

Welcome to Relay

This exhibition brings together writing produced by two very different groups. One is a long-established Writers' Group, who meet regularly at Pudsey Library; the other a group of Refugees from the Time Together project, who meet at Central Library.

We began the project one night in March when the two groups met for the first time. There was a marvellous spirit of openness, curiosity and empathy as people took it in turns to tell us about their lives in Yorkshire, Scotland, and Antigua, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea and Sudan; they swapped stories about their childhood, families and friends, compared experiences and shared laughter. The generous and open-minded attitude that was so evident when the two groups met shines through in the writing that is on display in this exhibition. Over the following weeks we met with each of the two groups in turn, getting them to write something, and then showing that writing to the other group at the next meeting, who would then discuss and think about what they'd read and use that as an inspiration to produce something in response: hence the name Relay. And so, over the next couple of months both groups produced a huge variety of writing. In fact the writing you see here is only the tip of the iceberg, this project has proved so productive that we have only been able to offer a small selection for the exhibition. If you visit the website at www.relayproject.wordpress.com you will find much more.

It was fascinating to see how well such a diverse group quickly found common ground, and it struck us early on how much of the writing dealt with family. Perhaps that should come as no surprise as families are, after all, a kind of hothouse for the human emotions, the place where we first experience the most powerful feelings - love, hate, jealousy, and intense loyalty. Our parents and siblings shape our life in profound ways and we spend years either trying to change the patterns of behaviour we learnt at home, or else repeating them consciously or subconsciously.

Both groups also visited the Leeds Discovery Centre one afternoon, where we got a chance to look at a collection of fascinating exhibits from different cultures specially chosen for us by the curator (and you can also see photos of some of those exhibits at the Relay website). Both groups enjoyed the visit very much, and it provided great inspiration. Indeed one of those exhibits, a Polish doll, has inspired one of the written pieces on display here.

Each member of the Time Together group also worked with a mentor. These are volunteers, local people who give up their own time to try and help the refugees find their feet in this country which, I'm sure you'll agree, is something to be celebrated. The mentors responded very positively to the invitation to write something themselves and have also contributed pieces to the exhibition and website. I'm delighted that they have done so, as the project could never have worked so well without their hard work, patience and empathy.

Although the work you see here has been produced by people ranging in age from their twenties to their eighth decade, and who hail from such seemingly different places as Britain, the Middle East, and Africa, some common themes have emerged: the search for identity; the need to belong; the power of memory, and the inspirational ability of the human spirit to endure all kinds of conflict. Writing that reminds us, yet again, that no matter where we grow up, or what our background, there are certain things that will always connect us. Zahra, a member of the Time Together group, responded in this way to a piece by Arthur, a member of the Pudsey Writing Group, about his memories of Leeds in the 1920s: 'I liked reading Arthur's writing about when he was a small boy because it reminded me of my childhood, even though there are more than fifty years between us.' This, in turn, led Zahra to write about her memories of her childhood in the Iran in the 1980s. As E.M. Forster said 'Connect, always connect.'

I often think of writing as putting a message in a bottle, you never know where it will end up, or who might read it, or what effect it will have. The poet Muriel Rukeyser wrote that the universe is made up of stories, not atoms. In today's frantic and often confusing world it is easy to feel alone and disconnected, but any book or story that affects us joins things up - often joining up things or people that seemed to have no connection at first glance. Perhaps this is what Rukeyser was getting at.

One of the mentors, Ken, wrote of the effect that working with the refugee group had had on him, and I can think of no better way to end this introduction by reproducing a passage from that piece that sums up so well what the project represented, and why it has been such a privilege to be involved: 'in the last few weeks I've sat in a room with a group of refugees who have lived with far worse than I could possibly ever imagine, and they treat each other with

respect, they're tolerant, they're warm and funny... They're quite the nicest group of people you could possibly meet. And they've given me the strangest thing, and I don't really know quite how it happened. This group of displaced people, living in a foreign country, under so much disadvantage, who don't yet feel they belong, have made me feel, for the first time in my life, as though I belong somewhere.'

Ray French



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Khalid Saeed
Time Together Project

My Mother And The Country



In the very hot summer in my country shade your eyes from the blinding sun and look into the distance, you will see about fifty to sixty ancient houses made of clay and set in green landscape. Don't think it is a mirage.

This is the colour of the Berry and fig trees, which are similar in age to my Grandfather. They state there is a life here also. I remember going to my Grandparents house with my mother when I was small. I threw stones at these trees. In response to my cruelty, they gave me what they had, the figs and berries. When I grew up, I learnt this lesson from them - humans must be like these trees.

If you look at the style of the houses and river, how it crosses the village, you can see that the builder of this village obviously was Sumerian, or Medean, or maybe Babylonian.

As I remember I was in my grandmother's house and she told me that on a rainy night my mother signalled her arrival to the world in this house by her shouting. My mother, like all the women from the third world countries, had to live by the rules decided for her; a man's by the power was full. He was the ruler, deciding what a woman must do or not, even the clothes she wore.

Her destiny was decided before she was born. But my mother, when she grew up, was brave like a modern woman. She defied these old rules and she chose her life for herself. A famous Russian writer, Dostoevsky, says that the strongest memory is a childhood memory. Whatever happened to me or will ever happen, the memory of one day can never be removed. This day was when my father returned home suddenly and took my mother to the other room for few minutes.

He said "Khawar the revolution will start. I leave the children with you. Take care of them, in my absence you will act on my behalf. There is a great duty for me to carry out. It's the day that I have always dreamed of, we will fight against this regime for our children and the others. We must give them freedom. And I spoke with my comrades about you. They accept that you will start your duty as a messenger." After this fantastic conversation they came out of the room. My father called all of us together. We are four brothers and one sister. He kissed all of us and said, "my little kids, do what your mothers says." Tears ran down my mother's face, and she said "they will." My father said "I will be away from home for some time."

After he said farewell to us, he took his bag and left, and he didn't come back. Since that time I have not had the joy of seeing my father even once.

After that, at least once a week my mother was going to the city or mountain, as a messenger in the revolution. Despite all this dangerous and hard work she was still a mother completely. After several months of the revolution, the comrades in the mountains told her that my father had become a hawk in the mountains. She became weak, her face changed and she began to look at least 15 years older than her age. My father became a light for the rising generation. But my mother continued her duties with this tragic news; she didn't stop.

One day my mother was travelling back from the mountain. She was very cautious and she felt she might be ambushed. She was arrested whilst carrying documents for the revolution. Someone had betrayed her. They transferred her to prison. For more than six months we lived without a mother; we stayed at our uncle's house in her absence. The revolutionary comrades, after much hard work, freed my mother. When she returned home she was very weak.

A few weeks later she decided to leave the village and we moved to the city. There the revolutionary comrades rented a house for us, and they paid the rent. It was not obvious to me and my brothers why my mother decided to leave the village. By later we found out that the regime had destroyed the village and taken the people as prisoners. The excuse for this was that the people had helped in the revolution. This had always been the government's plan, to destroy the village and take the people to prison. We stayed in the city until the revolution was won and the regime was removed from power. The revolutionary comrades came to our house occasionally.

I think there is no poem, or story, or novel that can tell the tragedy of my country.

If you shade your eyes and look again, your eyes will fall on the new village. You can find services, health care, schools, and paved streets there. The revolutionaries named the new village after my mother (KHAWAR), to show honour and respect to this revolutionary woman.

Kia Birgani
Time Together Project

The First Day I Went To School



I remember going to school for the first time. My father took me. That day I was very happy because I liked to go to school very much, and I also made many friends there. Education in Iran is different than it is in England. In Iran we start nursery at age six and primary school at age seven. After high school men and women can go to university if they want to, but if they don't continue education men have to go and do National Service. In England nursery starts at age three and primary school starts at age five. In England the children can have dinner at school, but in Iran, children are not given any food at school because one group goes to school from 8 am to 12 noon, and the other group goes from 1 pm until 5 pm, Saturday to Thursday.

Well, I remember on that night I couldn't sleep well, I was frightened because I thought that maybe when my Dad or Mum had taken me to school they might not come back for me. My Dad had teased me about school, saying that if I wasn't good they might just leave me there. Anyway, in the morning the next day I was woken up and then got dressed and ate breakfast with my father, who held my hand and took me to school.

We started on foot from my home, heading for the school and it took around 15 minutes to get there. We passed several streets. I saw a bakery and I smelt fresh bread. There was a shop that sold flowers, and we also walked past a shop that made shoes with leather and did shoe repairs. You could see the man and his wife working on the shoes from the street. After we had passed some big and small streets, we arrived at the school. My father took me to the school principal and he said "When school finishes I will come and pick you up" and then my father left.

After that the school principal took me to the teacher. After a while my teacher asked me my name, and he took me to the classroom, he showed me my table and my number, and then introduced me to the rest of the class. Later the teacher spoke about why we have to learn literacy, and the difference there is between those who are literate and those who aren't. And later my teacher taught us some numbers.

After that we played out of class and then we were ready to go home.

All of my classmates had gone except me. Nobody came to take me home.

When my father didn't come to collect me, I was very scared, and I remembered his words to me about leaving me at school if I wasn't good. I thought I might have to stay there forever.

I sat for a while and then eventually I decided to go home on my own. I started walking and it was very difficult because I wasn't sure where to go. I really wanted to see my family again and I started to get frightened, so I began running. On the way home I fell down two or three times and I got very upset. Then I smelt fresh bread and I started to remember where I was, and I found the baker's shop. I remembered the smell of leather from the shoe shop and I tried to follow that smell to find the right way home. Then I started to recognise the area and when I finally saw my house I was very happy again.

When I arrived home my mother said "Where is your father?". I told her "I don't know". After one hour my father came back home and he was looking for me. When he saw me he was surprised, and he asked me "How did you get home?" He knew I often got lost on my own. And then he said I went to the Council Offices, and it was busy and I forgot about you.

After that he always remembered to collect me!

Margaret Connor
Pudsey Writers' Group

Memories of Antigua



What innocents we were! Father, mother and six year old daughter - that was me - with my dolly's pram, its deep undercarriage typical of the era. We were newly arrived on the island of Antigua in 1935. My parents, full of eager anticipation, had responded to the call of a missionary post. The path, on which we were posing for the camera, joined the various buildings of the mission which were situated on an extensive patch of grass known as The Pasture. Scarlet blossoms blazed on Immortelle trees arching overhead with an almost indescribable brilliance at high noon.

Later in the season the trees would shed hard shiny seeds known as Jumbies, which we pierced and made into necklaces. Jumbies was also the name given to departed spirits. The occult and Obeah, an underground religion of sinister practices such as Black Masses, was much associated with Jumbies, spirits of the dead. The Immortelles had bloomed above us, but was this ritual shedding of their seeds perhaps a pointer to the darker side when real life was to click into place?

Sometimes we all escaped for a while and went swimming with 'Pop' Lloyd (Rev), Superintendent of the mission, and also with his wife Hannah. Though only six and a skinny kid, I felt very daring wearing nothing more than a pair of navy knickers on the beach. I did not know then that there was no cash to spare for a swimsuit which would be outgrown in no time. The men were in prim woolen bathing suits with vests attached, and I recall Pop's substantial paunch seeming to bulge even more when wet.

We were soon to discover that in this island paradise, side by side with dazzling white sand (Antigua was a coral island), half submerged prizes of giant shiny pink conch shells often discovered first by our toes, almost blinding glints of sunlight on bluest of Caribbean waters, there was grinding poverty and deprivation verging on the edge of starvation. Having almost nothing to give, in material terms, my parents were very soon to come to terms with the meaning of the word Mission.

Much of my schooling was missed through tropical illnesses. Playing alone to recuperate, in the shade of the Immortelle trees with their blossoms, I must have looked an oddity. I wore cotton pyjamas with long sleeved jackets in the daytime which my mother made, as advised by our West Indian doctor, to cover my limbs. Malarial mosquitoes, he told her, were very partial to fresh white flesh newly arrived from England! In 1935 antibiotics were not yet on the scene. My solitariness probably contributed to my desire for the world of books.

Determined to be able to read 'properly', I decided to teach myself - no continuation of 'The cat sat on the mat' for me! I remember grabbing books, magazines and even newspapers and picking out all the very simple words I knew already. The frustration caused by the meaningless network gradually - very gradually - gave way. After wild guesses at the long unknown words I began to recognise their pattern in various contexts and was able to string along more and more of an approximate meaning. It was years later, when teaching, that I realised I had unconsciously used the Look-and-Say method.

Miss Kate Ladoo, a West Indian lady and retired schoolteacher, sometimes checked up on my reading, out of the goodness of her heart, during my long periods off school. I was in awe of her as she was somewhat severe looking. She was very tall and the thirties bias cut frocks emphasised her bony angularity. When she towered above me I was fascinated by the mysterious dark caverns of her wide flaring nostrils.

One day, handing me a childish reader, Miss Ladoo commanded me to begin. I gabbled through it with barely concealed scorn. Next came a much more grown up adventure yarn which I had begun with obvious gusto when Kate held up a hand imperiously, 'Enough!' and took back the book whilst I was in mid flood, to my intense irritation. Evidently she was satisfied as to my progress. More than seventy years later, reading of her distinguished career, I realise how much I owe to the benign interest of people like Kate.

Barry Fox
Pudsey Writers' Group

This is an extract from Barry's story, you can read the full version on the Relay website.

Frank', or The Brown Room. Thursday 9th November 1963



Silence hung heavy in the room. The gas mantle hissed softly, giving off a yellow light. The fire burnt low in the iron grate. The smell of the liver and onions they'd had for tea still lingered. The kitchen depressed Frank. The Brown Room, he called it. Brown painted cupboards and door, brown table, brown chairs and brown chest of drawers, even a dull brown carpet in front of the fire place. The beige wallpaper was the final straw.

Alice, his Grandma, was sat in an old, but ornately decorated, wooden framed chair - a relic of the Victorian age - the upholstery of which was leaking at the front. She was trying to read the Telegraph and Argus, the local newspaper. She kept glancing at the mouse preening itself on the old and rather chipped enamel hearth tin, but Frank's shuffling feet distracted her more than the rodent.

Frank hadn't wanted to put the wireless on, the battery was low and he hated taking the bloody accumulator to be charged up. The acid burned holes in his trousers when it splashed over the edge of the glass container as he carried it to the garage. So he was sat at the table struggling with "One of his Little Pictures," as his Grandma called them. It was a small watercolour landscape. The hills were okay (he was good at hills) but the trees and sun effect just wasn't right. His feet scraped the linoleum under the table. He kept combing his hair with his fingers and rattling his brush in the jam jar of water. He just couldn't settle.

'What's up with you tonight? Can't you settle?'
He looked round at her and grunted something and jabbed angrily at the foliage with yellow and brown in another attempt to get some life into it. She tried reading again, but couldn't settle herself.
'I don't know, you get me maudled with your fidgetting. You've always something on your mind, haven't you? You'll have to learn to relax...'

He looked up at her, but didn't say anything. Frank tried to relax for a bit, then asked, more as a statement than a request, 'How about me giving you seven and six a week...for mi keep, you know?'

Alice's paper's crackling expressed her shock. She absorbed what he had said, and replied sharply, 'It's that Miss Gorman, isn't it, who's put you up to this. You do everything she tells you, don't you? You don't do anything I tell you. Do you?'

'But Gran, I'm nineteen...' he shouted. He spluttered and stammered as he gabbled loudly, 'B.b. ...besides, she tells me a lot o'good s...s.stuff an'all.'

'They do well to say that she's a good speech therapist...your speech has got worse, not better since you went to see her...'
Sullenly, he replied, 'S.s.she t.t.t.told me it would...b.b.but...'

'Why do you still go to see her then?'
His thoughts went back to the strange and new concepts he'd been introduced to at speech therapy. A different and new sort of encouragement that he felt that he wanted. At their first meeting she'd asked him how long he'd stammered. He told her about when he first experienced it...

'I were in the primary school. I were good at reading. We'd been asked to read in front of this higher class. And...and...and I just couldn't say t'words. I burst out crying...'

'And I'll bet everybody said, "You poor dear thing," didn't they?'

'Well, yeah...' he answered. He understood this to be the obvious reaction.

'If only they'd said, "Try again," or, "Try it slower," or something like that, you wouldn't be in the up tight state you're in now...'

He'd looked at her, puzzled. She'd smiled. 'Never mind, we'll get you through it...by Hook or by Crook...' she'd said. She'd introduced him to voluntary stammering. This was designed to get him to face up to his stammer and eventually to increase his self confidence. And even though it was designed to decrease the scary element, he found it very scary and his speech blocks seemed harder to get out of. All this flashed through his mind, then he said slowly, choosing his words carefully, 'She says things I haven't heard before. It's all new stuff...'

'Like, "Time you left home," eh,'

'Well, yeah...and a lot of other s...s.stuff an'all...'

'Who says, "An'all"? It's, "As Well..."

'Oh...get s.s.stuffed Gran...'

'Who taught you that, as well? I suppose it's those at work. I told you that that job in that Brewery would get you into bad habits...but you would go there...'

They both sat silent. The gas mantle hissed, some cinders from the fire fell with a soft grating sound, frightening the mouse, making it scuttle off. But Alice's crackling paper and his constant fidgetting increased the claustrophobia felt by Frank. The brown walls seemed to be closing in on him. He murmured, 'There's more to life than this...'

Sudden realisation dawned on Alice, shocking and hurting her. She sighed deeply, put her paper down and stared at the brown walls.

'We do all we can for you. You know your Dad works his best, doesn't get much at that Mill, but we do our best...' she said. Frank hesitated but didn't make eye contact. He mumbled something Alice didn't catch and continued painting...

Ken McDougall
Time Together Project

The Fluteplayer



This picture of me as a young flute player has lain in a drawer for the last 20 years and I've only just come across it. When I saw it after all this time, my first thought was 'It's a good job you didn't know what was going to happen to you...' It's an image of a young, confident man and he looks very comfortable and sure of himself. Nothing bad is going to happen to him. His whole career is ahead of him. He doesn't know that one winter evening he will be sitting in a flat with his friends and he'll get a phone call telling him his brother was killed the day before in a car crash.

He doesn't know that there will be months in his life that pass in some grey in-between world where time seems to have stopped and he just has to get through each day as best he can.

And yet, when I thought about it a bit more, I realise the photo had been taken about a year after my brother had died. I was perfectly well aware of the fact that my brother had died. I'd been devastated and it was a turning point in my life. Nothing was the same after that.

I'd been taken in by my own publicity. I wanted to appear like a young confident musician with a bright future ahead of him because the truth was, if I didn't, I wouldn't get any gigs. That look of quiet, assured confidence, it says "I won't screw up and run off the stage at your Music Club... it's OK to book me..."

Perhaps I can enlighten you about the music profession. Those people wearing dinner suits and sitting in orchestras, the soloists you see at concerts, the wonderfully exotic lives they lead, do you envy them and think how wonderful it must be not to have a real job?

Do you ever think that the soloist travels from one small concert hall to the next, never really having any companions, staying in dingy hotels? Do you ever think about the musicians who devoted their whole lives to music and now can not stand it any more, but can't do anything else?

This magic you see when you go to a concert, the drama of the opera, be honest, if we didn't create this fiction you wouldn't really want to go, would you?

These are the lucky ones though. What about the ones who so desperately wanted to succeed, but just didn't have the breaks or the talent to do so, and the most tragic of these, the ones who never worked it out, who kept freelancing, doing a bit of teaching, desperately hoping that they would eventually be discovered, that something would change. And all the time their life slipping through their fingers without them realizing that this day to day jobbing existence is what life is, not the dreams they might have that 'one day' something would happen to them. For them it might not be a crushing few seconds on 'Britain's Got Talent', but a whole lifetime of gradual disappointment.

Before you feel sorry for me, I was none of the above, well, none of them and all of them at the same time. It just depended on how my last practice session had gone...

In the end, I did OK, I had a career, better than most, and you would have had to pry it from my cold dead fingers if you'd asked me to give it up at the time. It wasn't just what I did, a job, it was me, my whole life was centred around my career. Music was a truly captivating experience.

Music entralls you, ensnares you, occupies your mind, all of your mind, even the bits that don't 'do' music, spiritually, emotionally, and even as a sport, when you're trying to improve your technical ability. In my entire musical career from the age of 16 to the age of 35, there were about 10 days when I didn't practice. Picture, if you will, a young man, sitting upstairs on a London bus, with the body of his flute in his hands, practicing orchestral excerpts... That was me. But as well as captivating you, music can suspend you. I look back on that time now and most of me was almost completely dormant for all the time I was a musician.

I became Principal Flute in a symphony orchestra, and sat for a while in amongst a group of people who were extremely nasty to each other. It wasn't a terribly good orchestra, which is why they were nasty to each other. In fact, it had a bit of a reputation for that sort of thing, which outshone it's professional reputation.

That's another thing you won't always realise when you're listening to the orchestra, strains of delightful music wafting over you, visions of high society in their DJs, long black and jeweled handbags...

Sooner or later, I realised I might become one of those people sitting in orchestras, feeling trapped. And since I left that magic Peter Pan world of music, I feel as though I started to grow up and live the rest of my life.

'Many of my colleagues, often those more promising than me, didn't have such a fortunate outcome. Some ended up as car parking attendants, some as middle managers: several ended up marrying men who beat them up.'

Some died, long before their time, one just at the point when her young family most needed her, and sadly, also at the point when she'd realized how vapid the music profession was and that her family was all she needed.

The luckiest of us learned to change with time. I eventually realized there was a lot more to life than just music, and I'd been putting the rest of my life on hold until I'd achieved something.

When I first started writing this piece, I thought it was going to be about missed opportunities, how a photo can hide reality, the sadness that befell me and many of my friends. But in the last few weeks I've sat in a room with a group of refugees who have lived with far worse than I could possibly ever imagine, and they treat each other with respect, they're tolerant, they're warm and funny, they're polite, and they smile a lot. They're quite the nicest group of people you could possibly meet. They're survivors.

And actually, they've given me the strangest thing, and I don't really know quite how it happened. This group of displaced people, living in a foreign country, under so much disadvantage, who don't yet feel they belong, have made me feel, for the first time in my life, as though I belong somewhere.

This is a life-changing gift. They've made me feel as though I'm a citizen of Leeds, as though I'm responsible for the city and the people in it. They've made me feel as though I've come home, and this is where I should be.

The truth is, I've had a blessed life in many ways, and it has taken me this long to realise it. For most of it I staggered from one crisis to the next, surviving, just about.

But somehow when I walk into that room and see the big smiles, the sparkle in their eyes, the friendly waves, the warmth of their humanity, I realise I'm not surviving any more. This is more like living.

Arthur Thrippleton
Calverley Writers' Group

Memories



Before I could tell the time - even before I could count, much less recite the name of any number, I was able to recognise some of the shapes on the clock face as my bedtime approached. Somehow I knew that the long hand moved faster than the short and was the important one. The one to watch, so that I knew exactly when to insert myself onto my father's lap, allow him to move me into a more comfortable position before making the request, murmuring the words, always the same words sung to the same pleading tune: 'Da - ad!'. Two syllables, three notes: 'Da - ad'

'Mm?'
'Da - d ! Tell me about the war, 'Plee-ase?' I could smell cigarettes on his clothing; he had a scar on his chin .
'I told you all about the war last night...'
'And every night for the past fortnight.' interrupted Mum.
She sounded tired, and I knew that she had been down in the cellar for most of the day baking enough bread, oven-bottom cakes, buns and cakes to last us for the coming week. The day before she had spent all morning at the dolly-tub with a posses - over and over endlessly - making never to be forgotten squishy - squashing noises. Finally came the last rinse, with clean water to clear away the suds of white Windsor soap. After each rinse, she had to manhandle the tub to empty it, before refilling it from the gas boiler. Having done this two or three times she would put the heavy, wet clothing and bedding through a huge mangle with its heavy wooden rollers, turned by hand on the big cast-iron wheel. Tomorrow it would be Friday and she would be ironing. Emily was there to help out. In many ways Mum was lucky to have Emily, a teenager, as my nursemaid; in fact she was like one of the family. She cooked for me. She fed me. She cleaned up after me. Undressed me ready for bed and tucked me up and, in the morning, this routine went into reverse. Hers was not an easy life, but neither was Mum's. Much later, well into her seventies, Emily still visited us twice a week to 'help out' with the cleaning. It was her pension.
'Every night for the past fortnight,' Mum continued. 'Don't you ever get tired of talking about the war?'
'I only tell him about the funny side of it', replied my father. And so he did, sometimes he would have me laughing my head off, until she told him that enough was enough and then it was 'Off you go ! It's long past your bed time!'
In France, on the Western Front, Dad drove an ammunition wagon, not horse drawn, as most of the transport still was in those days, but a powerful, real lorry, with a big powerful engine. To drive any motor vehicle in those days raised you well above the PBI and all those poor devils driving horse and wagons. And then? After the Armistice, those who were left came home. They had set out as boys. They now returned as men. Settling back into 'Civvy Street' was not easy, but Dad was one of the lucky ones - he had a job to go back to, and a Grandmama who had money in her own name. When Dad asked for money to buy a car - (Buy a car ? Nobody owned their own car in those days !) she readily agreed. There were several ex-servicemen who had set up small firms to build cars tailored to the buyer's needs. Dad chose a Bradford firm called 'Rhodes', and they built an open sports car for him. He wanted to go hill-climbing' at week-ends, a very popular new sport, with clubs springing up anywhere there was a suitably steep hill. Although only major roads were metalled then and hill-climbing in a car was a sport for the young; he had a wife, a mother and, by then, me.
Somehow we all squeezed into the car. Grandmama just loved it and it gave her endless pleasure, throughout her few remaining years, to wrap herself warmly in a thick scarf with a second, lighter scarf securing her wide brimmed hat and to climb hills. Mum was just as bad. Me? Well, yes, I loved it too. I couldn't get enough.
Nor was it only the hill-climbing, for the hill-climbers had formed their own club and had made their headquarters at an old inn, way up in the Yorkshire Dales where there was no shortage of steep, un-metalled hills. Crude trestle tables, normally reserved for harvest suppers, were set out in the barn, or sometimes in the orchard if the weather permitted. Since all the men were ex- servicemen there was a great, nostalgic sense of oneness, of companionship, of returning to the Flanders fields. The women folk found lots to talk about and most of the children were of my age and ignored. We had lots of fun.
Uncle Arthur (I was named after him) owned a chain of grocery shops in Wigan and smoked cigars, which he handed out to his close friends. I can still smell their richness. It was there also that I first tasted Cream of Tomato soup. My mouth waters still at the memory. Goodness me, I must have drunk pints of it - wonderfully, gloriously and deliciously tasty. Of course I was sick. Oh, dear, yes! I remember feeling absolutely terrible as they lay me across their knees in the back seat of the 'Rhodes' to drive back to Headingley. It was many years before I could bring myself to enjoy even the smell of tomato soup heating on the gas stove. Odd that, it's my favourite soup now, and has been for donkeys' years. I have just opened yet another tin for my supper. Heinz, of course .

Zahra Simiyari
Time Together Project

My Family



I liked reading Arthur's writing about when he was a small boy because it reminded me of my childhood, even though there are more than fifty years between us.

When I was about seven years old, me and my brothers and sisters would wait for my dad to come home from work, and then climb on to his knee and give him lots of kisses. He worked at the electric company, and every day he would come home with chocolate or biscuits for us to eat. He always made us feel safe and happy - I love my father (and my mother!) very much.

My mother was a very good woman - she had the strength of a man because she looked after everybody all the time. She was very house-proud, always cleaning and tidying the house. When she washed our clothes she would wash them twice to make sure they were really clean - the washing would take her all day!

At 5.30am every morning my mother would get up before my dad, and before me and my brothers and sisters, to make us all breakfast. Sometimes she would ask me to help clean the dishes, but then she would always say 'No, they're not clean enough!'

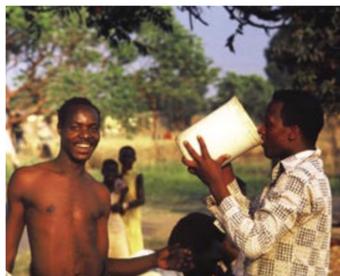
My mother was very strict with us, and would always make sure we were well behaved when we went to visit friends and family. But she was a kind woman, and everything she did was to make sure we had a good future.

Even though this was Iran in the 1980's and Arthur's story is from the 1920s, I think life is still harder for women than men. My father would get up at 7.30 am, two hours after my mother, and then go out to work at his job with the electric company. When he came home my mum would still be working, cooking his meals and looking after him. She did this for everyone - cooking, cleaning, making sure that we were happy, checking our school work. She was always working and taking care of us and I don't think she ever got time to rest herself.

Roger Barton
Pudsey Writers' Group

This is an extract from Roger's story, you can read the full version on the Relay website.

A Zambian Story



This story is about my experience of working in Zambia during the late 1970's and early 1980's. It is a factual account of what happened to the lives of ordinary people, during a crisis when its major export commodity, copper, declined in price. During these years, the country was a so-called 'front-line state' in the war against the regime in the neighbouring state of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). This compounded Zambia's difficulties, as what copper could be mined was difficult to ship out. All of Zambia's economy depended on this one product and the consequences affected everything from the price of bread to car parts. It had similarities to what has happened to local communities in the UK when a coal mine closed, or a steel mill shut – only worse and on a national scale. Sometimes I was not simply an observer, but a participant. This situation could be taking place today, in another developing country, in another city. One thing remains the same. It is the ordinary people who are the major victims, through no fault of their own, trapped in an endless cycle of poverty. It is they who suffer most.

In many African countries, the first to suffer from the onslaught of food shortages is the ordinary villager or poor urban dweller. Whether this is caused by natural causes such as famine, the devastating ravages of war, corruption by their politicians, or the collapse of a major export, they are so often the first casualties. In any African country dependent on the sale of a major commodity, this can set off an escalating chain of consequences. This is what happened in Zambia during the late 1970s and 1980s, although the country eventually recovered. But similar events have taken place in other developing countries and even today, global news reports show these tragedies are still occurring.

In Zambia, the decline in revenues from copper, which were exported world-wide, had a gradual but inescapable effect on goods brought in from outside the country. There was an inevitable shortage of foreign exchange and with an infrastructure lacking in the means of manufacturing even the most basic of commodities, shortages became endemic. The once quite splendid and well-stocked supermarkets of its show-piece cities, became eerie wastelands with shelves completely empty, stretching from the front of the store to the very perimeter. Occasionally shelves would appear with a bizarre selection of non-essential items, like jars of nut-meg, or low voltage light bulbs. These would be carefully placed in a single-line along the front edge of the shelf with an almost military precision. Nothing was on top or behind the isolated row; it had an almost artistic significance, as though preserved for a post-modern exhibition. Supposedly something to display was better than nothing, and demonstrated an irrepressible desire on behalf of the shelf-stackers to make themselves useful. As hopeful shoppers walked the aisles, vigilant for a rare item others may have missed, they too eyed the artistic display of things no-one wanted. Maybe the initiative of the shelf-stackers really did have an entertainment quality. Beyond this bizarre encounter with the super-market world, the tragic reality of shortages became a daily event.

Whenever something in demand appeared, it was rare for it to actually get as far as being displayed. A network of informers would have somehow discovered its arrival and the store would be besieged by demanding shoppers removing it as fast as it hit the shelves. It was possible for the goods never to reach the shelves, instantly transferred from loading pallet to shopper's basket. An informal communications network appeared to become established to communicate to anxious city residents the location of essential supplies.

In many instances black-market hoarders intercepted even this communications route, and stripped goods out only to sell them at inflated prices at their own premises. When news of a long awaited product spread, queues formed at the doors of the store. The penchant for order in queues so thoroughly displayed by their colonial masters in the past century (but did they ever really queue here?) was absent. It more often resembled a mob with the premises under siege.

The carnival atmosphere which is seen so much in African life, whether in bars, or in the bantering of groups waiting for a late train, was absent in this urban struggle. For many it was no longer selecting the best price for a basic necessity, their struggle had descended into a fight where there would be few winners. This was not a natural order. For many living in the surrounding townships, urban living was about day-to-day survival.

When even their meagre income could not wrestle the necessities out of the system, it stripped away their dignity. There was no one on their side. What they scrambled for was achieved by someone else's loss. When goods arrived at a local store, organized protection arrived too...

Teclé Ghirmai Desta
Time Together Project

Basketball In Eritrea



When I was fifteen years old I joined the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A). This was a place where Eritreans were able to learn sports, and many other activities. At the time I was interested in playing volleyball, but one day when we asked the people at the reception desk to give us a ball to play with, we were told that there was none, so I was forced to join the basketball group. At the beginning I didn't know anything about basketball, so at first I just watched, but gradually I started to join in and play. For the first two to three weeks all aspects of the game - handling, dribbling, passing and shooting - were very difficult for me. But after one month and a half, and after many trials and hardships, I started to play well and came to know the rules of the game. When I was eighteen an offer from a team called DOGALI came to me, and I accepted it and became a registered player in Division A. During this time I was studying basketball books in order to strengthen and upgrade my skills. This helped me to gain more knowledge about how to hold the ball in your finger tips, try different types of shooting and passing and, at the same time, to dribble: these are the fundamentals of basketball. I was also practising on my own by imitating the systems and tactics of some much more experienced players. Finally I was successful and became a good player.

The next step I took was to move to a better team, because the team I was playing for were losing every time and this was very disappointing. Fortunately I was invited to be a member of a well known team called CHIPPOLINI, and I accepted this offer and joined the team with joy. When I started playing for this team I became a well known player and had so many great experiences, and I thanked God for granting me this great opportunity. It was amazing to become a star player without the guidance of a coach. As I became more popular my interest in basketball increased, which resulted in me being given the chance to be one of the best basketball players in my country. During this time we were a colony of Ethiopia and our country was known as the fourteenth region of Ethiopia. Every year the Ethiopian basketball championship was played in the capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. I was selected for the Eritrean National Team. I represented Eritrea in the championship in Addis Ababa for five consecutive years. In these championships I got the chance to meet many good players from other regions and I was introduced to famous players, coaches and important heads of sports.

When I was going to Addis Ababa every year in order to participate in the Ethiopian Championship, I introduced myself to many important people, and I also got the chance to participate in an intermediate coaching course. As soon I was back in Eritrea I started to coach both men's and women's teams, and so I was both playing and coaching. When I remember that time what really amazes me is how I was able to study at the University, work, and also play and coach basketball as well. Even though I was busy I loved basketball more than ever before. I was also spending my leisure time in basketball courts.

As a coach, I had to prepare a plan for the training session that helped divide the time between different kinds of activities. When the players came to be trained I had to focus their attention and concentration on the playing court, as they had come from so many different places. I gave them the chance to shoot from different positions, because this is what every player loves to do when he is on the court. The next part of the process was warming up, drills, tactics and techniques, and finally chance to demonstrate what they had learned. I based the drills on some good basketball coaching books and videos of NBA teams such as Chicago Bulls, Lakers and others.

The teams I used to coach started to come first in their championship groups and win knock out games, especially my women's team, The Red Sea, which was sponsored by the Eritrean Electric Authority. Many women wanted to join this team, and I accepted the best players which helped me in strengthening the team. I was named as one of the best coaches in the nation.

After we got our independence in 1991 I studied the "Basketball Level One Coaching Course", which was sponsored by the International Olympic Committee and was organized by the International Basketball Federation and the Eritrean Basketball Federation, and was taught by a Kenyan FIBA instructor. This gave me an international basketball coaching certificate. It took me many years to become a good basketball player and coach. Because of basketball I got the chance to be introduced to many good people, and a lot of bad and complicated people as well. I have had to adjust to deal with many different people, and this has been a good experience for me.

Aissa Gaillie
Time Together Project

Looking at the Photograph



When I look at this photograph I am totally trapped by myself in the present moment, I can't put myself, nor my husband, completely back into that place. When I look at my husband, his younger face (his jaw not yet set in the angularity which forms his present expression), I can only look inside him and mourn his innocence and fragility. I fear for him and the grief I know he will come to suffer in the time to come.

One element of the photograph that does travel is the fact that we are looking each other straight in the eye. This is something that we have always done. In my favourite wedding photograph we look each other straight in the eye. The companionship is in its infancy in the photograph, but it already looks so steadfast, eternal. And this is why I like this photograph, the setting is antique, ancient, hand-made, set in folklore and in all respects older, more eternal than us, yet we fit there.

I like the layers of time in the photograph.

The slime covered boulders of the waterfall set by nature's hand develop into the ragged rock slabs of the Roman Bridge and then again into the bricks of the 'new bridge', which is itself now old. I also like the extremes of movement and sound that the photograph portrays. The rush and roar of the water tumbling down the small waterfall beneath the rocks, versus the stillness and quiet of the dark pools of water close to our feet. I know from memory that the air was fresh and cold, but we were warm from walking. The colours in the photograph seem to blend into a palette of natural hues, with extremes at the colour of my hair, the florescent green slime on the rocks, and the black of Ritchie's clothing. The only thing that seems out of place is the blue bobble in my hair.

In this picture I imagine that we are thinking that we are elves and that we have wings. I think we are laughing at ourselves thinking it, but still we know that it could be true. Deep down, we know we're elves because we're the same. We still know that we're elves, but we spend less time thinking about it... Missing from this photograph are the people we have lost and the people we are now (well of course the trace is there, the essential self). When looking at this photograph the absence of Vi and Celie in our lives now invades the picture then, and they weren't even on that holiday.

It was the Head Goblin who took the photograph, Ritchie's Dad. Ritchie tells me he even set up the pose. Ritchie's whole life is documented by his father in photographs, so it is fitting that he would take this picture and for a moment saw us as we saw ourselves, two little elves with wings. After this photograph was taken, we kissed and laughed. Later, further on in our walk, Frank (Head Goblin) raged at us, then stormed off in a huff because we'd forgotten our nuts and raisins.

Rachel Dukes
Time Together Project

The Five Stories Behind One Photo



This is Rachel's Photo - a family snapshot depicting Rachel, her mother, brother and her late Gran. It was taken in her Gran's garden.

Story 1

My Gran's garden was a real treasure-trove to me as a little girl. It had tall, high fir trees down one side, a vegetable patch on the other, and flower beds. From the flower-bed at the end of the garden were roses which flourished, and also a view of the traditional old English countryside, rolling plains with hardly a house in sight. Many a summer holiday was spent playing in my Gran's garden, with my brother. One strong memory consists of my baby brother and I playing 'camping', complete with a V-shaped clothes horse with a sleeping bag flung over it. We'd hide under it and pretend to cook, and have adventures. My Gran also had a front garden, but it was the back one, where this photo was taken, which I was always drawn to. As I got a little older, every time we used to visit, I would collect flowers from the garden to put into vases for my Gran. I would always make sure she had fresh garden flowers in her house when we had to come back up the motorways from Wiltshire to Derbyshire.

Story 2

As my Gran aged, she became frailer and more bent over, due in part to her osteoporosis, however, she fiercely maintained her independence and had no end of visitors to her bungalow. When she became more frail, she got a zimmer which became a firm favourite with her. She was still able to get out and about (be it at a slower pace) with the help of the trusted zimmer. It had a basket at the front where she would store bits and pieces. Over time, she started hanging shopping bags inside it. Well, they were fabulous, as she would put totally random things in them, such as leaves, receipts and a piece of coal! Whenever we went down to visit her, my mum liked to have a photo taken with Gran and all of us. Despite us asking Gran to take out the plastic bags (in this case the "Happy Shopper" bag), before the photo was taken, she never wanted to. So there we are, my Gran complete with her "Happy Shopper" carrier and zimmer - a smiley and independent image.

Story 3

Due to the fabulous garden she had for many years, flowers triumphed everywhere. As well as my Gran's heavy involvement in the local Parish church where she played the organ, she also organised local events and arranged the church flowers: flowers make up a substantial part of my associated memories. When I became older, we used to talk about the future, as you do, your aspirations and plans. I once said to her that when (as I obviously assumed I would!) get married, I would want flowers from her garden to make up my bouquet. She used to laugh, saying that she may well not be around then as she was getting old and tired (in her words). I used to combat with this by saying that it didn't matter, and even if she wasn't around, I would come her house and ask the new owner if I could have a flower or two from their garden to go in my bouquet. We used to laugh about this a lot, and I think it made her happy to know I had a plan.

Well my beloved Gran passed away when I was 18, that's 13 years ago now and she is still a big factor in my life. So much so that last year, I returned to her village and fulfilled a promise. I got married on May 17th in Leeds and Phillip, the new owner of her house, has agreed to let me have a flower from her garden. It will (God willing) take pride of place in the middle of my bouquet.

Story 4

Aside from getting older and hairstyles changing, my brother has changed dramatically in other ways too. When this photo was taken, he was around 12 and was just starting to explore music, especially the drums. He is now 27 and lives in London, working for a record company, and has his own recording contract! My mother is turning 60 this year and has just retired, and is looking forward to many holidays away with my father and their lovely Bernese Mountain Dog, Jess. My Dad took the photo, he is retired too and relishes the open road with a trusted camper van.

I on the other hand, now live in Leeds with my partner, Anthony. I always had a fascination with the world and with all the different cultures and groups who live here. When I was 14 I got involved in a school production of a play about a tribe living in the Amazon rainforest, called the Yanomamo. That play has never left me. I am an avid supporter of Survival International (which supports indigenous people around the globe), and work professionally as a Health Improvement Specialist, focusing on improving the health and well being of Black and Minority Ethnic communities living in Leeds.

Story 5

At the wake for my Gran which we held at her house, my Mum, her brother John, and his wife, started sorting through her possessions. There were two strange finds which were linked to me. We all knew that she had a 17th century wedding dress which had been left to her, in fact I used to dress up in it, until I was about 14. What we didn't know about was an old christening gown (from the late 1800s) and a young child's yellow cloak (from around the same period). Whilst drinking tea and chatting to the guests following the funeral, my mum mentioned the finds to one gentleman. I came over when I heard this, and he said the strangest thing; "She always said that the christening gown was for Rachel, she was saving it for Rachel." Well Rachel I am, although none of us ever knew about this. My mum wasn't christened in it, and neither was her brother. So, we have no idea how she came to have it, and where it came from. It is totally beautiful and in mint condition and, if I am ever blessed with a child, rest assured he or she will be wearing this on their christening day.

Jack Walters
Pudsey Writers' Group

Locomotive 90699



Dawn was breaking as our huge, ex-war department 'Austerity' goods locomotive 90699 nosed its way out of the goods yard at Copley Hill, on the short journey to Neville Hill goods sidings. It had been a long night and I was ready for bed. "One more trip", I reflected, and soon I would be in the land of Nod. I was a 17 year old fireman at the time, and totally oblivious to the possible fate of my 'best laid plans.

However, travelling tender first, we eased the forty wagon goods train down the steep incline to Whitehall Junction, and then across the maze of points and crossings, known as Leeds City Junction. I remember taking a swig of warm tea from my 'Tizer' bottle, which I kept wedged between the hot steam pipes on the bookplate, and then returning to sit on my swing-backed wooden seat to look out of the cab and note what was happening.

All seemed to be well. We were still attached to the long train of loosely coupled goods wagons, whose buffers crashed and couplings jerked every time my driver adjusted the speed of the locomotive. The seagulls were squealing and diving after morsels of food across by the river, and the cold morning air blowing around my face removed the earlier pangs of tiredness.

At this point, I was awakened from my reverie by the sound of the locomotive attempting to pick up speed, as my driver sought to move the train more briskly across the mouth of the station. This was the signal for me to earn my keep. Opening the firebox doors, and reaching for the shovel, I scattered a liberal amount of coal down the sides of the firebox and under the doors; the firebox was turned into a raging inferno, which would guarantee the right amount of steam to get us to Neville sidings.

I was just returning the shovel to the tender, when all hell let loose. I was thrown to the floor as we collided with the 6:20am Leeds to Lockwood (Huddersfield), a local passenger train. Apparently, it had run past the signal, which was at danger and fouled the points, and was stationary at the point of impact.

Unfortunately, it wasn't possible to stop our train dead in its tracks, as its forty wagons clashed and pushed against each other, urging our now damaged locomotive to go on as they pushed against its brakes. As a result, the passenger train tank locomotive ripped the tender of 90699 like a knife going through butter, going on to crumple, like a paper bag, the cab window area through which, seconds earlier, I had been looking out. Fortunately, the nearby tin of detonators (fog signals) escaped being mangled, otherwise these would have exploded like a bomb.

The noise and vibration was deafening, as the huge locomotive shuddered to a halt. I remember seeing my driver huddled in the corner at the driving controls, enveloped in steam, as was the bookplate in general. I was standing near him, prepared to make a lightning escape if anything threatened to explode, which I fully expected.

In those days, 'trauma', 'shock', or 'whiplash' just didn't happen to you, but my next recollection of events was having to throw out all the burning coals in the firebox onto the fireside, somewhere near the back of Leeds City Station. This was no easy task, and was only accomplished by using the long 'paddle' designed for such a purpose.

However, it was a necessary exercise because we had lost all our water and the boiler could have blown up, or at best, the extreme heat could have melted the safety lead plugs, causing the remaining water in the boiler to extinguish the fire, destroying the firebox in the process.

I collapsed into bed round about lunchtime. There was still a word, if not 'trauma', to describe my tired condition, and it aptly did. The evening paper carried a very brief account of the accident, its tenor seeming to imply that as accidents go, it was nothing. Or, on reflection, was that the phrase I used the next night, when describing what happened, to my unbelieving colleagues, as we inspected the two damaged locomotives safely parked up at Farnley Shed?

Zobay Simiyari
Time Together Project

The Missing Sandwich



In 1979 I was seven years old. Every day before school my mother would make me my lunch to take to school. She didn't want me to buy food from a shop because she said it would have germs from other people touching it, and it might make me sick. She always said that her cooking was the best and she would make me two sandwiches to take to school. Sometimes it would be egg, or sausage or even spaghetti!

I liked school but sometimes I would cry if my Mum was too busy to take me. When this happened then I would go with my sister and she would look after me.

One morning I went to school and was working very hard in my classroom when I heard my stomach begin to rumble - I was hungry! At break time I went into the yard and took my sandwiches out of my bag and ate them - they tasted really nice.

After break I went into my class and carried on working hard. I wasn't hungry anymore and I forgot all about my sandwiches.

In the middle of the day we finished our classes to break for lunch. I took my bag from under my desk and looked inside it. I was very upset to see that my sandwich wasn't there and went to my teacher, crying 'My lunch has been taken from my bag!'

My teacher was very cross and didn't let anyone go outside until the whole class had opened their bags so we could see who had stolen my sandwich. But we couldn't find the sandwich anywhere, which made me even more upset.

After school I told my mum what had happened.

She couldn't believe that someone had stolen my sandwich and asked me 'Are you sure?'

I said to her 'Yes of course I am', and so she gave me a hug and made something else to eat.

One week later I suddenly remembered what I had done and thought 'Oh My God - it was me! I ate the sandwich!'

I told my mum what I had done. But we didn't tell anyone else.

Mona Salintout
Time Together Project

From Sudan to Leeds



I was born in Omdurman; it is the second largest city in Sudan. It is dominated by the white and blue Nile. It has many green forests near the banks of the Nile. I grew up in a middle class family. My father died when I was five years old. Then I lost my mother at the age of nine. Therefore, my elder brother took the responsibility to raise me. Those particular conditions had a major repercussion on my life later. I started to rely on myself at an early age and take care of many aspects of my life, such as doing homework and I put my education as the first priority. However, the absence of my parents affected me by making me more self-supportive and reliant. I felt very upset, but I preferred to see this in a positive way, as I was now much closer to my brother. I had a happy childhood, always surrounded by brothers and sisters. We went for holidays together to visit places in my country or abroad. Although I do not have a vivid memory of my parents, my family, especially my elder brother, played a major role in raising me and alleviated so much of the loss of my parents.

In 2003, I was given the opportunity to join my family in the UK. I had to leave my work and my country; however, this was a fantastic opportunity. I could not believe it, to be honest. I spent 3 weeks deciding what to do. On the one hand, I had a chance to travel to Britain and work in a new environment; on the other hand, I would have to leave my work, friends and family. I made the decision and on 2nd of September 2003, I was on the way to the airport. The opportunity to come to England was too good to turn down. It was a chance for me to join family members and move to a politically stable, safe country.

We arrived in London after 6 hours, I was very excited to see the view from the plane, and it was fascinating. I liked the landscape; it was very green and rainy. I was not wearing a coat, as it was very hot in Sudan, especially in September. I was very cold and shivering. I spent the night in the airport hotel and in the morning, my family and I went to London Central. We had a very great time, although I spent a lot of money. We walked for a bit. We went to Hyde Park - it was full of joggers. We went shopping. I hoped to find some bargains, but most things were a bit expensive. On the second day, we travelled to Leeds by train. That was very nice. I have come to know some British towns and cities. It was the first time I got on a train, as in Sudan the only transport is either a car, coach or a plane. It was amazing and very quick and comfortable, but a bit expensive. I arrived in Leeds at 3pm. I liked it very much, as it has a wonderful landscape, but unfortunately I could not speak English and I found out that different parts of Britain have different accents. I also found people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which make Britain a multicultural society. In Sudan, we focus on reading and writing English, but the only problem is that we do not speak in English very much.

I was surprised by the system in Britain, I was very fascinated to find out about the NHS and other social administrations, as in Sudan we do not have a National Health Service and local GPs, only clinics that are in the state. I visited the Art Gallery and the Town Hall and, in the afternoon, I walked down to the library, which was not very far. In the reception, it had been explained to me how to apply for membership, which I could get by filling in the form and giving details about myself. One of the most interesting sections, which I had never heard about before, was Family History, where you are able to trace your family tree and ancestors and you get to know their names. All the services were new to me, apart from the books, as we did not have other facilities in our library in my country. I was surprised by the role played by the libraries here in UK and how it is connected to serve the community.

One thing that makes Mona very happy is to see her niece, Lena. She has been to visit Mona in Britain once, and now Mona is looking forward to seeing her when she visits again this summer.

My niece Lena was born in 1997, in Dubai. She was born one month earlier than she was supposed to be; she was tiny, cute and had no nails at all. The first (incredible) word that she said was "mum" at the age of two. She started to play, walk and talk to her family; she was full of joy and happiness. At the age of 5 she started school at an American system school; she got on well with school and did well at her tests. She lives with her mum in Dubai, and her dad lives in America so they go and visit him every summer holiday. Last year they came to the wonderful United Kingdom and she loved it, she would go and play out and visit different cities, she also travelled on a train, which she had never done before.

She was happy to see her beautiful cousin Sarah - they played together and had lots of fun. She would rather live in the UK than the USA. She liked the British weather, as it doesn't rain in Dubai as much as in England. She feels horrible with the weather there, especially in the period of sandy storms. They are strong winds that occur along the edges of the desert and are associated with large sandstorms and dust storms. They usually last a few hours, and are most common during the summer and quite often proceed the rainy season. These storms may blow from any direction and could turn the daylight into a dark night, sometimes it's hard to see your own fingers. In Lena's native country Sudan they call it a Haboob, which transports huge quantities of sand and dust. (You can watch a video of a Haboob on the Relay website). During her vacation in England, she got amused by the rain and the green landscape everywhere she went.

Next, her Cousin Sarah went to see her in Dubai; she was very surprised and was very happy to see her. They went to theme parks, went on trips to other cities, played video games and other stuff that they liked to do.

Now Lena and her family are planning to come to the UK again during the summer holidays, so I am searching the web for places to go to keep them busy, I don't want to bring them to places they have already been to. I want to make this the best summer they have ever had, so I am trying hard.

I would like to take them to many places like museums, theme parks (like Flamingo Land) so they can enjoy it. Lena is my favorite niece because she is fun, intelligent, and you can talk to her about your problems and she will listen. You can have a good laugh with her and when going out together she is always full of fun, joy and energy. That's why I chose her.

Meredith Moore
Time Together Project

Eid Mubarak



Eid Mubarak! But our cultures don't collide. There is suspicion everywhere, if not in words, in minds.

It's a time for celebration, we can share if there is understanding. However, the mistrust creeps in and casts shadows over all that is bright and good.

The government wants us to 'integrate', yet the media creates a whirlwind of scaremongering. Someone is responsible for this perceived differentiation, but in reality it doesn't exist.

How can things change? Who actually wants change? WE, the people who can, will. There may never be widespread acceptance, but those who do rejoice will know in their hearts that they are winning.

Barbara Newsome
Pudsey Writers' Group

A Doll In Polish National Costume (From The Discovery Centre)



This doll was made by Martha. The Family lived in a small town near Warsaw. Her husband Janusz, (John in English), was often sick as he suffered from asthma and bronchitis, so every day of his life was restricted by the way he felt on getting up in the morning. He worked in a carpet factory, so dust in the air sometimes made his condition worse. The weather could also make a difference, as if it was windy the fibres flew about the shop getting up his nose: he often tried to cover his face to avoid the wheezing that could ensue.

They had two children; the boy was now married and lived in a town some distance away from his parents, so they were not in contact a lot. His sister Tanya worked in the next town, where she lived in a flat with two of her friends whom she worked with in an office, but would come home some weekends. Money was always scarce, especially when Janusz was sick, so Martha did dressmaking for the local ladies of the town. Her neighbours knew what a good seamstress she was, so when a new dress or skirt was required, they would come and ask for advice and suggestions on materials and styles. Martha would dress a doll with a bit of the suggested material, adding different ribbons at the bottom of the skirt to give the lady an idea what the finished skirt would look like. If satisfactory the skirt, or dress, would then be made up and, for a little more, the doll would be offered too, so the customer could remember how pretty she had looked the first time she had worn it. Martha and her daughter had lovely long black hair, she would sometimes have a friend cut it for her and would then collect the fallen bits in a bag to be used for a doll when required. Headsquares in lovely bright colours were often worn, especially to birthdays or parties. They were often embroidered by the wearer, many being recognised by their work. When there was a special procession through town, perhaps for the Virgin Mary, everyone got dressed in their best. Then the skirts, headsquares and white blouses with big billowing sleeves would be worn with black velvet waistcoats, or some other bright colour to match the outfit, as was the custom. Martha would often be asked to make these too. Many dolls were made up with the remnants of the materials and displayed on the windowsill of her house, which had been built higher to accommodate them, with the hope of selling one. There was always such a great variety to be had. Anything to make a little bit extra.

Poland always had very cold and snowy winters, well below freezing point, so warm clothes had to be worn, especially by the children when going to school. This gave mothers a lot of work knitting all year round. Of course they also liked shawls in bright colours, some with these intricate patterns. Getting about in the snow was an every day difficulty as the transport would often not run if the streets weren't cleared, but the children could use sledges pulled by their parents which they always enjoyed, with much laughter on the journey.

Janusz would often tell his family about his life at home before the war with his Mum and Dad, Josef Ostrowski and his brother Konrad. His Dad was a joiner, and they didn't have much money, but they had their own little house, which many people did not. Over the years he had made all the furniture and had taught his sons the trade as best he could. Eventually all helped in the business and made what money they could from the local people; there were always gates and doors to mend and a table or two to make, or a lovely sideboard when the customer could save enough money to afford it. They were well thought of for being honest tradesmen in the community. But his brother Konrad was always reading books about flying, it was all he'd ever thought of ever since he was a little boy. He would buy aircraft kits for a few pence, which he would talk his Dad into making. But that was not enough, he would cut and mould airplanes out of oddments of wood, making the propellers from match sticks; but he still was not happy. He was determined to learn to fly; there was an aerodrome some distance away, and when he was old enough he would cycle to a hill nearby and watch the aircraft coming in and taking off, which made him even more determined to learn. He began to save up, even if he could afford only one lesson he was going to have a go...

He was a quick learner; his teacher was pleased, telling him he would go far. In 1938 he joined the Air Force and went into training at the Academy in Deblin, their aircraft were very poor but he flew a few sorties. The war was imminent and they knew they were no match for the German Blitzkrieg. So he and many others, including his brother who was now in the army, decided to try to get to France. They disguised themselves as students and papers were hurriedly arranged for them all; more than 700 made their way through Romania to Constanzia on the Black Sea, where shipping had been organised to take them across the Mediterranean to France. But the French were disorganised and slow in getting things moving; perhaps they thought the war would not happen. Time once more ran out and, at the fall of France in the spring of 1940, they escaped and left Brest for Southampton. They soon settled in, being sent to different parts of the country to continue their training, and learning the language as fast as possible. Konrad went to Flying Training School in Carlisle and his brother up to the borders of Scotland.

A new life was what they needed, but of course, as you can imagine, they were worried about the family at home, and as time passed they were having it very hard indeed. The Jews were rounded up and taken away to who knew where, the food was very scarce, they helped each other as best they could but the Germans were cruel. It was every man for himself, or herself, as by now there were very few men around to help. They scavenged in the fields for odd potatoes and vegetables but there was a curfew, sometimes from as early as 1.30 in the afternoon. So people had little chance of finding anything; the black out was rigorous, a gun would be fired near a house that showed even a glimmer of light, and by now, of course, they were being bombed by the British. The women spent their time knitting or remaking old clothes as the children were getting bigger and growing out of them. Sometimes they would try to slip out of the house to look for food, but of course that was dangerous as if caught they could be shot. This went on all through the war, it was surprising how people managed to survive at all. The only news they could get was from the wireless, and most of that would be bad. Josef eventually was posted to Edinburgh where they were billeted in some of the big houses. They found a canteen which was open most of the time and they would go there during the evening. It was run by volunteers who were friendly, the food was always hot, and there were sandwiches too if you wished. Of course there was rationing, but compared to what they had been used to the food was plentiful, and it was good to feel free and safe. Edinburgh had so many troops of all nationalities roaming around, sailors too from ships on the Firth of Forth.

When the war ended some decided to settle in Britain, including Konrad who eventually found a bride and settled in the Isle Of Wight; others managed to get home to see how their families had coped. Everyone was alive but only just, it took a lot of work for every household to rebuild their homes but Josef was seldom out of work for many years to come, and had lived to a ripe old age with many tales to tell.

Ron Dyson
Pudsey Writers' Group

The Way Ahead



The stormy history of our island offers ample evidence of incursions in earlier times by foreign invaders. Many left their mark in one way or another, adding to local legend and folklore. But the Normans arrived as conquerors and came to stay. Place names, building styles and farming patterns reflect their presence to this very day; even some handicrafts have survived to form the basis of early of early industry.

After William was crowned king, he opened the Domesday book, to chart and evaluate his realm. One entry records Leeds as a farming settlement of forty families at a ford on the River Aire.

Eventually, Prince Edward, a descendant of William, returned from wars in the low countries, followed by weavers from Flanders, and many of these settled in the Aire valley. The river waters then were sweet and clean, lending themselves readily to the washing of wool prior to the weaving process. Thus began a staple industry, which developed over the centuries; later, the area became a flourishing textile centre.

Over the years that followed other migrations took place. Fugitives from political and religious oppression were welcomed to our shores, weaving their customs into the fabric of our national and local life. An earlier invasion, of a more peaceful nature, had already brought St. Augustine and Christianity. Another import from foreign climes!

By the end of the nineteenth century, Jews were fleeing from pogroms in Europe and some settled in the Leylands, a district north of Leeds. They brought more prosperity to the city thanks to their skill as tailors, bankers and commercial enterprise. They also took a great interest in civic and social affairs. Soon, through their efforts, a successful clothing industry was established, bringing further jobs and wealth to the city.

One market trader developed his business into a large national chain of stores that was eventually to export goods throughout Europe. Marks, a Jew was joined by Spencer, a Gentile. Theirs was a sterling example of successful community relations that was to pay big dividends. Occasionally there were disputes, but what large family was ever without them? Yet the Cohens and the Kellys existed very well. At the close of the second world war another influx from afar brought commonwealth citizens in great numbers to work alongside Poles and other Europeans who'd settled here after service in the allied armies.

Mosques and Temples give evidence of the great diversity of local religious activity. Different paths up the mountain, to that house with many mansions. But what earthly (or even heavenly use), is the fatherhood of God, without the brotherhood of man? A statue of that same Prince Edward mentioned earlier stands in the city centre. He was known as the Black Prince, because of the colour of his armour. Sitting astride his charger, his hand is raised, pointing clearly in a forward direction. And if humanity is to have even a chance of survival, then that, with both tolerance and unity is the only safe direction we can all take.

Water Lily Girl



An exquisite nymph like girl in the middle of a water lily of the palest hues of pink, cream and green, half bent over holding the tops of the two innermost petals. One tiny finger nail is broken, one or two of the petals have been damaged and stuck back on, in not the most professional manner. It has obviously been through the wars at some time or another. As an ornament she is pretty but worthless; nevertheless, one of the most precious things in my home. She was given to me by the lady in the picture, Auntie Rhoda, who stands outside her home with her husband, Uncle Jim, my mother's eldest brother from a family of twelve siblings – eight boys and four girls, all now gone with the passing of time.

Perhaps 'given' is not the right word. I asked for it, but only, I hasten to add, when she was no longer with us. When I told her my reason for wanting it she laughed and replied "Yes, There's no-one I would rather give it to. I tell you what, would you like it now?"

I assured her that was not the intention.

"Indeed not" I answered, almost indignantly, "She must stay where she is for as long as you live in the house."

And so she did until Rhoda died, when I was asked if there was anything I would like.

"Yes there is" I answered without hesitation. "There is something I have always admired..", but before I could go any further, Gladys, her niece, replied "As well as the ornament on the coffee table, I mean? She has constantly reminded me that you asked for it and to make sure you got it."

So, the water lily girl became mine.

Sometime later I learned that someone else had had his eye on it. 'Our' Kevin, Rhoda's favourite nephew, was also asked if there was anything he would like and instantly replied that he would love to have the flower girl on the coffee table.

"But I notice it's gone" he continued. When told that it had been given to me, he protested, almost childishly "Well, I liked it. I've always fancied it and when I was a little lad, and I thought no-one was looking I would....."

This, from a man who worked as a carer, to whom naked ladies (albeit, old) were the norm.

Why did I want it, you may ask?

The figurine had been on a coffee table alongside a tall, green glass vase containing five, now way past their best, bulrushes, for as long as I can remember. When we visited my aunt and uncle it always fascinated me. In the days of my childhood nudity was taboo – not nice, almost lewd, so to see this beautiful maiden without clothing was embarrassing, but at the same time, compelling. As I entered the room my eyes would automatically be drawn to it and should I be left alone, or if I was sure no-one was watching me, I would sneak a peep, drinking in this new found pleasure with childish wonderment, the sight stirring wicked thoughts and feelings in my young mind and body. There was nothing in my own home of such beauty and whilst there were knickknacks everywhere, even at that young age, I felt it lacked the panache and good taste that my aunt had brought into her home. Why, did I yearn for more? Indeed, how did I know there was more? I had loving parents, there was always food on the table and sometimes special treats, made more enjoyable by their rarity. We never had books in the house - stories were made up and told as we went along, and television had not been invented, so children could not be enticed into a way of life their parents could not afford. Was it greed, envy, or even ambition and the desire for better living standards than the one down, two up, back to back - and a long walk up the street to the yard where we shared a 'privy' (water closet) with No 7? Going into a house with a bathroom and lavatory upstairs was quite daunting. Once we got up in the morning we never went back upstairs until bedtime, so perhaps it was bad manners to get up and go in someone else's house? A matter of great embarrassment and concern to a shy young child. Moreover, to my shame, on one occasion I was too scared to ask and wet my pants. It was much easier, even if it was cold and raining, to get the key on a piece of string with a bobbin from the hook on the back of the door and go up the street.

So it couldn't have been indoor sanitation that appealed to my young mind. Without doubt, it was definitely Auntie Rhoda's sophisticated appearance and worldly ways that was the attraction, even at that early stage of my development.

Lavinia, my mother, and her brother, Jim, were from the same stock, raised in a rough and ready fashion, the older girls (my mother, the capable one, especially) having to rear the younger brood whilst their own mother concentrated on having more babies. They were educated to the same standard – my mother working half time in the mill at twelve years old in 1910 and he spending the whole of his life labouring in the textile industry. They shared the same morals, principles and attitude towards life but, admittedly whilst childless, he had progressed from basic living accommodation to a three bedroomed, newly built semi. Obviously it was Rhoda, although coming from the same background, with even more children in the family, who had the initiative and drive.

Rhoda, an extrovert, was self opinionated and giddy – always ready to hear a risqué joke or chat with a strange man in a pub, and yet equally happy joining in with her Jim and the other nine hundred and ninety eight at the 'cathedral of the north' (Eastbrook Hall Methodist chapel in Bradford), in a glorious rendering of 'Oh for a thousand Tongues to Sing'. An extrovert, yes, yet abiding by the rules of the Ten Commandments instilled in her by parents, whose wisdom and guidance she relied upon throughout her life – she would often be heard quoting from The Bible; "Honour thy father and thy mother." Jim, on the other hand, was a humble, uncomplicated man, happy to potter in his garden during the long summer evenings, or sit by the fire, chewing on his pipe and listening to his favourite programmes on the wireless (radio); In Town Tonight, with its famous signature tune, Knightsbridge, from Eric Coates' London Suite; ITMA, with Tommy Handley; or a good play on Saturday Night Theatre, with its accompanying sound effects. The wireless, a big wooden box with a fretwork front covering some sort of blue material – hessian, perhaps, stood on a spindly table in the corner; a blot on the landscape, totally out of place in the elegant surroundings. Nevertheless, a necessity in any home of that era. Yes, Jim was a contented man, happy and grateful for all that God had given him, and so lucky to have Rhoda to share it. He adored her.

I am not sure who took the photograph. It could have been Bill, whom she referred to, first, as a friend. He was the son of the lady in whose boarding house they stayed at Seahouses when they could afford a holiday. Later, when he continued to visit after the death of my uncle, he became her toy boy. Such was her imagination and vanity! Or perhaps it was Gladys, her niece, only four years her junior, who lived in the adjoining semi. But, more likely, it was taken by one of "my family", or "Jim's lot", at one of her tea parties. These would consist of a 'running buffet' served from a 'party susan' (a large round revolving tray filled with 'open' sandwiches, little cakes and patties), and serviettes, after which my father, who was not used to such fineries, would complain on the way home.

"There's never enough to eat at your Jim's. I can't do with them bits of sandwiches with the crusts cut off. Wasteful, chucking good bread out for the birds. I like to sit at a table and get stuck in."

"For goodness sake, Harry, stop going on about it. She does her best and it will be a long time before we go again, so just forget it. I must admit, though", she added, "she didn't offer us a cup of tea before we came home. I'd never let anybody turn out on a cold night without a drink."

"Aye, love, but they're not all like you."

However, suffice to say, whoever took the photograph, it was a gesture that would please them both. Jim would cherish a picture of them standing together outside their home. She, no doubt, having made a special effort with her clothes and make up before the filming took place, likening herself to one of the stars she had seen at the Tivoli. The Tivoli was a picture house down Leeds Road where she had worked as an usherette from time to time for pin money, or to buy something she had seen for the home in an antique shop. Unlike the multi screen cinemas of today, it was an old, ornate building with a balcony, where lovers bagged the back row, which was also where the more affluent chose to sit, the downstairs occupied by the rest. Her duties as an usherette were to show patrons to their seats with a torch if the film was in progress and the lights had dimmed (and, no doubt, she was not above flashing it on the back row if she thought there was any hanky-panky going on), and, at the interval, to walk down the aisle to the screen, selling ice creams from a tray suspended round the neck. Pure theatre. Rhoda loved it. She didn't resort to a Ra-Ra skirt but would, no doubt, have risen to the challenge if required.

As she stood posing for the photograph she would be thinking that if the photo turned out well she would get copies to enclose with her Christmas cards to family and friends. Better still, she decided, she could dispense with a card and write her own festive greetings on the photo. Jim would like that too, she thought. She could just hear him saying "What a good idea! Eh, lass, there's only you who would think of something like that. You spend your life thinking up nice things to do for folk."

Perhaps it was the party where we were all sitting in the through lounge, from where there was chatter and peals of laughter as Harry (my dad) told a rude joke, only to be admonished by Grandma, who would point out "Hush, Harry, be careful what you say in front of the children. How many times have I reminded you that little pigs have big ears." Auntie Nelly giggled with embarrassment and Great Aunt Jane, not really understanding the joke, tittered nervously. Meanwhile, whilst Gladys looked down in disapproval, there was little time to worry about one little pig who, sitting on the child's chair which was normally a set piece of interior decoration, unnoticed by the adults, was rapturously drinking in the sight of the bare lady on the coffee table across the room.

After the photo shoot Rhoda, totally oblivious of the little hiccup in the proceedings, re-entered the room, gaily enquiring "Has anybody got any jokes to tell? You usually know one or two Harry."

"I don't know about jokes, I think it's time we got these children home. Its school tomorrow," my mother was quick to retort.

Shortly after, the party broke up and the guests departed, leaving Rhoda and Jim with more memories – and a photograph to remind them of yet another happy occasion which, Rhoda, no doubt, considered another 'feather in her cap' (a compliment to her ability) and Jim proudly thought of as one more example of his wonderful wife's talents.

Her only regret was that Harry never got round to telling his joke!