



# Up!

FEBRUARY 2024

RELATIONSHIPS

Making the world a better place  
one page at a time

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# Up Front!

Welcome to our Relationships special!

Although February is traditionally - in the UK at least - linked with Valentine's Day, relationships aren't always about romantic love, as you'll see from this month's features. One thing that putting together this issue has brought home to us, on an even keener level than before, is that if we as a species are to survive and prosper, we really do need each other. As the photo above suggests, it takes a village to raise a child!

In our experience human beings are essentially the same the planet over. Regardless of race, gender, age or sexual orientation humans are social animals and relationships are at the centre of everything.

So scroll on and enjoy!

Bridget & Harry x

# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF RELATIONSHIPS

### **Maud**

I had a sister once.  
Her name was Maud.  
She never grew old,  
never even grew up.

My father cried.

I never knew her,  
never even knew of her.  
But I know now.  
I have a photograph  
so I can see her,  
picture her as she was.  
And I won't forget that

I had a sister once.  
Her name was Maud.

*Lynn White*

### **My grandmother**

Her infant-teacher writing stands out boldly  
on its yellowed paper tucked among my treasures:  
writing I could read and thoughts for me  
to understand - the chicks she rears, her views  
about my drawings - her gentleness belying  
the standards I was kept to in her name  
(rebelliously I wore the petticoat  
I wore for no-one else, in case she noticed).  
She dazzled me with small, impressive skills:  
an apple peeled itself as if undressing;  
her hands would delve and peep among her knitting  
("In, round, catch, off!" - and what  
a hopeless pupil she had found in me).  
When sitting by my bath she'd soap her hands,  
extend a rainbow film between her fingers,  
and blow me bubbles bigger than my dreams.

*Damaris West*

### **A Tiny Ritual**

One handkerchief. Lines parallel,  
neatly folded, carefully pressed,  
kept in the middle drawer of the sideboard,  
G - Plan, below the drop-down drinks' cabinet  
where you keep the sherry for Auntie Ann.  
Fresh pipe-cleaners in a plastic pack,  
and one ounce of Golden Virginia tobacco, bought  
from Forshaws for your every birthday,  
"The one Mr Thompson buys, please."  
Each rounded bowl polished until it gleams  
burnt sienna bright. Every pipe handle  
carefully cleaned and dried from  
the inside out, and each tiny, white,  
cotton covered wire figure I built,  
like some Giacometti in training,  
carefully unfurled and tidied away.

*Jenny Thompson*

# Help Up!

N.E.S.T.

**Up! meets Newcastle University's Tilly Atkinson to learn about a project full of heart**

**Thanks for agreeing to talk to us about this brilliant project, Tilly. For the benefit of our readers, could you tell us a little about NEST and what it delivers ...**

North East Solidarity and Teaching (N.E.S.T) is a student-led Newcastle University Students' Union Go Volunteer project - bit of a mouthful, we know - designed to educate, empower and integrate the forced migration community in the North East of England. We receive most of our funding from Newcastle and Gateshead City Councils, the Newcastle Youth Fund, and the Students' Union, in order to carry out our services. We currently have three main sub-projects for our service-users: ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) classes, Community, and Schools.

**We'd love to hear some of the day-to-day stories of the practical differences you make to the lives of those uprooted into our country...**

At N.E.S.T, we observe remarkable transformations each day, as individuals who have experienced displacement and come to our community discover practical solutions to their challenges.

Consider, for example, a service user who joins our organisation and initially struggles with language and cultural barriers. Through our comprehensive ESOL provision, engaging community events, and supportive mentorship initiatives, we help them gain newfound confidence, enabling them to fully benefit and



contribute to our community.

Our impact is evident at every step. By providing crucial language assistance, facilitating meaningful cultural exchanges, and promoting community engagement, we empower individuals to prosper in their new environment. Their progress in English proficiency equips them with vital skills to successfully navigate daily life.



Moreover, our influence extends beyond individuals to include their families. Children who initially encountered difficulties in adapting now receive support through tailored educational workshops and activities, allowing them to form new friendships and gain new experiences. Parents

# Help Up!

## N.E.S.T.

not only showcase their skills through our program but also extend their influence on the wider community. These stories vividly illustrate the tangible differences we make, whether it be in nurturing language skills, promoting cultural understanding, or empowering individuals to construct fulfilling lives in their adopted country.



Do you get the chance to build relationships with the people you help?

Yes, all of the time!

Meet Carlos, a young man from El Salvador who sought asylum in the North East of England. When Carlos first joined N.E.S.T. he faced the challenge of adapting to a new culture and had limited English language skills. However, with the support of the welcoming community at N.E.S.T. Carlos steadily improved his language abilities through the daily ESOL classes and community events.

The volunteer and staff team at N.E.S.T. played a vital role in creating a supportive environment that encouraged Carlos to step out of his comfort zone. As his language skills grew, Carlos gained confidence in expressing himself and engaging with others.

Carlos actively participated in cultural exchange activities where he shared his Salvadoran heritage with the community. Not only did this help him connect with residents, but it also fostered a sense of pride in his cultural identity. As his language capabilities developed, Carlos began taking on leadership roles in community projects organised by N.E.S.T.

Furthermore, Carlos played a crucial role in helping fellow forced migrants navigate their new environment. He volunteered as a mentor, providing guidance to newcomers and helping them overcome language and cultural barriers. Through his involvement, Carlos not only transformed his own life but also became an asset to the broader community.

At the same time, his daughter, who initially struggled to adapt, benefitted from N.E.S.T.'s educational workshops and activities designed for young individuals. N.E.S.T. provided a holistic support system that not only helped Carlos thrive

# Help Up!

N.E.S.T.

but also had a positive impact on the development of his family.

## What kinds of activities and experiences are you able to offer?

Our ESOL Project offers four English classes, six days per week, during university term time. Every class is led by volunteer teachers and classroom assistants, and tailored to our service users' ability levels.



Our Community Project offers childcare provision, alongside our Saturday English classes, so that families can access our support. Volunteers help out in a toddler and baby room, a games room, an arts and crafts room, or a homework club. This project also encompasses a Friday evening GCSE support club, and two weekly circus skills sessions.

Our Schools Project includes two to four daily sessions across ten primary and secondary schools in Newcastle. Volunteers run lunchtime and after school clubs, as well as reading comprehension and phonics activities. It is designed to support the children's academic, social and emotional development.

Volunteers can also support N.E.S.T. internally through our Engagement Project, which

includes working on marketing, fundraising, recruitment and communication. As an organisation, we rely on volunteers and donations to carry out our full services, so this is a crucial part of our work.



## We've found in the past that volunteering can be really rewarding. Is this something you've found too?

Volunteering to support those in need is absolutely one of the most rewarding things you can do in your spare time. Here are a couple testimonials from N.E.S.T. volunteers telling us about their time with the project...

*"I volunteered with N.E.S.T. to gain more insight into the world beyond Newcastle as well as to challenge my perspectives. I was amazed at not just the exposure to people and cultures around the globe but the amount I learned about my community and the community N.E.S.T. has built for both volunteers and learners. Being surrounded by a supportive team and building a relationship*

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*with the learners has been the best and most valuable part of the experience and has provided me with interpersonal and intercultural skills that I have taken out into the world on my year abroad and will be valued in my future”.*

Emily Pocock, Modern Languages Student, ESOL Coordinator, October 2022 - Present

*“Volunteering at N.E.S.T. has brought me a new perspective on life, not just working in a community that felt like family, but also helping me to improve myself personally, in the confidence, public speaking and independence which I still use today. Furthermore, volunteering at N.E.S.T. has made me have a more positive mindset to look beyond my studies, being able to provide help towards others in society that feels fulfilling rather than letting my degree and grades define my being. N.E.S.T. acts like a safe house for me, allowing me to relax and move out of the stressful mindset of studying. This is also one of the best things I believe volunteering at N.E.S.T. has brought me, the wonderful community that treats one another like family and many new opportunities. My time with N.E.S.T. has been an*

*eye opener to what we can do in the future beyond our degree”.*

Mei Li, Psychology Graduate, ESOL Teacher, October 2021 - June 2023

## How on earth do your volunteers manage to fit it in with their studies?

The great thing about N.E.S.T. is that you can really be as involved as you like. We offer a wide range of opportunities ranging from those that don't require any commitment, such as a casual ESOL Classroom Assistant, to roles where you have a lot more responsibility, such as a Schools Project Lead. We are so lucky to have over forty student volunteers take on leadership roles throughout N.E.S.T. These students lead our provision. They fit five to ten hours a week of volunteering around their university studies and part-times job because they truly care about the service-users they work with. Every single volunteer at N.E.S.T. is integral to us being able to continue our services. We currently have three staff members, two full-time and one part-time, so we really wouldn't be able to do it without them.

<https://supportus.ncl.ac.uk/north-east-solidarity-teaching>



*No-one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land*  
**Warsan Shire**

*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free*  
**Emma Lazarus**

*It is the obligation of every person born in a safer room to open the door when someone in danger knocks*  
**Dina Nayer**



# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF RELATIONSHIPS

### **Aunties**

Auntie Marjorie wasn't my real aunt  
but my mam's aunt when relatives were lost  
and absorbed into huge extended families.

Mum never liked her brother Jack's wife, Annie,  
I sensed it, never called her auntie,  
after all she wasn't kin.

Auntie Helen WAS, we had a secret liaison  
in a humbug flavoured thankyou Yuletide kiss  
knowing tight-arsed Uncle Joe would have sworn  
at the extravagance of a ten shillings postal order.

Muriel and Ilma, apologising for the dryness of the cake,  
as Dylan Thomas's 'kitchen of unwanted aunts' came alive  
Auntie Velma, glamorous as Ava Gardner

God's Gift for Uncle Ben who in those times of secret lies  
and veiled identities, grew up unaware  
that who he thought were his sisters  
were really HIS aunties  
all that is except for one;  
his mam.

### **Steve Harrison**

### **Beyond**

I want to outlive you  
to say farewell and then  
sit alone with you  
on memory's shore  
I want to be the last

### **Mandy Macdonald**

### **Model Wife**

She asked her husband  
to replace her

with something, an apple,  
a sunrise, one of his Star

Wars people, anything else.  
His paintings did nothing

for her.

This wasn't love,

but paralysis.

He didn't get her lips

or her cheekbones right.

There were no golden

waves under her feet.

Did she trust him?

Did she believe in him?

These were unfair questions,

dull questions.

Some people believe in UFOs.

Some people hear voices  
telling them to leave

in the middle of the night.

### **Glen Armstrong**

# Link Up!

ROB WYLIE

Meet Up!'s new board member, community worker Rob Wylie, who is all about bringing people together

## Describe a typical day in the life of a community worker for us.

Because I work for the church, and my faith guides me, several mornings a week I lead a short devotional, either in person or online. Then I will usually dive into some of the boring stuff... admin! We all love it! I would normally have a meeting of some description, perhaps meeting with one of the groups I'm involved with in North Shields. At the moment I'm leading a faith in the community course, so I also spend time preparing for and delivering that each week. My days are never the same as I hold 2 part time roles and even within them each day looks different.

## What's your favourite thing about what you do and why?

The best thing about my role is the people I meet. I'm an extrovert by inclination and so being around others gives me life. But more than that I'm also interested in people and their lives and digging into what makes folk tick.

## What's the most challenging aspect of your role?

People! hahaha! With the joy of meeting people also comes the challenge of navigating the agendas people come with (mine included) so this can sometimes be fraught with issues, particularly when dealing with people who are working for established organisations.



When times are tough (as they certainly are at the moment!), it can be hard to believe that we can make a difference. Give us some examples of how people can improve things for their local communities.

Three observations come to mind with this question.

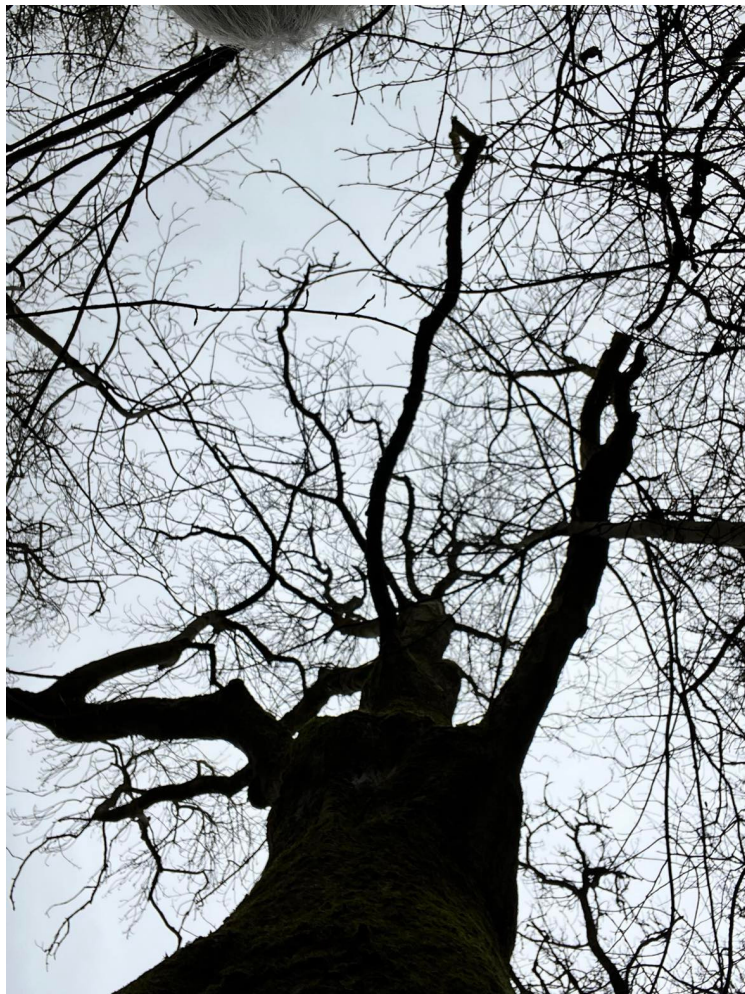
Firstly 'noticing' - over the last few months I have made a conscious effort to slow down and take notice of the things I see. So much of life involves rushing around and we often miss things in our communities, the extraordinary and the obvious. If we take time to notice, we not only see the things that are our natural inclination, but we also see behind and beyond to the hidden things, the things that we might bypass. These can be both positive and negative, they can bring joy and they can also fuel us to 'do' something!

As I have slowed down and looked around I have

# Link Up!

ROB WYLIE

noticed small community groups trying to make a difference, whether it be streets getting together and putting planters in their back lanes to make them more attractive, or community art projects that organisations have put together. You may also spot the many different volunteers who give their time each week to help with all kinds of projects. I have also noticed community groups being formed to meet some of the issues that we face within our communities, particularly around mental health.



Secondly being 'present'. One of the things I try to do as I walk around and speak to people is be fully present, not to be distracted by my phone or other things around me. I try to make whoever it is I'm speaking to the most important person at that time

This enables me to listen deeply to what folk are saying. Being present in this way also helps us to see what people aren't saying and maybe give them space to share it. Even in passing conversations at the checkout, in the shop or even walking down the street, we can try to catch someone's eye and smile and nod, we can recognise the 'human-ness' of those around us. Maybe you can intentionally speak to a stranger... God forbid!

Thirdly 'connecting'. Most of us live in our own wee world and don't see some of the connecting points, but if we really take time and think through the relationships we have, we will be able to see some ways people can connect with each other and with other groups and organisations. I'm thankful that my role gives me the space to think through these things and also see how people can connect with others. I see the opportunities that can be given when you start to join some of the dots and make connections. Sometimes when you make these connecting points happen, other vibrant gatherings can take place, I'm involved in Mariners and Marras (community singing at the Enigma Tap, North Shields). This has allowed people to find connections with others that might not have happened otherwise, but it has also allowed us to meet other groups and organisations. I have then made the effort to be curious and find out more what they do and who they are. This in turn builds further connections.





# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF RELATIONSHIPS

### **The Giving**

When it was time for giving, they made gifts,  
each to the other, of themselves. Naked  
in their honesty, they wore no fancy clothes  
to make them seem more than they were,  
no suit of armour for their weaknesses,  
protected only by each other's hands.

Precious, in all their ordinariness,  
beyond all other gifts they could bestow;  
each one received the essence of the other,  
knowing what they stood to lose. The giving  
was itself a gift: showing that they knew  
the hands to which they gave would keep them safe.

*Tim Taylor*

### **Broken**

A crack has formed on the surface.  
But it's not a clean break,  
not like that of a coconut being broken neatly in half by the temple priest.

No, this Crack is more like that caused when an amateur  
attempts to break open an egg in half.

All jagged and uneven  
the CRACK spreads like a spiderweb,  
quickly, with the mounting pressure.

And then  
Breaking point.

*Nivedita Karthik*

### **First meeting**

Propped on your elbow  
in the summer grass  
you tugged at tufts,  
listened, interrupted,  
while the shadow of your lashes  
drew a half-moon  
on your cheek.

You remember it  
so differently from me:  
you say  
we held hands  
on a bench in the rain.

*Damaris West*

# Joined Up!

## WONDERLAND WELLBEING

Meet holistic therapist Julie Egdell and discover the secret to a happier life

### Hi Julie, what led you to set up Wonderland Wellbeing?

I have always taken a holistic approach to my own health and wellbeing but it was an injury to my foot, coupled with fatigue, that led me to seek out complementary therapies and research their benefits. I started with acupuncture and found that it healed my plantar fasciitis that I had been suffering with for two years with no relief. I also had reiki and reflexology sessions and regular massages which I found lifted my mood and energy levels. I realised that the pain and fatigue were connected because our minds and bodies are connected. I started to study holistic therapies and learn more about the energetic body. I started Wonderland Wellbeing because I wanted to share my passion for holistic therapies and the holistic way of life with others. I wanted to offer a down to earth non-judgemental space where people could prioritise their own health and wellbeing wherever they are on their health journey.

### What happens to our bodies when we're under stress and how can good treatment help?

When we are under stress our bodies go into the sympathetic nervous system - also known as fight or flight. Too many of us don't have a single moment in the day when we stop, breathe and activate the parasympathetic nervous system - the rest and digest mode which is the opposite of fight or flight. Our bodies aren't designed to stay in fight or flight permanently and doing so leads to chronic stress. We can develop muscle tightness, knots, insomnia, anxiety, chronic



fatigue and burnout. A good treatment can help by releasing physical tension, activating your parasympathetic nervous system and acting as a reset for your nervous system.

Making small, simple and sustainable changes in between treatments can help you beat chronic stress altogether. Having a regular treatment can help relieve symptoms long term.

### Do you think there's a relationship between the way we live our lives these days and the increase in mental health and wellbeing issues?

Absolutely. Modern society isn't set up to support our mental health and wellbeing. It's designed to cultivate maximum productivity. The problem is that human beings aren't machines and our bodies don't work well in constant fight or flight.

We all have jobs and families to support and it isn't an option for most to quit. But what is an option is seeking out support by talking about our problems, being honest about how we feel and making small changes that could make a big difference. Even if the only thing you can do for yourself today is have an extra glass of water or focus on your breath for five minutes before bed those things make a huge difference. Simple and small is always best when you're overwhelmed.

# Joined Up!

## WONDERLAND WELLBEING

**It must be great being able to make a difference to people's wellbeing. What's the best thing about your job?**

I love to see the transformation and contrast in my clients between when they arrive and when they leave. Often people arrive slumped, mentally weighed down by their problems and in pain. To see



people leave the treatment rooms with their heads held high, smiling, feeling like a weight has been lifted both mentally and physically is the best feeling.

**What are your top tips for a happy, healthy life?**

Get the basics right - sleep, hydration, nutrition, exercise and human connection. Make time for the things that matter most to you in life. Don't wait for life to be perfect and your problems to be over before you prioritise your health, happiness and values. Just make the best of the situation you're in right now whatever it is. Talk to people about your problems and you'll find out that everyone is dealing with something. You really aren't alone.

<https://www.wonderlandwellbeing.com/>

[https://www.instagram.com/wonderland\\_wellbeing/](https://www.instagram.com/wonderland_wellbeing/)

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



*It's very important for us all to understand that we are interconnected and we need to hold hands together, especially when the going gets tough.*

**Michelle Yeoh**

*The internal machinery of life, the chemistry of the parts, is something beautiful. And it turns out that all life is interconnected with all other life.*

**Richard P. Feynman**

*We live in an interconnected world, in an interconnected time, and we need holistic solutions.*

**Naomi Klein**

*Pull a thread here and you'll find it's attached to the rest of the world*

**Nadeem Aslam**

# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF RELATIONSHIPS

**Couple, by Sean Henry (b.1965)**  
**Newbiggin Bay, Newbiggin by the Sea, Northumberland**

Three paces lie between me and the white horses.  
Sea horses brush hair and ruffle feathers on  
oystercatchers running the length of the bay.  
Offshore, stands a rig. Inhabited by a man  
five metres tall, his life partner cannot be seen.  
I wonder, for a moment, where she has gone –  
only to plunge into the icy waves below,  
bronze body scrubbed clean by a fresh facial of sand.  
Perhaps she grew weary of the insistent interruptions  
of the man who, beside her, faced the oncoming tides.  
Or was it just that her moorings came adrift  
in battering storms – giving way without warning.

I walk further and pause. Give breath.

For she stands. Still there after all.

**Jenny Thompson**

### **found family**

my favorite bonds are those  
forged in found family;

those people who we  
chose  
that chose us back without  
apology or remorse.

***linda m. crate***

**Next month's theme is: BUILDINGS**

Feel free to interpret the theme as you  
see fit and send up to 3 poems 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](https://positivelyup.co.uk/poetry-submissions)

### **Free Onboard Entertainment**

OMG Ben, she means it, with a heart and no chain,  
with a smile and no blind monkey shivering in embarrassment

LOL she is trying to express how awkward it is  
with a string of random vegetables, the screen is a garden

HAHA take a moment and appreciate the kiss,  
the following face with its drool, this drool is for you, you fool

**Ben Nardolili**



# Cheering Up!

## WAG & CO

**Up! meets Wag & Co ambassador, Kate Hierons and her gorgeous dog, Wedgie**

**Tell us a little bit about Wag & Company, and what they do ...**

Wag & Company is the only visiting dog charity befriending older dog lovers in their own homes as well as in care or in hospitals across the North East region. Launched in May 2016, Wag & Company matches and enables professionally-assessed volunteers and their special dogs (Visiting Wag Teams) to safely befriend dog lovers with the goal of reducing loneliness and loss. Currently, Wag & Company have over 350 Visiting Wag Teams and they regularly visit 205 people in their own homes. These people have typically lost friends, family and their beloved pets, their health and mobility are failing, they can't go out independently or have a dog of their own anymore. Wag teams also visit 150 care homes, hospices and hospitals. Whilst these people are less socially isolated than home placements, their need for contact with a dog again is no less important. A small office-based team provide advice and support 24/7, and deal with management of referrals, risk assessment, recruitment of volunteers as well as coordination of fund-raising activities.

**We'd love to hear about your own dog, Wedgie, and what was involved in him becoming a qualified Friendship Dog.**

When I retired from the NHS I needed to be doing something that was regular, sociable and active plus I had a very friendly, placid dog so joining the Wag family was a no-brainer! I became involved with Wag & Company in August 2018 and started volunteering with my black Labrador, Wedgie, soon



after. Wedgie, so called because he was 'wedged' during the birth process (yes really!) has made the perfect Friendship Dog due to his calmness, love for people and cuddles, enjoyment of treats and looking gorgeous in a red bandana! Wedgie sailed through the temperament test and once I had cleared the DBS checks, we were ready to start. Wag matched us to a local nursing home which was easy for us to walk to across the moor and I liaised with the home's activity coordinator who introduced us to new patients and updated me on others.

After about a year after starting volunteering with Wag. I was able to take on other placements and we now visit a nursing home (my original placement), a residential rehabilitation unit, an individual in a nursing home and an individual in her own home every week.

**This edition of the magazine is all about relationships, and there's something very special about the relationship between humans and animals. We'd love to hear about some of your favourite encounters whilst volunteering.**

Volunteering with Wag & Company is all about making and fostering relationships and also remembering cherished relationships. The people that we visit have usually lived with a dog for all or some of their life and they miss their pets' smell, feel and interaction. The presence of a dog

# Cheering Up!

## WAG & CO

seems to unlock these memories and often stimulates a discussion or stories of a loved pet. They often remember names, breeds, feeding and walking routines. I enjoy seeing the smiles on faces and increased animation in some people, especially from those suffering with dementia.



I visited a gentleman in Gosforth for about a year. Jack was living on his own but was quite lonely as his wife had been moved into nursing care. She suffered from dementia and didn't recognize him anymore, which made his regular twice-weekly visits very difficult. He loved dogs and had a great sense of humour so we quite quickly built up a good friendship which he enjoyed and we soon had him smiling again. Unfortunately, Jack passed away in early 2020 but I know from his daughter that he benefitted from the regular visits to his house.

In October 2019, I started volunteering at Connie Lewcock Resource Centre - a residential rehabilitation unit in Lemington. I had been a physiotherapist there during my NHS career so I knew the place and many of the staff already. Wedgie was a huge hit with the staff and the

patients and even has his own notice board there! We often join in with the exercise group or the crafting group in the day room - as long as Wedgie gets cuddles and the odd snack, he is happy!

I visit another dog-lover in a Care Home in Benwell. We first met Judith in the rehab unit and then followed her to her own home, then through a hospital admission to the care home where she is now settled. As she has no family, our weekly visits have been very welcome and she showers Wedgie with attention and Bonios - she tells him it is the highlight of her week!

### Has your relationship with Wedgie changed as a result of your working with Wag & Company?

Wedgie and I have a great relationship and I think that working together as a Visiting Wag Team has really enhanced that. We try to be ambassadors for Wag, making sure we are well-turned-out and presentable in our Wag uniform and bandana and on time! We have become a close team - Wedgie knows that when I appear in my red polo shirt it is a 'visiting' day and he gets suitably excited! I am super proud of Wedgie - he has taken to visiting so well and now knows what is expected of him. He knows when to be friendly and when to lie still.



# Cheering Up!

## WAG & CO

He is gentle with people and very responsive to cuddles and praise. It is a pleasure to be able to spend so much time with him.

### Are there other ways to support this great organization if you don't have a dog, or feel your own canine might not meet the criteria to become a Friendship Dog?

Wag & Company is a great organisation to support if you have a suitable dog and you are able to commit to a couple of hours a week volunteering as a Visiting Wag Team. However, if you don't have a dog there are many other ways to support this charity. For example, you can join the weekly lottery or donate by becoming a regular giver or a Friend of Wag. Other ways to help are through fund-raising activities which include the annual Walk for Wag in September, joining #TeamWag with a place in the Great North Run or on a Tandem Skydive, attending a sparkling afternoon tea event or even creating your own fund-raising initiative for friends and family.

### What advice would you give to anyone thinking about becoming a volunteer?

If you're thinking about becoming a volunteer for Wag & Company, I would really recommend it. Volunteering has many benefits such as connecting you with others and providing a connection with your local community. Wag tries to match each Visiting Wag Team with a suitable dog-loving recipient in order to make it easy to visit on a regular basis. It also means that the volunteer knows the neighbourhood and can chat about local issues, walks and parks etc. Also as a volunteer, you become connected to the Wag family and will be fully supported by the small office team who will guide you through the initial recruitment and testing and then the matching process. They are there for advice and providing ongoing support.

You are also connected through WhatsApp groups to other Wag volunteers, enabling the sharing of news and experiences. Volunteering can make a positive difference to both you and your visitors' lives - with Wag you can volunteer for just an hour a week or more if you like depending on your circumstances. This commitment can help with improving your self-esteem, confidence and well-being and your matched visitor will feel less lonely, connected and ... loved.

I am so lucky to be involved with a charity that makes such a difference to people's lives and that I get to do the work with my lovely dog - it's a win-win all round!



<https://wagandcompany.co.uk/>

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# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF RELATIONSHIPS

### SONG FOR PERCY DOG

(Newgale Beach, South Pembrokeshire, 2018)

A dry spell after too much rain sparked  
hope of a walk before dusk.

A draught of air spiked fresh with the ocean,  
a chance to clear our heads.

There's a bit of blue sky, one of us said.  
So we loaded Percy Dog into the car.

Sometimes you have to drive a ways  
to find your sunny day.

And so we did. When the sun broke through  
our listless hearts leaped up.

The whole day beamed like a jovial uncle,  
warmed our cockles through.

You took my photo. I wrote verses in the sand.  
For the first time in forever we could laugh.

We all three slipped the leash that day.  
But Percy ran and ran.

*Abilgail Ottley*

Extract from the cycle: *A family's history*  
*5 Repairs, one*  
*after Reunion - Claudine Toutongi*  
*from Smoothie - Carcanet*

You're there in front of me  
and I struggle to flesh you out  
because so many years have passed  
and you have so long not been flesh;  
I said at my mother's funeral, 'I have waited  
fifty years to say goodbye to my father'  
but that was in an emotional moment -  
it was a day of her memory, her celebration,  
not yours. But now the separation  
of still more years has reframed my desire  
not for farewell but for a closer seeing,  
at least a questioning, an opening of a corridor,  
not a closing of a stained-glass infilled door.

*Philip Hood*

### Family Values

It made me feel good to see the family,  
mother and father, daughter and son  
sitting together on the spread blanket at the park  
heads bowed around their picnic lunch, a tradition  
of saying grace before the meal not often seen,

when they all look up, laugh and point  
at the tweet just received on their iPhones.

*Carl Papa Palmer*

# Chatting Up!

JENNIFER C WILSON

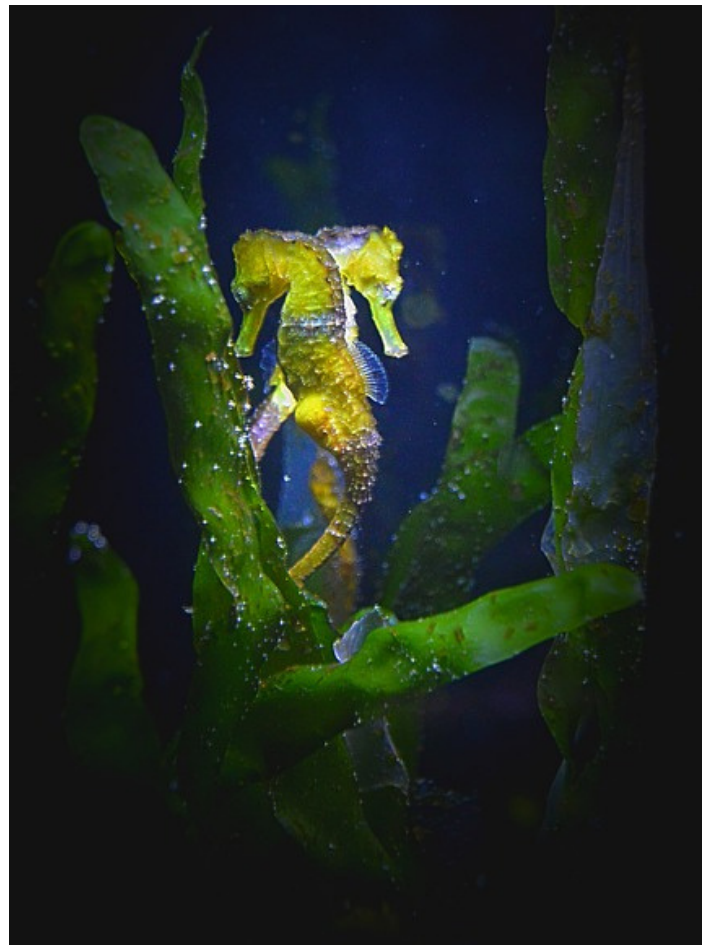
Up!'s resident marine biologist goes a-courting under the sea

Ah, February... The month of romance!

Given our proximity to Valentine's Day, I thought looking at some of the interesting courtship rituals that exist in the marine environment might be good fun. After all, it also gives us the chance to share some photos of aquatic critters, which I'm always a fan of.

As with many species of the animal world, when we head underwater, it's so often the males who put the effort in. This is another thing I am a fan of (sorry, chaps, but let's be honest, it's so often the women who put more effort into their appearance).

One crazy species which simply MUST feature in this article is the cuttlefish. Now, if you're not aware of the cuttlefish, their colour-changing skills are beyond belief. They can camouflage against almost any background, as well as using their abilities to flirt during mating season. BUT... here's the clever bit. They can change each side of their bodies independently. What does this mean? Well - to the females of the group, the male displays as fancy a colour show as he can, making sure his potential mates get a good view of what he has to offer. On his other side, visible to the other males? He shows female colouring. The result of this? The other males simply think they're watching a group of females hanging out, completely missing that there's a male rival closer to the pack than any of them. Crafty critters...



Also featuring colour-changing is the wonderful seahorse. You're probably aware of the whole "male seahorses giving birth" thing, but they also do a beautiful dance, with the males courting the female for several days before mating. In addition to this dancing, there's colour-changing, and entwining of tails. All very romantic, leading to the start of a monogamous, life-long relationship. Just beautiful.

Another fish which mates for life is the French angelfish, with couples living, travelling, and hunting together once their bond has formed. Working together, they will defend their territory against neighbouring couples, or single fish who might be looking to break up the happy couple. Once coupled-up, the fish are rarely seen on their own, they're that dedicated!

It's not all about the dancing though - we also have the oceanic equivalent of standing outside your crush's window with a boom-box, or making

# Chatting Up!

JENNIFER C WILSON



a mixtape for the love of your life. That's right, the music-makers! When I was younger, one of my proudest achievements was winning British Rail's Young Environmentalist of the Year Award, for a project on a favourite species of mine: the humpback whale. The song of the humpback whale featured heavily in my project, because frankly, it's beautiful. Their songs can last for hours, and can even be passed across the oceans, with research noting that Australian whales have passed their songs onto others in French Polynesia, and from there onto Ecuador. The transference can take years, but it's still impressive that specific songs can travel thousands of miles.

When it comes to the breeding season though, whilst male humpbacks do use their music to attract a mate, it's a bit different to some species. Larger, mature males lead the singing, but the younger males are not excluded, instead joining in the singing, apparently as a way of both learning the 'local' songs / dialect (yes, whales have accents) and amplifying the volume of the song, thereby attracting more females to

the area. They also physically spread themselves out in areas known as 'arenas', further spreading the song.

We'll ignore the emerging evidence that humpbacks are gradually becoming fighters, not lovers, and starting to use violence rather than music to attract their mate, because to be honest, that fact upsets me. If you're interested (which you should be) this is because the number of whales has simply grown so high that physical strength and activities such as ramming, charging, and head-slapping are more prevalent between males during breeding season.

We'll quickly switch back to happy thoughts, and the ever-cuteness of the sea otter. If you don't love otters, then I'm afraid to say you might need to get your 'adorability detector' checked and adjusted; it's likely broken. Nice and monogamous again, mating for life, and living in big family groups, caring for not only their own young, but others within the family too. See - adorable.



More adorability, and back to gifts... we've had mixtapes, and now - pebbles! Because who doesn't love a pebble? But more importantly, who doesn't love a penguin? Put those together, and what do we get? That's right, penguin partners presenting precious pebbles! A beautiful gift, romantically declaring their willingness to help build your nest, and be your partner, for the breeding season, at least. I must admit, as a former geology A-level student, I'd be perfectly

# Chatting Up!

JENNIFER C WILSON

happy to receive a nice stone or pebble as a gift, so this is another one I'm definitely in favour of!



Of course, we're anthropomorphising a LOT in this article, adding the very human notion of 'romance' to what, in reality, are very practical acts.

As with many songbirds, male humpbacks sing to show off their strength - the stronger they're able

to sing, the more likely they'll be a successful and strong partner, passing on better genes to the female's offspring. Likewise, the colour-changing and the dancing, it's all about showing how good your genetics are, and how you should be the one the females choose. Where partners stick together to raise their young, strength is vital, keeping both the female (potentially weakened for the first couple of days) and the offspring safe until they're able to look after themselves. And those pebbles? Those are for nest-building penguins, helping their partners construct sturdy sanctuaries for their precious eggs and young.

It's human nature though, isn't it, to see ourselves and our intent in the actions of others, and really, where's the harm? And if it inspires a spate of mixtape making, or pebble-gifting, then really, it's all to the good...

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

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**Blog:** <https://jennifercwilsonwriter.wordpress.com/>



# Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF  
RELATIONSHIPS

## **Baking with Mother**

She  
was always there in the kitchen, pinny and patterned frock,  
Flour,  
sugar, butter, mixing bowl; long gone recipe just ad hoc,  
Adding  
the eggs whilst singing the wrong words to every radio tune.  
Whilst  
the Oliver Twist at the table sits ready to lick a discarded spoon.  
Coconut  
Haystacks, angel, chocolate, and rice cakes, a few to speak  
Oh  
the smells from that oven were enough to make a small boy weep .  
The  
agony of the cooling; sitting on the wire rack.  
Intent  
faces, it's a pantomime, the waiting game is back.  
Conceded  
after a couple of rounds with an imperceptible nod,  
Consent  
duly given to eat the one that came out odd.  
Strange  
she was so meticulous in her work, but not a perfect bake.  
But  
happy sticky fingered boys, never question warm cake.

**Andrew Hare**

## **Songlove**

The way it is when  
we sing together  
you Ginger, me Fred  
I've never recovered from  
that first duet

**Mandy Macdonald**



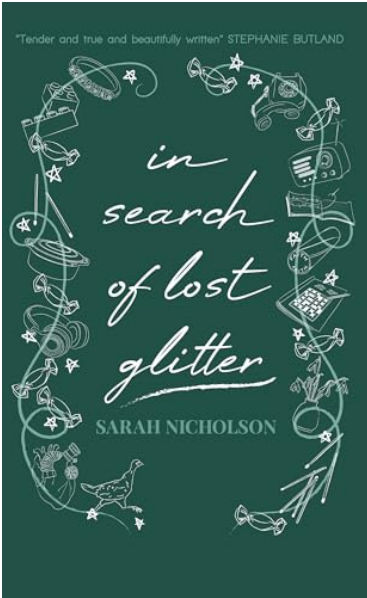
# Read Up!

JENNA WARREN

Reading between the lines, Love is in the air



In keeping with this month's theme, I'm going to share some of my recent favourite books which explore love and relationships.



*In Search of Lost Glitter* is a beautifully written memoir by Sarah Nicholson, and the author's debut book. When her husband Andrew died unexpectedly, Sarah started a blog to, in her words, 'help me work through my grief and stitch together what was broken'. Later deciding that she would like to develop her blog into a book, Sarah set herself a challenge to write one hundred pieces of creative non-fiction, each written in one hundred words (she later expanded some of these when it felt appropriate).

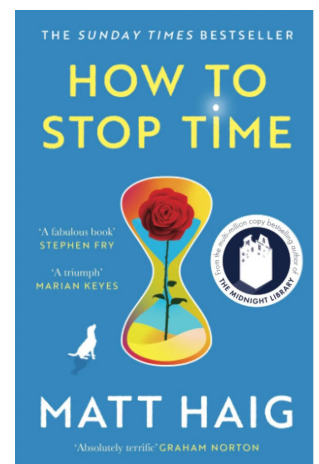
Sarah takes us from her first meeting with Andrew and shows us glimpses of their life together. She then shows us the aftermath of his death, and how she tried to find the 'fragments of lost glitter': small pieces of hope and comfort and happiness. The result is an exquisite collection of tiny stories.

The memoir explores the difficult subject of grief, while at the same time offering the reader touches of humour and insight into family relationships. I absolutely loved the format, and read the book in a single sitting. The book also features beautiful line drawings by Olivia Rose Design.

Sarah published her memoir with Resolute Books, a consortium of independent authors who are working together to promote and support each other's work and offer a viable alternative to traditional publishing and solo self-publishing. The writers among you might want to check them out at <https://www.resolutebooks.co.uk>

*How to Stop Time* is a touching and entertaining novel by Matt Haig, one of my favourite authors. The main character, Tom Hazard, looks like an ordinary man in his early forties. But Tom has a secret: he has a (fictional) condition called 'anageria' which means he ages very slowly. He has been alive since the time of the Tudors.

Tom has, obviously, seen a lot in his long life. He knew Shakespeare, lost family to the plague, and worked as a pianist in Jazz Age Paris. At the start of the novel, he has settled in modern day London, where he is (naturally) working as a history teacher.



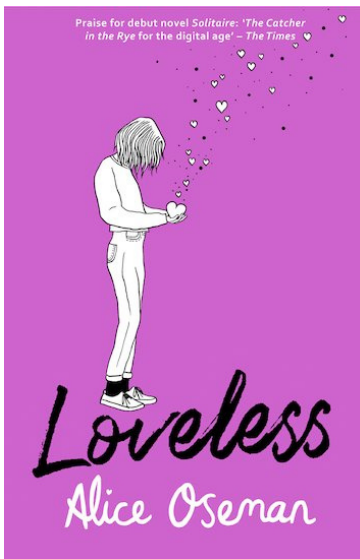
# Read Up!

JENNA WARREN

Tom isn't the only person with this condition. There is also Hendrich, a deeply unpleasant character who is the self-appointed leader of the Albatross Society. This secret society has the apparent aim of protecting people like Tom and Hendrich from danger and exploitation by the 'Mayflies' (people with normal lifespans). Occasionally Hendrich will send Tom off on an assignment to either recruit a new member of the society, or, on one occasion, dispose of any who resist. Perhaps most significantly, Hendrich has convinced Tom not to fall in love, because that is the way madness lies. Tom is familiar with the pain of loss: his wife died many years ago, and his daughter is missing.

So Tom moves through the centuries, doing his best not to connect with anybody. But then, in modern-day London, he finds himself falling in love with Camille, a fellow teacher at his school. This newfound love forces Tom to question everything Hendrich has told him and ask himself what he really wants out of life.

Like most of Matt Haig's novels, *How to Stop Time* uses elements of science fiction and fantasy to explore very human concerns. This is a story about love and loss and finding meaning. I highly recommend it.



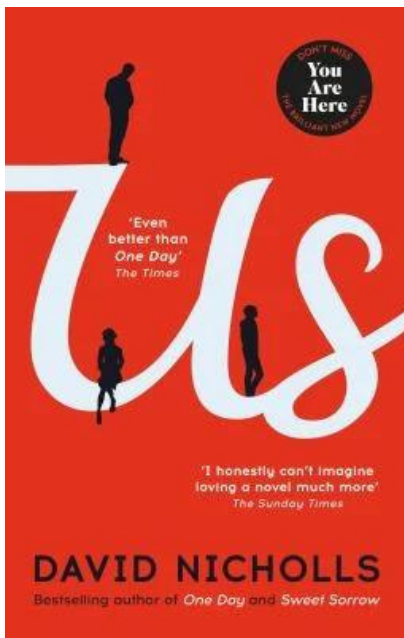
*Loveless* is a wonderful Young Adult novel from Alice Oseman, author of the popular *Heartstopper* series of graphic novels. It won the YA Book Prize in 2021, and follows eighteen-year-old Georgia, who is going to Durham University. Her best friends, Pip and Jason, are going there too.

Georgia considers herself a romantic, but she's starting to realise that she has never had a crush on anyone. During her first year at university, she starts to question whether she might be asexual and/or aromantic. However, Georgia has always been convinced that she'll find the right person eventually, and her determination to do this puts a strain on her relationships with her close friends.

*Loveless* is a story about self-knowledge and self-acceptance, about valuing friendship and not bowing to peer pressure. I particularly loved Oseman's portrayal of university life, and how it can be lonely and difficult for young people to be away from home for the first time, as well as exciting. Oseman's writing is very warm and humorous, and she creates wonderful characters. I also loved her earlier novel *I Was Born For This*, about music and fandom.

# Read Up!

JENNA WARREN



I couldn't end this column without mentioning another of my favourite writers who explores love and relationships so beautifully: David Nicholls. One of his novels, *Us*, is about Douglas and Connie, who have been married for twenty years. Douglas thinks they're happy, but then, shortly before their son Albie is due to leave for university, Connie says she wants a divorce.

Douglas forms a plan to win back the love of his life: he'll organise the family holiday of lifetime, and take his wife and son on an epic journey around Europe. They'll visit places that they went to on their honeymoon and in the early years of their relationship, and the romance between them will be rekindled. It will also bring Douglas and Albie closer together. What could possibly go wrong?

It turns out that a lot can go wrong. For a start, the relationship between Douglas and Albie is somewhat strained. Father and son don't have much in common – Douglas is a scientist who likes everything neat and just so, while Albie is a creative like Connie, and wants to go to art school. Albie meets a girl on the trip and promptly disappears, plunging the carefully organised holiday into all kinds of chaos.

This novel is very funny, with wonderfully complex characters. Like Nicholls' other work, it is often bittersweet, sometimes sad, but always insightful and warm.

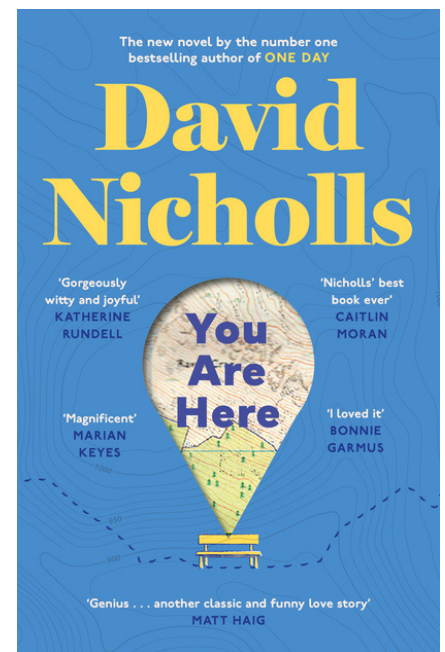
I was delighted to learn that David Nicholls is publishing a new novel at the end of April this year: *You Are Here*, which is about two people walking across England from the Lake District to Yorkshire. I can't wait.

Happy reading!

Jenna

*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 2022 by Fairlight Books.*



# Word Up!

## YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF RELATIONSHIPS

### **Muffin Exchange**

Penning self-effacing compositions  
In the corner of the café,  
I take in coffee and retrieve inspiration,  
Enjoying the bean  
And giving an ear to the staff  
Releasing a song from the bakery

Is it a craft? For sure, they are pouring  
Sacks of flour and sugar  
Into giant mixers to make breads,  
Muffins, and cakes,  
Their gleaming machinery whirls about  
In soothing rhythms

Meanwhile, I struggle to find  
My ingredients and their proportions,  
Searching for a way  
To pattern and cite in such sweet forms  
That can distract a reader  
Who is missing the comfort of prose

### **Ben Nardollili**

Nana never said she loved me, not once in thirty years. Old school, she was. Not one to talk sappy but nimble and fierce as a ferret. If she loved you, you knew it, like you knew the sky was blue or the lemonade man came on Thursdays. If you pushed her too far and she shot you that look, you'd still see it in the clouds in her eyes. Nana never flinched from an unpleasant truth. A lie was a lie and no nonsense. Best to face facts, see the world as it is: bluebirds and daisies, warts and all. Put your best foot forward, she told me. A smile is all you need to look lovely. Fine words butter no parsnips for supper. Fancy talk makes flatterers and fools.

### **Abigail Ottley**

### **Auntie May**

fluttered her way through life,  
providing for her family,  
looking after Uncle Les.

She raised two daughters in their tiny house.  
Her aging parents lived next door,  
needed looking after too, until they died.

May, never still, always on the go.  
When deafness and senility diminished him,  
she struggled on, still caring.

After she died, worn out, my cousins  
moved him to a nursing home.  
Three or four weeks later,

he'd forgotten her.

### **Tonnie Richmond**

# Coming Up!

So here we are at the end of another issue. Thanks so much to all our readers. We know that people from all over the world read our humble magazine every month, and we can't express how grateful we are for all your continued support. In a world which often seems full of trouble, our mission remains to highlight some of the good stuff which can so easily go unnoticed.

Next month we'll be talking about Buildings and we hope to have another exciting edition for you!

Until then, take care of yourselves and each other.

Much love

Bridget, Harry and Alfie (who's currently feeling very sorry for himself after breaking a leg) xx



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