch for the conditions (whilst clutching a bucket).

And it is the local coble fishers that lead to my other choice - those people who put themselves into danger to save others. That’s every single person who serves the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), an entirely unpaid and voluntary service should be lauded to the heavens by the entire population. News outlets barely give these people a mention, yet someone’s latest hairstyle might get pages (or inches) of comment. Why?

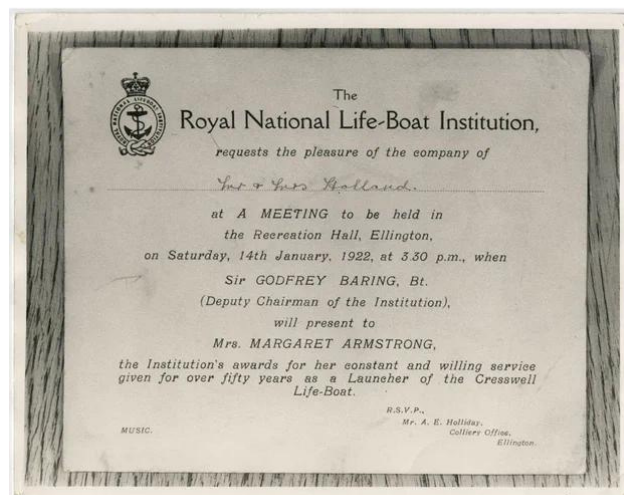
A local example then - on the night of January 5,

1876, the Swedish steamer *Gustav* ran aground near Cresswell village in Northumberland, with 14 people on board. The sea was so wild that the crew found it impossible to launch the lifeboat from its station, so men, women and horses dragged the boat for nearly a mile along the beach before they could launch it into the sea. At the same time, the rescuers spotted that one of two boats the *Gustav* carried on board had broken loose and overturned – stranding four sailors in the treacherous waters.

Despite the bitter cold, mountainous seas and gale force winds, local women formed a human chain, with Margaret Brown at its head, to rescue the men, who by that time were clinging to their



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NRO 8149/5

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# Looking Up!

STEVE LOWE

capsized vessel and were in mortal danger. For her efforts that night, Margaret Brown was presented with an inscribed brooch and a silver teapot by the lifeboat service, but perhaps more importantly she would forever afterwards be known as the 'Second Grace Darling'!

Another name, closely associated with maritime safety, and perhaps an odd hero, is Samuel Plimsoll (10 February 1824 – 3 June 1898). He was a British politician and social reformer, but best remembered for having devised the Plimsoll line.

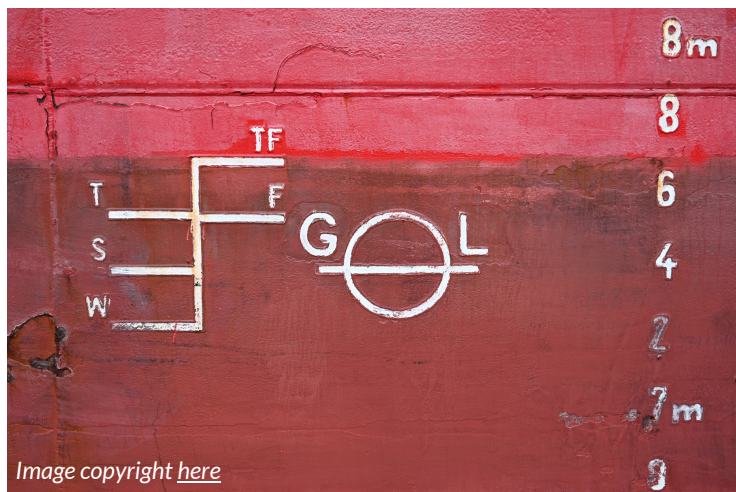


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His efforts were directed especially against what were known as "coffin ships". These were mostly unseaworthy and overloaded vessels, often heavily insured, in which unscrupulous owners risked the lives of their crews. Plimsoll's "line" on a ship's hull indicates the maximum safe draught, and therefore the minimum freeboard for the vessel in various operating conditions, thereby saving thousands of lives, despite fierce opposition to its adoption.

Less well known, but equally deserving of the hero status are 3 men, starting with John Lukin, the original inventor of the lifeboat (who received the

King's Patent for his invention in 1784). Lukin predates by five years the men cited by the RNLI as lifeboat pioneers. These are William Woulhave, a parish clerk, and Henry Greathead, a boat builder, who created their lifeboat, named "Original", half a decade after Lukin got his patent. The "Original" served forty years on station at the mouth of the River Tyne and is still displayed in the borough of South Tyneside.

I would add to this list, the Reverend Edward Lyon Berthon (1813 – 1899) who was an English inventor, and creator of the Berthon Collapsible Lifeboat. Now that name, in itself is a worry, but Berthon's invention was extremely successful. Built from waterproof flax canvas (soaked in linseed oil, turpentine, soap and paint) it was stretched over both inside and outside 14 feet of hinged laminated timber frames. This allowed it to be stored without taking up large amounts of space on deck and both the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy carried these stout little boats, which were put to great use by the French in 1906 to save lives during the great flooding of the Seine. The company founded by Berton still produces yachts today.

I have a vested interest in water safety, in fact my nickname is Bob. It should be no surprise then that the RNLI receives my support through monthly donations, yet I hope that I never to need their assistance. For those who serve, I salute.

*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.*

# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF HEROES

### August Against an Ocean

*Based on the preface to Chapter 1 in 'Caste'*  
*by Isabel Wilkerson*

In a sea of Seig-heiling rigid right arms,  
he alone stands out,  
arms kept folded to his chest  
while stiff Aryan palms hover inches  
from his determined posture.

August Landmesser, also an Aryan,  
sees what his countrymen choose not to,  
ties his fate to the scapegoated,  
those labeled Untermenschen.

Does it take an Aryan in love with  
a Jewish woman to windshield-wipe  
away the lies from his vision,  
lies embraced by the susceptible majority?

On the right side of history,  
early morning in a Hamburg shipyard,  
where Aryans gather to pledge  
loyalty to the führer,  
August stands firm against the tide,  
braves an ocean of fear and death  
to face consequences for his conscience.

*Evie Groch*

### Mend and Make Do

In the shed at the side of the house  
Brian turned fruit bowls, coasters, pepper pots,  
shavings falling thick as chaff, chipping  
away to find shapes hidden in a floorboard,  
an old bit of scaffolding. He took the holes left  
by TV screens, glued them together, layered  
them into clocks, tables, place mats. *Basterd*,  
kids had screamed in the street, *yer mum's a hooer*.  
But Brian could always make something  
from pieces other people didn't want  
and he took himself, made a house, a home,  
a family. And if, sometimes, he could still hear  
the words, he tucked them away in his head  
in case - one day - they might come in handy.

*Liz McPherson*



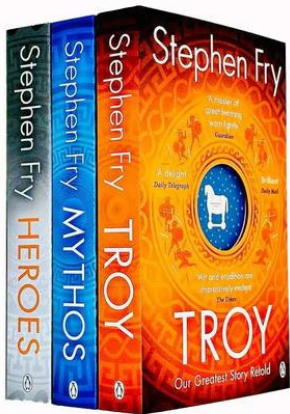
# Read Up!

JENNA WARREN

Whatever happened to all the heroes, all the Shakespeares ...



When I think of heroes, I tend to think of classic tales of adventure and exploration. But there are also more gentle stories of everyday, quiet heroism, too. So for this month's column, I've chosen several books about myths and quests, and a modern novel about more subtle acts of bravery.



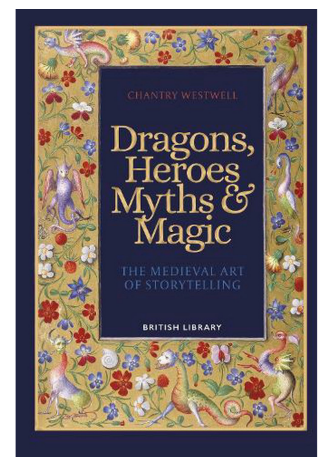
Let's start with books about classical heroes. I recently finished reading Stephen Fry's wonderful Greek Myths trilogy: *Mythos*, *Heroes* and *Troy* (Penguin Books). These highly accessible books are retellings of the stories of Greek mythology. *Mythos* tells the stories of the gods and other immortals, such as Zeus and Persephone. *Heroes* focuses on such famous tales as The Labours of Heracles and Theseus and the Minotaur, and *Troy* tells the story of the Trojan War.

The books are easy to read and quite funny in places. Fry intersperses the stories with relevant facts about history, geography and the origins of words, so it's a little like watching him present QI.

I was very interested in Greek mythology as a child, especially the mythical beasts, and this reminded me of some of my favourite stories. It has also deepened my interest in the myths and made me want to read more about them. I hope he writes a retelling of *The Odyssey*.

Last Christmas, I treated myself to a beautiful book called *Dragons, Heroes, Myths and Magic: The Medieval Art of Storytelling* by Chantry Westwell. Published by the British Library, it draws on archives of surviving illuminated manuscripts, and presents condensed versions of over fifty stories alongside stunning Medieval illustrations. Many of these stories feature heroes and heroines on epic adventures.

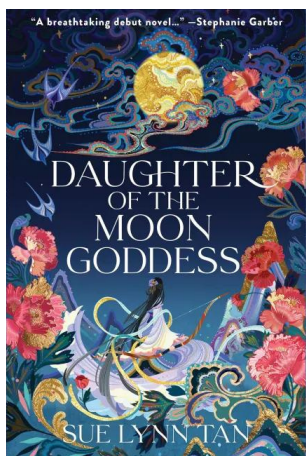
I found this book absolutely fascinating, as it features so many stories that have become a part of our popular culture and collective imagination, but which I had never actually read. These include legends of King Arthur, Alexander the Great, and Tristan and Isolde (to name but a few). Much like Fry's books, it's also accessible for someone (like me) who had no prior knowledge of the subject.



Again, I feel this book has deepened my interest in very old, classic stories. There's a companion volume (by a different author: Gerry Smyth) coming this October. It's called *Serpent, Siren, Maelstrom and Myth: Sea Stories and Folktales from Around the World*, and it sounds just as intriguing.

# Read Up!

JENNA WARREN



Many modern fantasy novels use mythology as inspiration to create their own stories of heroic deeds, including the wonderfully entertaining *Daughter of the Moon Goddess* by Sue Lynn Tan (HarperCollins). This epic fantasy adventure is inspired by Chinese mythology, and follows Xingyin, who grew up on the moon after her mother was exiled by the Emperor. Xingyin is forced to flee her home and travel to the Celestial Kingdom, where she aims to become the new champion in the Emperor's army and rescue her mother.

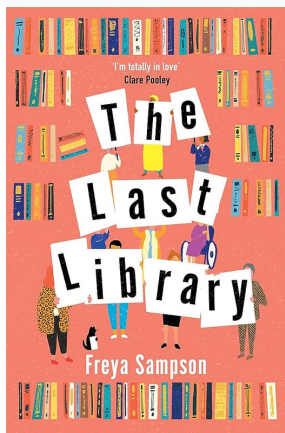
Xingyin masters magic, embarks on perilous journeys, and does battle with mythical beasts. This novel is a lot of fun, and it was very interesting to read a book based on a mythology with which I was unfamiliar.

Another recent contemporary book that deals with the subject of adventure and exploration is *Miss Benson's Beetle* by Rachel Joyce (Transworld). In 1950, Margery Benson quits her job as a teacher and decides to follow the dream she had as a teenager: she will travel to New Caledonia in search of a species of golden beetle which may or may not be real. She advertises for a travelling companion, and the only promising applicant is Enid Pretty, a younger woman who is vivacious, loud and generally everything Margery is not.



It soon becomes clear that Enid is running away from something, but this isn't the main thrust of the story. The novel is more about the unlikely friendship that develops between these two women as they travel across the world and far out

of their respective comfort zones. I was a little saddened by the ending, but in general I found this a great adventure story, set in an interesting location, with two wonderfully written female characters.



Some books feature much quieter acts of heroism. A lovely example of this is *The Last Library* by Freya Sampson (Zaffre). The heroine is June, a shy librarian who has retreated into herself following the loss of her mum. June leads a quiet life filled with her beloved books, but fears she'll never live up to her mum's legacy (she was the popular head librarian). When her beloved Chalcot Library is threatened with closure, June realises she'll have to step out of her self-imposed isolation and connect with other members of the community in order to save it.

This is a touching novel about friendship and a community rallying behind a cause. June is a beautifully written character. I really rooted for her and it's a pleasure to

see her find belonging among others who also love books and the library (without her introverted personality being dismissed: an important detail!). I read this novel while on holiday, and it made a lovely summer read.

# Coming Up!

So, who are your heroes? We'll bet everyone's are different, which is just as it should be!

At this point we are reminded of the fundamental reasons why we began producing Up! way back in the dark days of the first Covid lockdown. Back then, the people we thought of as heroic were everyday people doing extraordinary things. We are of course talking about the key workers, the emergency services and NHS frontline staff who risked everything to save complete strangers.

It's been our privilege over the thirty five issues of the magazine that we've worked on to meet and feature so many other 'everyday' folk doing heroic things. Look around carefully and you're bound to spot some!

Looking ahead, next month's Up! has the theme of 'writing' ... and it's shaping up to be a very special issue already ...

Until then, look after each other and do try to make sure your pants are on the inside of your tights, and not the outside!

Love  
Bridget & Harry (and Alfie) xx



Email: [admin@positivelyup.co.uk](mailto:admin@positivelyup.co.uk)  
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