

Our Favourite Places Calendar



Grass Roots Open Writers

2013

A MESSAGE FROM GROW

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.” - Philippians 4:8

Grass Roots Open Writers is a very friendly and supportive community writing group.

We hope you enjoy reading our work and that you'll be inspired to write your own.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION - OR TO SHARE YOUR WRITING WITH US

Please visit the GROW website: www.grow.btck.co.uk

Email: grass.roots.open.writers@gmail.com **or Phone / Text** 07932 231491

or just come along to one of our fun and relaxed workshops.

Creative Writing, Arts & Crafts Workshop

Every Alternate Monday[#]

10.30 - 12.30

Beulah Baptist Church, Buckhurst Road, Bexhill

Creative Writing Workshop

Every Tuesday^{*}

12.30 - 14.15

The Roebuck Centre, Roebuck Street, Hastings Old Town

Skill Sharing Workshop

Every Wednesday^{*}

10.00 - 13.30

Roosevelt Court Resident's Lounge, Stonehouse Drive, St Leonards

[#]Please check the GROW Diary on our website for dates.

^{*}Except during School Holidays.

We also organise social events and outings.

January

Favourite Places

One of my favourite places has to be a particular coffee shop in town.

I am more than happy to buy a magazine and relax there with a small latte (with added sugar) after a hard week and just before the weekend. I also like to go with my youngest daughter where she has a babychino. I started taking her there twice a week when we first moved here. When she drank she always had a chocolate smile afterwards. When we had finished we'd go downstairs and read endless books together, I'd always see the same dad with his little boy doing exactly the same as me.

I do miss her being there with me, but I've kind of got used to it now, as it's so calm there. I also love the smell of freshly roasted coffee. I can chill out on my own and read or have a gossip with a friend.

Debbie Feltz

Places

My favourite place would be in the countryside near a mansion. I would like to work things out and write them on paper. I may find this hard and with distractions. Also it would be a place where I could read a book.

Drawing the details of the house would be difficult. I may need to know the distances between things. A diagram with all the distances written down I would take to put in the drawing.

It is a good place to work and read a book.

Andrew Jeremiah

My Favourite Place

I like to go to creative writing in the Hastings Children's Library, using my brain and writing things down. Discussing my thoughts and ideas. It's a nice place to meet people, to talk, exchange views and share experiences.

Sue Horncastle

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A FAVOURITE PLACE FROZEN INTIME

In the confines of my bedroom, a solitude inner space situated within the framework of a protective shell, I expel an array of photographic images, from my laptop computer, of bygone ages. A brightly coloured Ford Capri stands proud outside a grey stoned brick terraced house in Burnley. A mother cooks a meal in her garishly decorated Butlins' chalet. A diesel train approaches Darlington station, snaking along the winding track, against a backdrop of spewing cylindrical cooling towers, the smoke blackening the overcast sky. Images frozen in temporal suspension, which spark off the inability to feel their physical existence.

One such image is that of a sweet shop, sandwiched between rows of red-bricked terraced houses, with its fresh 'hot of the press' odour of comics, and the towering teetering jars of sweets, mouth-watering magical colours of different flavours, shapes and textures. Not only was it a favourite haven of mine, as a child growing up in the 1970s, but a heavy inspiration for putting words onto a blank page.

For within the space of marginally ruled lines, I recreate this piece of nostalgia through the eyes of my fictional character, Harry, a boy whose words tend to speak off the page to me.

"Go on! Get me to distract the shopkeeper so that I can stuff my coat pockets with crisps and sweets," as if his written words would say. An act, for I know only too well, the consequence of which once led to severe reprimand.

Mark Crittenden

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Serenity, Solitude, Peace
Time alone when writing words
As I listen to my soul
I hear the emotion of the sea within
I capture the world
Rehabilitate the senses
The sound, the crushing swirl
It tries to take the glory from me
But -
I have a brain - even though -
that tried to take me
But I smile
For each day brings me
My favourite place
The Earth, it's Serenity,
It's Solitude, it's Peace
Even though it's falling apart around us...

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MY CORNER

I have a corner in the yard
In winter it is always warm
If sunshine really is so hard
I sit out on my little form

The walls are tall, no breeze is there
At noon the shadows will encroach
Which really doesn't seem quite fair
'cos evening still has to approach

Although the shady garden's white
And old leaves too are lying there
The frost that's come the previous night
Other conditions might infer

December's threat it does not mean Indoors
I have to spend my time
My little corner that's so clean
Means I can sit, not spend a dime!

Henry Dallimore

February

Island of Dreams

At last dawn is breaking as I spy a chink of light through the curtains. I am so excited I have been unable to sleep. The butterflies in my stomach are having a real battle. This morning I am to take my first flight to the island of Menorca.

I look outside it's a cold February morning putting on the kettle for my first cup of tea don't think I could face eating breakfast. One hour to go before I leave home, keep checking passport, tickets money.

The taxi arrives. First we will go to collect my parents and then off to the airport. I can see the excitement in my parents' faces. They have flown before and I can see the pleasure they are feeling for me. What busy places these airports are; people going here there and everywhere. We go to the check in gate; the nerves are really kicking in, no turning back now.

It seems an eternity before we are called to board. We take our seats, the engines are roaring speeding down the runway. I don't know whether to look out of the window or shut my eyes. As we left the ground I felt like I was glued to the seat. At last we are in the air. I was actually starting to enjoy it; stewardesses coming round offering us drinks followed by food. As we prepared for landing, I was starting to look forward to seeing where we were going. I had noticed during the flight how blue the sky was and the clouds like fluffy cotton wool.

As we stepped of the plane the one thing I will never forget was the warmth that hit me and a beautiful aroma of flowers like you get when you walk into a heated greenhouse. I could not believe that just two hours ago we had left a very cold damp foggy morning in England.

When we reached the hotel all I wanted to do was run down to the sea, the sands where golden and the water was so clear I could see right down to the bottom. Everything was so different and I spent a glorious week exploring this wonderful island.

I have since returned on two occasions and I don't think it will be my last but I will never forget the first time. We have special occasions through our life but very few are really memorable.

Pauline Faulkner

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THE BEACH – Part One

Life found me when I was born. I did not know how my life would progress. But it did. Childhood was not really my favourite place but I had some really good times. In my mind's eye I can see those moments still. One of them was would you believe, me in a pram. I remember having a white dress on which one day changed its colour to mud. The boy it seems threw mud at me. Now that was definitely not my favourite place. Being a baby in a pram I wouldn't have really known what was going on except for feeling the sensation of the mud smacking against my body.

Further memories. I can remember playing with my siblings. I grew up in Hastings, UK. I was born in St. Leonards on Sea, and then I went with my family to live on a council estate. That house stayed in our family right up until 2001...my father had died in 1993 - my mother took over the house and stayed there right up until she had been transferred to a nursing home, but still it stayed intact until the day she died. A month later it had been cleared and now other tenants are in it. I sometimes wonder about it...

As a youngster...there were many of us kids who loved to get together and play. In those days, we could play on the roads...it was safer then, but also, for us to do it, I can remember having road sense. My parents and schools must have taught me. Was my childhood my favourite place? You don't realise the impact the world can have on you until you do become a grown-up having to deal with the pros and cons of life as your parents obviously did when you were a child.

I went through so I was told 'Whooping Cough' - a bad attack as I was told as a grown up...it seems, there was a gas works in the area of Glyne Gap where Ravenside shopping centre is now. It seems the smell of the gas back then seemed to have cured me. I don't know the ins and outs, but I was told my mother or both my parents walked through the works. Must have been an old remedy. My father was born in 1906 and my mother 1921. They met in the 2nd world war when my mother had arrived in England from the Republic of Ireland. They met in Birmingham - a munitions (I think that is what it is called) factory where they made things for the war. And I even heard that they were so much in love, when they were together, they slept right through an air raid.

Yes, my memories can sometimes be my favourite place. After all, when I think back and put thoughts to paper, it becomes real. When my father died, just before, he asked me if I could write about his life. He asked me to bring in a dictaphone, but R.I.P. dad died before I could do this. So, I write my thoughts and if something turns up about his life, words come pouring out of me. It took me about 10 years to find one of his 1930s friends...whom I am always linked with now...

And so, my teenage life came along...I was a very shy person in those days..but I can remember, I liked going out with my pals...(boys/girls) but my main love was writing projects...I can remember doing one about Australia. Family used to send me cuttings, thoughts etc...but I also loved to read...I used to get lost in the stories that were on the page, also, I began to enjoy poetry. My parents gave me my first book in 1959...Children's Verses. Somewhere it is still with me, but I can't put my hands on it yet. I hope it turns up soon. I had no clue as to the fact I would find the initiative of becoming a Poet myself.

I can remember my parents used to give us birthday parties...and then our friends parents used to hold them - I can remember when I was about 8 or 9, 4- 5 years after having my large tonsils removed at a hospital that is no more...having to stay in bed instead of going to this fabulous party that all my friends were going to..I had what they called in those days 'Asian Flu' - I have no clue if that is how it is spelt. I used to think it was spelt 'Ancient Flu'

Back to my teenage years. Music, dancing...brilliant. I seemed to love being in my bedroom with this suitcase type of record player. I would buy those 45 rpm vinyl records. The 60s was my favourite era. In the quietness of my bedroom (my sibling not around - she may have been downstairs or out) I would sing along with them. Music was great (my favourite place then) was my dad and my brother playing instruments. Dad could play loads. He used to have his friends in at night, and I would go out with my friends, but when I returned they were all there playing them. So musical and joyous. It was in those days, dad told me he did a lot of music and dancing in Hastings UK in the 1930s before I was even thought of. It seems he choreographed ballroom dance on the Hastings Pier, helped competitions along - and played his music. I understand he was a good Cello player. His younger sister, my aunt was a piano player, and their other sibling (my other aunt) was a form of Tiller Girl.

(End part one of THE BEACH to be continued in Part Two)

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March

Tenterden, Northiam and Bodiam Railway

Walking onto the platform, I go back in time, but the people walking around me have digital cameras and mobile phones to record the history around the area. The people are buzzing with excitement, chatting to the volunteers, but I don't listen to that as, in the distance, a whistle sounds and echoes around the fields, making sheep run away.

Then the noise of a deep throaty chuff starts and continues going chuff chuff chuff, getting deeper as it works harder to get up the steep hill. It works hard to pull the coaches and the passengers to the platform. It billows smoke and steam from its chimney,

The driver opens the regulator to full and the fireman shovels more coal into a fire so hot that Satan himself would run and hide from it.

As it gets over the threshold of the hill, the driver shuts the regulator, letting it coast into the station, before I hear the squeal of the brakes being applied bringing the train to a stop with a slight shudder at the end. I have a fright when the driver lets off the steam.

I walk with a quick pace to have a look at the incredible machine. As I'm coming near it I see the fireman signal to the driver that he's going in the gap between in and the coaches, to uncouple it. The clanking noise means that it is now free to move, once he signals the driver with his hands.

Getting the all-clear from the fireman, the driver moves the engine under the water tower, so it may quench its thirst after its hard journey and get ready for its next.

When people look at these machines, that's all they see. When I look at them I see a living beast, capable of moving amazing weights. They are working history and I will always love them for these steam engines are living works of art.

This is Tenterden, Northiam and Bodiam Railway, formerly known as the H.E.S.R. and it is my favourite place because it is the one place where I fit in.

Sam Burford

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THE BEACH – Part Two
(continued from Part One)

When I reached adulthood and kept thinking I was a dunce because I failed my school exams (except for pitmans elementary and commerce) with the day release from my senior school...was left thinking I was a dunce. At my senior school I enjoyed doing project work, but exams and English and English literature I failed miserably. It wasn't until I decided to go back to Adult Education knowing full well, by that time that I wanted to become a writer, that I was told, even if I didn't understand grammar etc...but I continue to write - I indeed was a writer...in fact I was so made up in 1980 that my first letter was published in the then known newspaper Evening Argus entitled 'SAVE OUR CLASSES'.

My world evolved around what I was learning in my own style...I know I sometimes make mistakes, I know my health issues get in the way sometimes, but after a school inspector at my youngest sons school once said (my youngest is now in adulthood) You may not understand grammar but it is obvious you sometimes write it...write as you speak and so this is what I do. Just because I do not have exams making me feel a dunce, does not mean I cannot be a writer. I would love other people to think this also.

My favourite places of my life have been...my head stuck in a book...writing...freelancing a community column for 3 years with a newspaper which was given me when I approached when I founded a non-profit magazine which is now a hobby, but I still do...living the world as a poet, performance reading them, having had moments on hospital radio, and even once on Meridian news (due to a neighbourhood disagreement of sound from a Sheep -I had written a poem - at the time I was known as Mary Jo West - Hastings Poet, now I am known as Josie Lawson -Hastings Poet)...I could go on...but, I also have enjoyed my world in local writing groups...I keep in touch with my computer but one day maybe my health will support me to attend again...

I suppose these words are just a freeflow today because I read there was a deadline with the theme (Our Favourite places)...

Love my words...

I have lost my favourite favourite place which was my secret place for solitary moments of writing words...It was in the open..many people around except for inside my soul

This place, was -

THE BEACH.

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The Seaside

I love living by the seaside. Standing on the beach staring out into forever while listening to the ebb and flow of lapping waves and whistling shingle makes me feel as free as the gulls flying above my head...

The sea often mirrors my moods. Listless and shimmering on a hot summers day it is as I basking in the sun skin aglow with perspiration.

Little can be seen peering into the black abyss at night. Yet standing on the shoreline I know my companion is there with me. Constant yet silent it becomes my link with loved ones now passed, who, though masked now from my vision, shadow my every move lighting my path safely as does the moonlight.

The seaside, just these words connect in my mind thoughts of holidays, sunshine and fun! Even when it is grey overhead raining and the ocean is colourless I am full of thoughts of how when summer returns this blank canvass shall once again be used to paint the hopes and dreams of thousands of locals and visitors alike.

Yes, I love living by the seaside.

Antony May

April

Home

Favourite places, it's hard to think where my favourite place would be. I have been to Hound Tor in the south of England what was amazing, but then Bolton Abbey in the north of England what gave off the same awe aspect as Lake District!

The snow covered mountains gave off the same effect upon me like when climbing the Tors in Exeter. Many more other places I have been to, not just in the England but abroad too...but then I realised my favourite place was home. To be in the company of whoever you want, whenever you want some time alone you have your bedroom. When you want something to eat you go to the kitchen and cook what you crave and quench your thirst with drinks from the fridge.

Home would be the favourite place... I may not have a great view of mountains or not able to climb rocks. Still I can see the sun go down from my window and enjoy sounds of joy of my nephew and nieces play in the garden. I can sit in the swinging sun lounger with my feet up in to the air and in my shed I can play pool and darts at my leisure. Home, it has everything I need to fulfil my needs.

Ifran Kasim

Favourite Places

Another favourite place of mine has to be going to see my parents in Brighton. We go every Christmas, as I don't have to cook the Xmas dinner. My girls love it too as there is always something to do. There are loads of shops, coffee shops, and when the weather gets warmer there is different entertainment for the kids, like bungee (not the one where you jump off a crane). They get strapped on to a trampoline and bounce really high. They also go in a huge ball which they go inside and they are inflated and pushed into a pool of water. They have to try to run in it. They look like hamsters in a ball. I tried it once and I couldn't get as far as to run. I could just about manage to stand up in it. Great fun though. Brighton is a very busy place but the beaches just get extremely packed.

Debbie Feltz

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Menorca

My most memorable time was my first holiday abroad to Menorca. It was a cold damp February morning when I set off to the airport with my parents the jitters in my stomach were going round and round at the thought of flying as we entered the airport there was a sense of excitement all around we seemed to go from place to place checking in then through security finally we were in the departure lounge I really thought there is no turning back now the waiting seemed endless not good for the nerves. Finally we called to board the roar of engines as we took off was deafening as we left the ground I felt that I was being thrown back into the seat and when she went into a turn I held on so tightly to my seat for fear I was going to fall out..

As we broke through the cloud the sky was an incredible blue so clear you felt that you could see for miles. Gradually I got used to it and started to enjoy it especially when the air stewards came and offered us food and drink it seemed as if I was someone special. The only thing to cope with now was the landing I enjoyed this less than the take-off as it seemed to take forever and my ears were going pop pop. As we taxied down the runway, the excitement of what was to come filled me with excitement.

Getting off the aircraft the one thing I will never forget was the wonderful aroma I can only describe it to the like of being in a hothouse full of exotic plants the clear sky and sun it did not seem possible that we had only left the cold and damp of England two and half hours ago. We arrived at the hotel and were shown to our room. Why is it parents always want to do silly things like unpacking, when all you want to do is explore? When I saw the sea it was crystal clear; you could see right to the bottom. Such a beautiful sight and the sand was golden. That week had been one of the best times of my life and it went so quickly but I knew I was hooked and this would not be my first and last holiday abroad.

Pauline Faulkner

Even France was sunny!

Talking of France - it was my first time travelling through and seeing the names of places, connected with battles of World War One and passing by them was very poignant for me. I felt the past. Seeing some war cemeteries from the motorways I said my prayers in tribute and remembrance. They fought for the freedom of folks - like me - to travel freely and without the fear and despair they felt.

My eternal gratitude to them and the subsequent heroes, one and all of World War Two. I thought of them when travelling over and seeing the Alps – how those, who traversed them in determination to reach the neutrality of Switzerland and how they survived those awesome mountains. Some of course didn't make it; I said a prayer for them as well. I did enjoy travelling through France, such vastness! Lots of miles! But very good roads! The Swiss, Italian, and French Alps are breathtaking and awesome – majestic! To see them, dreams come true!

Into Tuscany, and lots of lazy days in hot, hot, hot, sun! Went to the coast and swam in the Med, and had one trip to the mountains north of Pisa and then of course, there was the concert! That was something else! Bravo, bravo! Nessun Dorma, live with fireworks and the night time Tuscan countryside bathed in light. Sung by Bocelli and Domingo, I cried! All in all an unforgettable honeymoon. Bless my lovely Nigel!

Then the sight, for me my first time, of approaching the White Cliffs of Dover. Time for another whispered prayer for their welcome. And for all those who felt their welcome and those who sadly never did, my gratitude.

Jan Hedger

My Life in the Country.

From when I was a very small girl, all I did was dream of walking down the lane, just looking at all the plants and flowers on each side. Brides and violets, trees, primroses, wild roses and hips. All I wanted was just to keep walking and feeling very happy. Now I am older I just think of how my life is now.

Theresa Taylor

May

Old Manor Gardens

Within the walled garden; Manor Barn stands
 Square leaded windows, a testament to its past
 Ordered rose beds sit amidst the close cut lawn,
 Awaiting bloom, they appear severe and stark.
 In neatly cropped borders of symmetrical design,
 The rich black earth casts a shadow upon itself.
 At the foot of the far wall, in rank and file
 Flowers grow in graduated height of colour.
 High upon a tree, outside of its boundaries
 A blackbird praises the lengthening evening.
 Whilst the walled garden remains hushed,
 In quiet contemplation of its memories

Jan Hedger

Hastings Old Town

I like the Old Town in Hastings. There is a lovely poodle
 called Sandy. He's very affectionate and loves
 everybody. He loves a kiss and cuddles and strokes and
 pats on the head. He sleeps with London people now
 and also trains. He likes Evelyn - she is his favourite
 doll. He's got lovely brown eyes. He likes to eat and is
 popular. He loves people.

Sue Horncastle

All Saints Street, Hastings

Down in the Old Town, up from the sea
 Lies an old street that fascinates me
 It sits in the sun and dreams of the days
 When none but the fisher-folk trod its ways

Old oaken beams and mellowed bricks
 Untouched by any restorers tricks
 There's 'Shovell's' with it's crooked gable
 Where once an admiral sat at table

A hundred years can come and go
 That street would have no change to show
 Except, perhaps, that lichen spreads
 And here and there old tiled heads
 Of houses, curved with weight of time
 Seem to bow, with grace sublime

Contemptuous of our modern scurry
 It's not a street down which to hurry
 But to savour something made to last
 By all those generations past

And isn't it nice to think that you,
 When you come to Hastings, can see it too!

Walter William Smart

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A Place:

Beach:

Light beige, flat, wet slab of ground.

Sea:

Silver strands threading through waves.

Rock pools:

Still.

In surreal solitary space, dark square shapes

Reflect in smooth, moon-grey water.

Birds:

Distant seagulls.

Sun:

Visual, special effects.

Helen Taylor

THE ROEBUCK CENTRE, AUTISM SUSSEX

Attending The Roebuck Centre (situated in the heart of the picturesque old town of Hastings), a part of Autism Sussex, has played an integral part in the daily running of my life.

It is a safe haven, away from the harsh realities and threatening forces of the uncaring wider community, where persecution, towards my diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, rears its ugly head. For it is in this wider community, I form an imaginary synthetic transparent bubble, pushing away those I deem to be distrustful, or reaching out to those very few, where I would attempt to pull forward, albeit to no avail.

Entering the brightly coloured red doorway is akin to entering through a gateway to a different world; a world, where I can be free, flapping my imaginary wings like a bird in flight, without the threat of being ensnared by those whom I deem to be predatory. For within the heart of Building 3, a part of The Roebuck Centre, I am able to strip away the material of my aforementioned imaginary bubble, and let in those, who I do not consider a threat: service users (and their understandable parents), who, like myself, are on the autistic spectrum; and caring approachable staff, where solace can be sought if I am having a bad day.

The Roebuck Centre is a haven, where unpleasantness and discomfort are left in faraway, out of reach places. Within the wide opened modernist architectural interiors of Building 3, I can, if I so wish, spend time alone without feeling that my own personal space is being violated, usually subjected to in areas, such as a busy supermarket, or a crowded train carriage.

Partaking in a number of courses is a pleasurable experience, where I am not coerced into completing projects (like at a college or university), nor am afraid to voice an opinion or input feedback for fear of being ridiculed, or ignored, because of the way I speak. During the lunch period, I can indulge in a delicious home-made, reasonably priced, meal, without the worry of being frowned upon for the way I aloofly eat.

I feel at ease mingling with other service users at special events (open days, trips out and parties); and at the social evening, where I can partake in a board game, and a Pool session, or exercise my vocals at the monthly karaoke, without persistent anxieties of being belittled and teased.

On the whole, I find The Roebuck Centre to be similar to a second home from home, where everyone is like one big happy family.

Mark Crittenden

June

MY WINDOW

My window looks out onto the country. A green and hilly land.
A lonely buzzard turns and swoops in the stiffening breeze.
I gaze with indolent peace at the trees, the fields, the sky.
A cow bends its head to graze on the grass.
Hidden in the shadows a deer surveys with solemn eye,
then steps into the pooled light of the sun.
Flowers bud, bloom, die.
For a brief moment time stands still, and then

Night falls with whispering sighs and calls
the translucent moon to rise and sail through vapid clouds.
My window frames the myriad stars that spin into infinity.
I breathe the fertile air of my green and hilly land.
I am part of the whole ... but separate.
My window is an opening into what I am and what I see.
My window is the barrier between man and the land.
My window makes me a part of what is.
I close it and draw the curtains.

I am blind.

When man builds a structure, a house, a theatre, a church, any building, something is enclosed. What is inside becomes a separate universe from what remains outside.

And a window stands between the inside and the outside. It is a portal, things can be summoned through a portal. Its an edge, strange things happen at edges, the boundary between night and day for example is always a magical time.

Garet

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Underwater World

Footprints in the sand,
a sign of life for just a minute.
waves wash them away, vanished gone forever.

White frothy foam,
dances on aquamarine water
ripples decrease into nothingness,
until waves reappear.

The sky bows down,
to meet the majestic ocean.
under the water a life of darkness,
where creatures swim looking for bait,
through tangled seaweed, and swarmy grains.

A world unknown to human life,
A place I'd like to meet.

Sue Rabbett

On the Street Where I live

On the street where I live I see parents taking their children to the school. We also have a special needs school behind my flat. They play happily there and the excitement of them makes you feel alive.

The road outside is the main route into Bexhill. We have many lorries, buses and cars going through. I find it does not disturb me, it is really quite pleasant to see.

Ambulances and police cars zoom through, being as it is a main route.

Neighbours are quite elderly and we do not see much of each other, apart from one couple who can have a n ambulance and a few police cars every day to them.

We have a park across the road and see dog walkers in there at all times of the day and evening.

Jan Humphreys

My first trip to Pas de Calais

First a smooth ferry crossing, then down from Dunkerque to our friends for a meal. Woke up next day, by the sea in Wimereux! Did the shopping thing, the first day!

Next day, Nigel and I walked up to Wimereux cemetery, along rue McCrae. First thought, was of pure peace. The reality of seeing the names engraved, with poignant messages and regimental badges, brought sadness – those lying there were real, not just something of tele, or in a history lesson. A fleeting moment of anger followed – then the peace returned. Very mixed emotions. Nigel and I went our own way, so we could each spend private time with our thoughts and prayers.

Nigel thoughtfully and quietly took some photos for me. The memorial stone for the poet John McRae, sits in appearance, like he is looking over in protection on the fallen that lie there, bringing comfort. The headstones lie flat in this cemetery, due to the sandy soil. All nationalities, some women and those poor souls with no names, lie side by side. We then took a quiet walk along the seafront and sat with our friend, who joined us, in her beach hut – seemed appropriate for this day – to sit and look at the sea that played such an important role in both wars.

Boulogne in the rain, the following day – enough said! Penultimate day, a visit to Cap Griz Nez followed by a drive down the coast to Le Touquet. On the way back, we pulled into a lay-by and spread out before us was Etaples Military cemetery, the largest commonwealth cemetery in France. Here the pure white headstones were standing, in the sunshine on a manicured lawn, beautifully architectural. The scene swept away before us – the magnitude of loss, almost too much to take in, in one place, knowing there were so many other cemeteries. I believe the saying now – there is beauty in silence. A time for a blessing in remembrance.

A last meal with our friend and her family on the evening then up packed and off by lunchtime on the Sunday. Stopping off at Cap Nez Blanc – where we had a close up sight of a peregrine – free on these cliffs that were once part of the Atlantic Wall, littered still with stark concrete reminders. Too much rain to look round Dunkerque, so popped into Belgium, where it rained heavier! Evening ferry and home.

Many things struck me on this trip – I have mentioned before the magnitude of loss, but also so many monuments erected in remembrance. The fallen are not forgotten here. Signs of the occupation – in grey concrete are also still here, slowly being reclaimed by the marram grass and brambles and eroded by the sea and being covered with sand. Nature speaks in greater volumes than any war.

Bless all the fallen. May they sleep and rest in peace.

Jan Hedger

July

CAPTURED (By Springtime in South Gower)

Can you capture a place in words?
The tug of an emotional pull
And a promise to return
To where you felt complete

Towering cliffs joining sea to sky
Aflame with scented gorse and,
Carpeted with sweet springy turf with,
Nodding wild-flowers and dancing butterflies
A myriad of colours in fine grandeur
A place to capture an artist's eye

Flit flitting and trilling of the pipits
Warblers accompanying the birdsong melody
Gulls soaring, kittiwakes calling kitti-week,
Kitti-week, sailing the sky over the sea
The rolling surf a soothing lullaby
Can a symphony capture a place?

A rocky climb, take heed, take care
The scree loose shifts beneath ones feet
Just one more stride, and there.....
Stretches a view so breathtaking, in awe,
You reach for the camera, to try,
And capture the place in a picture

Down into a valley of secrets held,
In quiet solitude, a well worn path
Leading to a treasure chest of golden sands
Warmed by the sun and fringed by the sea
Pulling you to stay, hypnotic in its beauty
It is the place that has captured you

I've tried to share with you, in words,
That cannot compare, to the splendour,
That cannot be captured, on the walk
From Port Eynon to Rhossilli

Jan Hedger

ROSEISLE FOREST; BURGHEAD

Where the sea meets the forested shore
on the clean sweep of the Moray coastline
and Shadow Green needles intermingle with
crystal grains of sand; in an odoriferous
foot treading carpet for the wayfarer.

Jan Hedger

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FOREST

Forest
Green, tall
Comforting, refreshing, chirping
Wild berries, fern, thicket, mushrooms
Timber, muddy roads, buzzing saws
Devastation, destruction
Clearings

Marie Neumann

ON THE BEACH

Neptune thunders along the sand
Where the ocean meets the land
Undulating serpent swells
And of distant places tells
Shells whisper secrets to me
Promise that I'll soon be free
Neptune thunders along the sand
Where the ocean meets the land

Ashley Jordan

GIRLY ESCAPE

Firstly do not be fooled by the title, I say girly escape when in actual fact the average age was seventy years. We were all members of the townswomen guild. No we didn't spend our time making jam or knitting, we were far more adventures than that. We were off for four days to Germany. After a very early start, we arrived at Dover for the ferry crossing. Our journey was to be a long one.

My very close friend, Iris, was great fun with a terrific sense of humour. She was a widow after many years in a marriage which was ruled by mother in law, who not only went on the honeymoon, she moved in lock, stock and barrel and outlived her son! Poor Iris was left to care for her. She never complained but when she finally got her freedom she was determined to enjoy life. She also suffered from MS, but it never stopped her.

Meanwhile, back on the ferry, Iris said perhaps we should have a little drink. She was Scottish and did like a tot of whiskey! Well one led to another and going to the duty free for a bottle to take with us. We boarded the coach and off we went for our journey through France and Holland. We were driving through the night again and Iris decided we should have another drink to help us sleep. I would like to say at this point my memory of the journey was complete blur, all I remember was waking up in the morning looking at Iris who said

"Where's me teeth there was a shout from the back of coach
"I have got the bottom set" and a voice from the front shouting
"I have got the top set" All Iris was worried about was how will I eat my breakfast? I looked at the bottle and it was empty! I would prefer to think someone played a trick on us. Mind you I have never touched whisky since.

Well we arrived in Germany to start our holiday we had an excellent driver who was going to make sure we had a good time. This was my first trip to Germany. Our hotel was on the banks of the Rhine. It was absolutely beautiful. Our first trip was a cruise stopping off at various places. We just never stopped laughing, we just saw the funny side of everything. There is nothing like a gang of women without husbands in tow.

Our next trip was a ride through the Black Forest. Stopping off for a break, I felt very tired and decided to have a lie down on the grass closing my eyes for a few moments. When I woke up, I couldn't find my shoes. The girls were trying to keep a straight face, but I knew they were up to something.
"Are you looking for something?" they said. Guess where my shoes were - hanging from a tree!

Our next trip was to a wine cellar. On entering the cellar, me and Iris decided to have a cigarette. Suddenly a very loud German voice boomed out
"Zere is no smoking in e ze vine cellar" Whoops in trouble again. Well by the time we left after a few glasses of wine there was a lot of laughter and a few wet patches in the knickers - one of the problems of getting older. We certainly packed a lot in those four days I had one of the best times on holiday everyone got on well. All we could think of was where our next holiday would be. This turned out to be Austria, but this is another story which perhaps I will tell at another time.

Pauline Faulkner

August

OHTALL GREENTREE

I looked out from my kitchen window
at the tall green tree blowing in the breeze.
With branches stretched out, like welcome arms.
Protecting land and farms from harsh wind and rain,
waiting for summer to return again.

Oh tall green tree, what you mean to me.

As youngsters we climbed your lofty branches,
playing pirates, looking out to sea.
When we fell in love we carved our initials on you.
This was sacred to you and me.

Oh tall green tree, what you mean to me.

We had picnics under your leafy green boughs,
protection from the sun, watching the sheep,
listening to the lowing cows.

Oh tall green tree, what you mean to me.

You are a landmark to lost travellers,
a resting place to people who have reached their journey's end.
It's a comfort to be in the shade with a close friend.

Oh tall green tree, what you mean to me.

Frank Burnham

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MY EXPERIENCE AS A WHALE AND DOLPHIN CONSERVATION VOLUNTEER

I have completed a BSC degree in animal management. It was a three year course and we went on lots of different animal based trips and outings. I think the best trip that I went on as part of the course was one of the best holidays I have ever been on.

We went to Tenerife for 2 weeks to work as volunteers for the Atlantic Whale Foundation.

For the few days we were based at the site at which we would be staying for our time there. We spent those first few days being educated on whales and dolphins. A lot of people didn't like this and found it boring but I was fascinated and wanted to learn more about these beautiful creatures. We were also taught to some basic Spanish phrases. This part of the trip was essential to prepare us for what was coming next.

We were given information packs and thrown in at the deep end. We were sent onto whale watching boats. Our role as Atlantic Whale watch volunteers was to talk to anyone that would listen, try and educate them on whales and dolphins, and answer any questions that they had. Most people we found were very friendly and interested in what work we were doing.

The main species we saw on our regular trip were bottle nosed dolphins and Pilot whales. If we came across any whales or dolphins, it was all hands on deck. It was amazing to see them as their dorsal fins gently broke the waters surface. They would pause for a moment as their blow holes opened to let the air in, then closed before they went back under the water. They would arrive in groups, sometimes there would be small groups of 3 or 4 but there could be up to 20 in a group. Sometimes if they were feeling playful, the dolphins would jump out of the water with a flying leap, sometimes somersaulting mid air before crashing back into the water with a huge splash. It was truly amazing to watch their acrobatics.

Volunteers had to take pictures, it was particularly important to focus on the dorsal fins as the dorsal fins are completely unique to the individual. Every fin is different as they all have marks and injuries from attacks from other whales or dolphins and other marks. Some have bits of their dorsal fins missing. We also had to try and encourage people to send their children to our club for kids.

When we were not working on the boats, we were either sited near the boat ports where the Atlantic Whale Foundation volunteers were running an educational club for kids, trying to educate the younger generation about whales and dolphins, and teaching them how important they are. It was important to target children as if we can get them interested, they would pass their passion down to future generations.

Either that or we would be sited at the Atlantic Whale foundations main base. At the main base, they have a computer system with pictures of all of the known whales and dolphins in the area and have given names to them all. Our job, with support from more experienced volunteers was to match up pictures taken by volunteers from the whale watching boats with pictures on the system so we they could record which dolphins and whales had been seen. This information is important as it helps the Atlantic Whale Foundation with ongoing research projects into things like behaviour and the impact of boats.

I really enjoyed working for the Atlantic Whale Foundation, it was a very memorable experience. I didn't want to leave. All of the older, more experienced volunteers were so approachable and friendly, I learnt a lot from them. The end of the volunteering came too soon, I didn't want to leave this beautiful place. I hope I can go back there someday and help them with the invaluable work that they do to conserve these fascinating creatures.

Elizabeth Jury

THE OCEAN

Ocean
green, blue
glittering, changing, calming
foam, whitecap, flood tide, ebb tide
sparkling, surfing, coming
waves

Marie Neumann

September

THE FADING YEAR (Canadian Arctic)

As the Beluga Whales revel in the low tide gravel, sloughing their dead skin; so the Arctic is shedding its summer. Birds, which have bred in their thousands, are leaving in a cacophony of sound, heading south, urging chicks to follow. Young Guillemots, with under-developed wings, leap 150 meters to the safety of the sea, some landing short, a gift for the Arctic Fox.

Solitary Polar Bears come together at the shoreline, tolerant, where once blood would be spilt and wounds inflicted. Caribou are restless, breathing heavily; though the musk oxen just munch on, oblivious. They are waiting for nothing.

With uncanny timing, all know it is approaching the darkness and quiescence befalls the deserted nesting grounds. On a sliding scale, the temperature plummets and the sea begins to freeze; reflecting with glittering, crystallised diamonds. A streaky film forms on its cooling surface, clusters of ice coagulate into bobbing, floating, disc like shapes. Bumping, jostling, interlocking – until once more the sea-ice is complete and the Polar Bears can venture forth to hunt seal.

Giant cliffs sparkle; as their granite faces glaciare and waterfalls are stilled as they flow, like children playing statues. Natural sculptures of white and silver illuminate in an amazing show of crystal chandeliers, in the ballroom of ostentatious stately homes.

The fading year is taking hold; it's quick, it's brutal yet to the observers eye it is magnificently, breathtakingly, beautiful. Knowing the truth of the harsh reality, the caribou cross the ice fields, venturing south, and a marathon journey upon the frozen road. Musk Oxen watch them go, they have no need to leave, they'll survive; their large bulk and shaggy coat the ultimate protection. As does the male Polar bear, braving it out while the female climbs the snow slopes, to seek, a natural 'white-out' birthing chamber.

Few creatures remain, as the storms surge, and winds whip the snow into thick flurries of illumination in the gathering muted darkness, lit only by perpetual moonlight. The brief Arctic summer is over.

Jan Hedger

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OH I DO LOVE TO BE BESIDE THE SEASIDE

Oh I do love to be beside the Seaside
I like to take the kids on some of the Rides
I love to spend the day on the beach
I can hear the children as they play and screech
The beach is full of colourful towels and deck chairs
And everyone is summer clothes or swim wear
Ladies lying on towels topping up their sun tans
Its paradise with sparkling blue sea and golden sand
I have to make sure the children have plenty of sunscreen
They don't like it so I bribe them with ice cream

They run shouting to me to join them into the inviting sea
Its lovely mum they scream with delight, on a day like this I have to agree
As I enter the water for a refreshing swim
Its exercise as well, it beats going to the gym
After our swim we go and get some fish and chips
We eat them on the beach as we watch the ships
I love to walk along the promenade
Go into some shops and buy some postcards
I also have to buy the traditional rock
The sweet shops also have fudge by the block
I love to buy presents as souvenirs
So I can look back and remember today we were here

Then its back to games in the blazing sun
Beach balls and buckets and spades provide them with such fun
The older ones play volleyball on the beach
The younger ones are too small, they just cant reach
For them out come the buckets and spades
They love to show off the sandcastles they made
They also love to collect seashells
They're very pretty but such horrible smells
The rock pools that the little ones love to explore
There's no better place for them than the seashore
All too soon it is the end of the holiday
Time to return to our everyday ways
But as we leave I smile as the children I hear
Goodbye paradise see you next year

Liz Jury

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

A shopping trip to Reading
To buy a pair of jeans
To the pink flared type I was heading
A shopping trip to Reading
Would suit me by all means
With two blue seahorses as beading
A shopping trip to Reading
To buy a pair of jeans.

Mark Crittenden

GAILY GO I

So gaily tripping, lightly skipping
Through the flowerbeds of life.
A promise to a fairy keeping;
So gaily tripping, lightly skipping.
I'm substance free - it's just me you're getting!
I proclaim, let merriment be rife.
So gaily tripping, lightly skipping
Through the flowerbeds of life.

Robert Brandon

October

MY FAVOURITE PLACE

On waking I look out of my bedroom window. My curtains open wide, I see the sea above the tops of the properties. I can see the horizon and on some evenings I can see cruise liners all lit up, some small but also large boats. During the day you see large cargo ships, one after another. I look through my binoculars and can see a great deal. With weather changes the sea changes colours at certain times with the tides. There are sailing boats on good days.

Also from my bedroom window at the back of my flat I have open ground. To the left is an infants and juniors school and further down another school, which is going to be changed into an academy. The view from my back garden is a grass play area with a play area for children with special needs. You hear the children the children playing and screaming. You can never be lonely here. Over the valley you get the sea mist and it can be so misty when the rain comes down so hard.

It looks absolutely fantastic when snow lands down, it's so pretty. We have wonderful sunrises from the bedroom window and sunsets from my front room windows, which are beautiful.

At the moment I watching a seagull resting on her nest. She had a single egg, now the baby chick is two weeks old and growing up fast. My binoculars are on constant watch, with mum and dad feeding their baby. The nest she made is on top of the school roof, just by a window, which is positioned at an angle.

Jan Humphreys

GLYNE GAP POOL

I also like swimming and the pool at Glyne Gap is a favourite place.

You can swim and exercise yourself.

Exercise your body. It's a place to lose yourself.

Sue Horncastle

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BARNSLEY

A tiny speckled marking
The distorted butterfly enshrouds
Through expelling pumping veins
Breathing lifeblood into its
Sprouting industrial wings

A lonesome spot on Mother Nature's
Earthy rugged skin
The once monastic shrouded figures
Doth claimed?
Pumping out lifeblood through
Pulsating arteries
Carved deep beneath her brawn
A watery vein passes through,
Fast flowing outwards
Through snaking paralleled
Networks of steel
Scratching the surface of this
Rugged skin
Stitching the links between the very
Industrial heartland

Windows to the world created
Beyond the light that shines
The reflection of one's outer form
Replenished through clear-cut
Vessels of liquid desires
Blown forth in fiery furnaces
Towering above the surface
Dug deep by clawing mechanical
Hands of man
Gnawing away at the pre-historical
Remnants of time
Industrial lifeblood supplied
Emerging triumphant in the now
Defunct deepened pores of
Mother Nature's brawn
The industrialised rugged earth
No longer grows

The shielded industrial figures
Stand united, yet divided
Amidst a reveille, brass trumpets play
Marching, heads held up high
Across winding cobbled scars
Sliced deep in the rugged earthy brawn
Whence continual stone carved
Hovelled homes doth lain
Neglected by the controlling
Heart of bureaucratic rule
Now conserved within the very
Industrial heartland
Museums of humanity laid claim
Artificially frozen, through
Moments of time
Captured by monumental lenses
Symmetrically trapped, the carved out
Growth of Mother Nature's spawn
Within her unspoilt earthy rugged skin

A kestrel doth flies
Trapped within the sentences of the
Turning pages of a book, or
The rolling frames of celluloid
Remnants of a remembered
Cinematic past
Handed down by seats of learning

A sporting victory
Cheering fans salute
Watering holes descended
A fish and chip delicacy
Winding snakelike queues ascend
Amidst bustling markets
Mother Nature's displayful
Produce reaped
Moulded in fabricated consumerism
Designer outlets, leisurely pursuits
A new aged dawn descends
The distorted butterfly sheds its
Wings once more.

Mark Crittenden

HOME

Home is where the heart is.
I live in Hastings. I'm very happy in my flat.
I was born in Wales. I call it my first home. All my children were born there.
My home is very special. It was where my four children were born.
My home is very special and my home makes me very proud.
My home is a happy one, where my partner and I live.
It's a happy home.

Maria Gethin

November

HALL GREEN DOG RACING TRACK

It's a Saturday evening. I am ready to go and pick up my mom. We are going to our favourite place, Hall Green dog racing track. Oh the buzz when we arrive. You can hear the dogs barking. People queueing to get in. We always go in the posh area, where you can dine and sit in comfort and watch the racing through large plate glass windows. We collect the racing programme and study the form, not that it means much to us. Mostly we look at the names and what takes our fancy. It's getting close to the time of the first race so we go to the counter to place our bet. We are the last of the big spenders, no more than a pound for a place, which means first and second dog winning. We take our seats. The dogs are being paraded round the track towards the traps, tails wagging. They are in the traps. The hare is coming round on the rail. The traps lift, the dogs shoot out, they are off. The crowd are roaring, shouting, willing on the dog they have chosen. It's all over within a few minutes. I look at people's faces. There is either a look of elation or disappointment, tickets being torn and thrown to the ground. Oh well. There is always another race. The only one who really wins is the bookie.

Pauline Faulkner

'OUR HOUSE' MY CHILDHOOD HOME (Baker St, Small Heath)

Back door flung open, bringing in the scents from the potted plants, hung on the whitewashed wall. Red Geraniums, Candy-tuft, blue and white trailing Lobelia and sun orange Marigolds; bright with fresh watering – they broke the routine of her day. The baker called, the milkman called, the window cleaner knocked for a bucket of water and the dustmen clattered metal bins. She knew them all by name. All came to her kitchen door, but none crossed the threshold onto the patterned lino, or graced the kitchen table; each, including her, knew their place. Her place now, was at the tired looking cooker, she knew how it felt, so treated it gently, coaxing the blue flame into life and heat, to melt the lard in the brown veined chip pan. Watching it slip from a whole, into a bubbling liquid; into which she lowered the basket of the first batch of snake peeled King Edwards, the best potato for chips, carried home from Charlie's that morning, in a newspaper lined old shopping bag. For today was Saturday. Match day! Blues were at home, and soon they would be home; her family. Win or lose, they would all want to shake malt vinegar over her crisp coated chips and re-write the game.

Jan Hedger

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THE LIVING CANALS OF BRITAIN

1.

BIRTH

Through expelling networks of
Narrowed watery veins
Carved deep into Mother Nature's
Earthy flesh
Across towering aqueducts pulsated
The hidden tunnels dug deep
Beneath her brawn
The controlling rise and fall of
Durable substances flowed
Supplying lifeblood to the hearts of
Industrialised cities
Pumping out through the
Arteries of this sceptred Isle.

2.

DEATH

Watery lifeblood soon ceased to flow
Snaking paralleled networks of steel
Scratching the very surface of
Mother Nature's earthy rugged skin
Surgically gnawing at the cities'
Industrial hearts
Watery arteries pumped no more
Her flesh wounded deep by the
War torn atrocities of man
The vein like watered graves soon drained
Discarded by the decaying remnants of time
Injected by the neglectful minds of
Those passing by.

3.

REBIRTH

A trickle of watery hope flows
Through the new lifeless veins
Cutting through the discarded rusty
Remnants of yesteryear
Dredged by the celestial saviours'
Clawing hands
Unclogging the decaying vessels of
Our industrialised heritage
Restitching the wounds of Mother Nature's
Earthy infected scars
Transplanting new lifeblood
The watery arteries pumped once more
Durable substances no longer abound,
The leisurely pursuits do flow.

Mark Crittenden

REPOSSESSED

I try hard to look bereft
Now my kids have flown the nest
But I can scarce contain my glee
At last my nest is just for me!

When the phone starts a-ringing
No more cushions am I flinging
In a vain attempt to find it
Before the call is disconnected

I don't have to go a-questing
On its charger stand, it's resting
Nothing interrupts my flow
For the battery's never 'low'

No more clutter on the stairs
My socks are in my drawer in pairs
No more mad, last minute, rush
I can always find my brush

My keys are hanging on their hook
I don't even have to look
The 'remote' is on my knee
I only watch what I want to see

Their dreadful rave and hip-hop stilled
With sweet tunes my home is filled
Bath-time is a joy once more
No more hammering on the door

The stamps and pens are in their place
Of teenage angst there's not a trace
Today I feel most truly blessed
My home, my castle, repossessed!

Ashley Jordan

REGIMENT OF GHOSTS

In the thick mist at night
Just after twilight
On Hastings West Hill
The castle remains can be seen still
It's as if the regiment of ghosts is still there
From the days of William the Conqueror where
The sound of the wind, as it moans
As if you can hear the regiment's groans
Chilling thoughts to remember
Especially as days get darker in November

Mary Cook

December

VRADL

Vradl in Norway is quite simply the most romantic place in the world. Situated in the Telemark region, it is a place separated from the ills of modern day suburbia by beautiful mountains, lush green trees, peace, quiet and cool blue lakes, in which, the beauty of nature is reflected in perfect symmetry.

It only gets truly dark in Vradl during the winter months and so on summer nights during half-light the silvery shadows of the moon can be seen to best effect upon the landscape. One night, at about 1am, I was awoken by a bright light shining into the window of my hotel room. Getting out of bed to investigate, on drawing back the curtains I was soon spellbound by the sight of how the moon, peeping over the top of the mountains in the distance, had cast a silver carpet of light across the lake to the door of my hotel! Ever since that moment I have held the firm belief that Vradl is the perfect place with which to take the woman you intend to marry, for, if you cannot on bended knee be accepted in such a beautifully romantic setting, you may just as well embrace being a bachelor boy!

Another magical feature of Vradl is the fact that it is also home to 'Father Christmas's House'. 'Solvsmedtun Nisseloft' is its Norwegian name and it's a large-ish building made out of logs – the kind you might imagine seeing in a film about the Canadian Rockies, or such like. Inside, a treasure trove of hand made Christmas toys, decorations, gifts and ornaments can be found and upstairs (if you are a good boy or girl) you can visit 'Santa's Workshop' where a Christmas bobble hat can be seen sitting on a nail alongside a wooden desk full of sawdust, tools and half made toys. Santa must have been on his tea break while I was there but the fact I missed out on meeting the old gent did not spoil the magic of visiting the place where he does so much work all year round in preparation for Dec 24th.

Sadly, I was only in Vradl for a day and a half. While I did manage to enjoy a boat ride upon the lake in front of the hotel, it would have been so much nicer to be able to do so on a lovely sunny day rather than the grey and overcast day we had. Likewise, I will forever only be able to dream about how perfectly Christmassy Vradl must look when winter comes and snow is on the ground. How special it could be to stand, shivering, outside Father Christmas's House, see a light on in the window of his workshop, hear first hand his ho-ho-ho's and gaze up into a sky full of stars invaded by just the spiral of smoke coming from his chimney...

Tony May

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MITCH - MY SCOTTISH BOY (Knock Hill)

I wish you were here; it's not the same without you.
The arterial path is still here, with its veins of sheep tracks
Criss-crossing the ankle-high purple carpet of heather
I am not as sure footed as you on the loosened earth,
With protruding rocks, lying in quiet ambush, for my feet
The terrain for you was effortless: you were born for this.
The hill still rises steeply, its scents intoxicating; to me a
Gentle, caressing aroma, to you, they assaulted your nose,
Causing you to run helter-skelter; tongue lolling; investigating
Returning happily once solved, to my outstretched hand
To me the questions remained unanswered and bewildering.
It was your world. I miss you; my hand now only meeting air.
My breathing becomes rapid and my chest tightens, as
I reach the last ascent; but not you; your heart beat,
Remained steady and constant; you were bred for this.
Tail swishing; you would wait for me to catch up
It was a game we played. The memory causes me to smile.
Reaching the top, I am rewarded by a 360° view, as vast
As the 360° devotion you opened out to me. The Moray Firth,
Speyside, the moorland of Braemar and the coast of the North Sea

We'd been to them all together, when everything was fresh and new.
It's not the same without you, I wish you were here.
Following tradition, I place a loose rock upon the cairn
This year, I choose a second one for you. Side by side,
In obedience; like our bond unbreakable.
Descending the hill, I feel I am leaving you
Further and further behind and the tears fall.
As I click the gate shut, from whence I started
I say goodbye to an old friend, for I shall never
Climb that hill again.

Jan Hedger

HOME

It's raining outside.
I am lying on the sofa
under the light of the lamp
with the pink shade,
wrapped in the warm blanket,
reading a mystery book
and sipping hot tea
with lemon and honey
from my favourite mug.
The cat is sleeping at my feet.

Marie Neumann

TheFED FESTIVAL

How good it is to hear the words
Of people who don't often speak
Whose thoughts are very rarely heard
The ones who in the background creep
To find the star within the meek
Raise self-esteem with our applause
Cause confidence to grow and peak
And carry on our noble cause.

Ashley Jordan