

Jack's Fables – Volume 1

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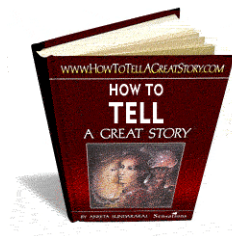
About the author and How To Tell A Great Story

Jack Stewart has been writing all his life. He has written short stories, a management book, and is currently working on his autobiography. He is, with David Miskimin, co-author of a book which can transform the lives of parents and kids-**The Coaching Parent**. A psychotherapist by trade, he has co-created two CD's which offer true relaxation, **Purrfect Symphony** and **Relax With Cats**.



The stories in this ebook are written by Jack Stewart and the copyright in them belong to him. If you'd like to reproduce any of the stories in this ebook, please contact him (see below for contact details). They are only a handful of the stories that appear under a [column called Jack's Fables](#) on the [How To Tell A Great Story website](#). Each story is featured in the *Great Story Telling Network* [newsletter](#). If this is the first time you're hearing of this popular newsletter, you *must* visit our [Archives section](#) to read past listings.

Founded in 2003 by Aneeta Sundararaj, [How To Tell A Great Story](#) is the name of a website which focuses on any aspect of storytelling from the various methods of storytelling, ideas, research techniques, editing, ghostwriting, storytelling in business and so on. There are many resources offered for free on this website.



How To Tell A Great Story is also the name of the best-selling ebook, which is a beginners guide to storytelling. This ebook is now in its 7th edition and has helped many people all over the world to begin their journey in storytelling.

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Big Pat

Forged with history

We live in an age where increasingly heritage comes with a price. A price often too high for communities, but affordable by 'developers'.

Soporific [Soppo] is a little village in Cheshire, England. A couple of miles from Wuckey, a town the same distance from Given Up and Madness.

A long time ago, there was a small factory in Soppo making tools, spades, shovels, picks etc. Competition from larger companies, plus other factors led to its closure about thirty years ago.

The factory was flattened, and on the site was built a supermarket and about six shops. The centre was called the 'Forge,' and a couple of the machines from the factory were renovated and placed at the entrance, making the connection with history.

The move was very popular with local residents.

One of my favourite 'strap lines' about any product is that of a beer brewed in the 'Black County.' The line is: 'Unspoiled by Progress.' Priceless.

Unfortunately, the 'Forge' was about to be ruined by 'progress.' Only one of the machines was left [the other had been 'spirited' away years before], and the local rag reported that 'developers' were to remove it, as it was in the way of 'proposed changes' to the shopping precinct.

The slow but steady removal of power from local communities, increasing government centralisation, cloned, supine politicians, an explosion of bureaucracy, and a drugged, obese, reality tv'd, alcopopped, monosodium glutamated wave of indifference has led many to accept our heritage being vandalised.

But 'they' reckoned without 'Big Pat.'

The machine in question had reportedly been 'taken away for scrap' by 'developers.' Sorry I should have added the scandal of anonymity to the rant above. 'No-one' knew where the machine had been taken, and the local councillors declared 'nothing can be done.' Cue anguished looks, the wringing of hands, and the mass abdication of responsibility.

In a few years time, the last survivors of that enduring insanity that was the First World War will be dead. All that will remain are cenotaph's, poppies, a suitably solemn 'Big Bet' [the Queen], and sepia-tone photos in millions of homes. Those who were there will be forever silent.



Big Pat is a local celebrity in Soppo, using fame only to get things done. 6' 3", built like a brick outhouse, addicted to fried bread and black puddings, he drives a big white van, pretty courteously most of the time.

'They' had been 'at it' before. Wanted to close the local school. A fine building, fine school, the justification for its demise was a problem even for those who supported it. In other words there was none.

When I was a kid, I recall watching an event on TV that changed my life. It was about the mafia in the USA, I think in the 1950's. The top people in the mafia were worried about the FBI and other agencies getting too close to them. Bribes and coercion had their limits. So the head honcho, or his deputy decided to mobilise Italian-American support. A campaign was launched. So successful was it, that the closing rally in Central Park was one of the biggest in US history. The message was-stop persecuting us, there is no mafia, leave us alone. Yes, the rousing speech was delivered by the no. 1 or 2 of the mafia. I'm pretty sure the mafia are not implicated in Soppo skulduggery. But like Big Pat, I have little confidence in the sleeping population that now has six more restaurants to broaden its waistline, and who cares about an old bit of scrap anyway?

Big Pat and his friends saved the local school.

The machine was a forge that used to make spades and shovels which were used by British soldiers in the trenches at the Somme. Old Soppo spades are still being found today. This month is the 90th anniversary of the battle of the Somme. In total over 1 million British, French and German troops died, and [a record] 58,000 British troops died on the opening day.

After using those rare commodities, intelligence, purpose and persistence, Pat's friends found out where the machine had been taken. The scrap yard dealer was shocked when he was told of its history and agreed to return it for a reduced price.

Pat and his allies confronted the local politicians, who were to swap anguish for outrage. At the meeting, unknown to all except Pat's group was one of the family who used to own the original forge factory. The politicians exhibited a range of emotions both outwardly and inwardly-guilt, shame, anger, powerlessness and finally outrage when Pat revealed they had found and secured the machine. This was after he had secured needed donations [to pay for it and its transportation] from both the council, and the previous owner!

There was another factory in Soppo making tools for the war effort. It had been knocked down years before the Forge. On its old site, the spade making machine would be placed, a reminder to those drinking at the pub next door that many of their ancestors had needlessly lost their lives in the madness that is war.

My late father, a wire weaver, helped to find Polish immigrants who used to work at the old factory jobs at his new company. I was a pupil at the school Big Pat saved. And I've enjoyed more than a few pints at the nearby pub.

Thanks Pat. I'm a vegetarian, but there must be something in those black puddings...

The Apprentice Millionaire

As a young boy, living in a modest house with his mother and brother, Mike was always finding ways to earn money. His childhood was broken up by moves to different countries [his father worked for the American Air Force]. Education was never going to be his passport to a better life.

He acquired an 'attitude', which is another way of saying he knew what he wanted, and refused to accept put downs.

Mike could always spot good role models, until he was to become one himself. And Mike spent time with people he admired, and quickly took on the qualities he wanted. He quickly realised to keep out of the way of those who might do him down. In short, he was a brilliant modeller. And like many of us, he was logging in his mind the kind of childhood he would want for *his offspring*.

We all have the potential to apply our talents in areas other than in the ones we are found lacking. We are no less of a person. In fact we are a *complete person* when we set out and continue on the path of our destiny.

Famous people written off by parents, teachers, peers and employers makes fascinating reading. It includes, Einstein, Churchill, FW Woolworth, Henry Ford, Sochiro Honda, Edison, Fred Astaire, Beethoven, Darwin, Tolstoy, Rodin, Disney, Abraham Lincoln, Isaac Newton, Socrates...

My late father worked for 48 years in a factory making wire mesh. It would have been cruel to expect a monkey to do his job. A man of immense talent, it was suppressed and never revealed itself at work. Outside work, he was a champion badminton, tennis, and bowls player. He learned how to strip and re-build motor bike engines. He built a photographic enlarger from sheet metal and lenses. He could play the violin, ice hockey, and was an expert decorator, and dedicated body builder. There was nothing he couldn't do if he put his mind to it. He rode his bike to and from work, mostly twice a day, as

he came home for his mid-day meal. He rode over 100,000 miles in his lifetime. But he had few qualifications.

In his teens, Mike was often asked what he was going to do with his life. "No problem," was his reply, "I'm an apprentice millionaire."



He loved cars. After he left school, he started buying and selling cars, particularly sports cars. He also saw the value in property.

His lifelong companion is his childhood sweetheart Caroline. Caroline shared his enthusiasm for life, and his willingness to take risks, borne out of his growing self-belief.

Over 20 years ago, Mike decided he wanted to live in a small village a few miles south of where he had spent some of his childhood. He discovered a house was coming up for auction in his favourite village, and the agents had invited prospective buyers to look around it prior to purchase. The expected price of the house was £55,000, the limit of what Mike and Caroline could afford.

Mike and Caroline turned up on their motor bike, as the agent was showing a couple around. The agent was a little taken back, and was amazed a couple of young people barely out of their teens could even contemplate buying this house. And, of course, he let it show, treating them contemptuously as he fawned around the first couple.

The pair saw enough of the house to convince them it was what they wanted, but Mike was annoyed by the agent's attitude.

A few weeks later, the auction was being held at a local hotel. Standing room only. Interest in the house was considerable. No space left.

This was Mike's first auction, so he wasn't aware of the protocols. However, he did know that the house would go to the highest bidder. And if it was under £55,000, it would be him.

Mike would be late for his own funeral. The bidding was about to start. He drove up to the hotel, no spaces, except right outside the entrance. No time to lose, that was his space. He turned off the Porsche's engine and ran into the room.

The only place left to stand was on the window ledge at the back of the room. He climbed up and stood on the ledge looking directly at the auctioneer.

Bidding was brisk, and quickly got to £40,000, Mike bidding quietly from his vantage point. However, it then slowed down as a number of bidders dropped out.

'Forty-one? Forty one five...forty two am I bid?' shouted the auctioneer.

"Forty two five...forty three...forty four thousand. Come on now who wants this wonderful development opportunity in one of our prettiest villages?"

Well, Mike did. And to his amazement the bidding stopped at £45,000, the highest bid. His bid.

"Sold to the young man at the back."

Mike jumped down from the ledge, and went over to the auction agents. The snob who had looked at him with contempt when he went to see the house didn't recognise him at first.

"You do realise you have bought the house, and we require 10% deposit now?" said the agent.

"Yes" said Mike, unruffled.

"We'll take a cheque or banker's draft."

Mike knew a banker's draft wasn't an option, as the house price couldn't have been known in advance at an auction.

"Cash?" asked Mike.

After a flurry of ignorance and reluctance to drive home with £4500 in his pocket, the agent finally agreed to take the cash, as he knew it was valid.

A final attempt at social one-upmanship backfired.

“And you do have the balance of £40,500 plus solicitor’s fees?” stuttered the agent.

“Tomorrow do you?” said Mike.

Mike collected his paperwork, gave the cash to the agent, and walked out of the front entrance. The agent saw him get into his Porsche and drive off.

Mike renovated the house, and sold off various parts of it [it had stables and outbuildings] over the years. Made at least £200,000 profit when they decided to move. Over the next 20 years, he and his wife Caroline moved again a couple of more times in their village.

They now live, with their daughter in a house worth at least £4 million, with over 40 acres of land. Mike has commercial properties all over the area, a villa and yacht in Spain and his classic car business is thriving. A month ago, he went out and bought a Porsche like most of us would buy some new shoes.

Affected? Mike is still one of the lads. Treats people the same regardless of their income or status.

No longer the apprentice, I first met Mike and his family in February this year. He is my brother. My wife and I met my [and Mike’s] mother [I was adopted] in May. I have two other brothers and a sister in America. I have still to find my birth father.

Shame Mike never met my [adoptive] father, as they had a lot in common...

The agent is still a snob.

With Bear on our side.

In the ancient wood, deep in the rural idyll of God's chosen county, Crazy the badger came out and declared to the world:

"The fox cubs across the stream are not innocent. According to Badger law, during a time of battle and war, there is no such thing as 'innocence' among the enemy."

"In war, when our badgers storm the enemy, they are allowed and even enjoined by the Copse to kill even good foxes, that is, foxes that are ostensibly good."

The badgers had several setts on the eastern side of the stream in the ancient wood. They had been established in the wood for centuries. So had the foxes, their sworn enemy, but the badgers used ancient 'law' and propaganda to distort history to such an extent that lies would be an understatement. However to the rest of the animals in the area, fed on the daily diet of 'news' by the squirrels, it was the badgers who were the victims.

Over one thousand years ago, the badgers had witnessed the trapping and killing of a great brown bear in the forest. So had the foxes. The foxes passed their account of the event down successive generations by word of mouth. The badgers had written a book about it, and from this single event, had created a wood and forest view which was used today.

The Badger Book of Conservation [BBC] was used as a smoke screen for genocide, rape, incest, murder, stealing; just about any anti-social behaviour you could name. But to the world only some badgers were religious zealots, condemning such acts as punishable by eternal hell and damnation.

The foxes had many things in common with the badgers, but were hopeless amateurs when it came to wood domination.

"We shall never turn the other cheek. We will always get our retaliation in first. Our God is the one true God. All other Gods have to be destroyed."

The same words were spoken by both fox and badger. But when it came to oratory, Crazy had Brook, the fox leader, beaten paws down:

“The BBC teaches the law is that all those who defy Sett [the Badger ‘homeland’] should be killed: and those that have the power of life and death should have them killed; and if this cannot be done, they should be led to their death by deceptive methods.”

Both fox and badger were b*****ds, but the badgers were clever b*****ds, and they had one massive advantage, or so they thought.

The Great Bear had been trapped and killed by humans. The foxes found the whole spectacle hard to come to terms with, and so passed down to their cubs a different version of events than the badgers. Unbeknown to both ordinary badger and fox, *humans* had written the Badger Book of Conservation!

Before he was murdered the Great Bear had shown all the wildlife in the area how to live together, to work through their differences, and to help each other in times of strife. When they were not fighting the badgers, most foxes behaved as if still guided by the wisdom of the Great Bear, acting compassionately and responsibly. As soon as the badgers started their propaganda war [it never ended], the local chickens dived for cover, the levels of fear in the wood went off the scale, and all creativity and traces of civilized behaviour perished.



To the badgers, the Great Bear was a false god. The BBC denounced him as a dreamer and con artist. The reality was that the humans had realised the Great Bear had been sent in by a power even bigger than themselves. Preaching love and cooperation was not in their interests. The badgers and foxes were ripe for manipulation.

Set up the badgers with the BBC, repeat the same [lies] message for centuries. Use the squirrels to feed the foxes and everyone else more lies, and by keeping the area in a permanent state of fear, draw in every other animal to take sides.

To almost all the great apes, who amongst them many possessed much wisdom, the foxes and badgers were as bad as each other. OK, so the badgers wiped out 20 fox cubs, so what? Didn't the foxes kill badgers too? And wasn't the fox creed to kill all other animals who didn't want to become foxes?

The humans made sure that the badgers, who had nearly been wiped out by the great forest fire of 1900, always attracted sympathy for their cause. History, smoke and mirrors would ensure almost everybody would be ignorant of the fact that the badgers were doing the humans dirty work.

Every year, the wood held a secret 'convention.' It was billed as a gathering of those concerned about the future of the forest, those who cared about *conservation*.

What wasn't known is that it was attended by badger *and fox*, lion and gnu, cat and mouse. Indeed all the supposed sworn enemies spent days together being manipulated by humans.

However, what was also unknown was something far more significant was gathering momentum. Amongst the foxes, badgers, lions, cats, humans and every species on the planet were those who had absorbed the teachings of the Great Bear and his fellow visionaries, the great whales and elephants. And because these animals and people found that love and compassion resonated deep within them in ways that squirrel-speak never could, the manipulators began to get worried.

Squirrels were instructed by the badgers to become more ruthless and frivolous at the same time. More animal reality shows on squirrel entertainment, deny anyone with fox sympathies the right to speak. Get rabbits to destroy trees, but make it look like the work of rabid foxes. Stage 'massacres' and 'atrocities' every so often, and restrict movement around the wood under the pretext of 'security'. Use these to justify the deployment of more ****house rats to watch over the wood population. Over-feed the animals and make them obsessed with their weight and health. Create diseases, then give out pills and rubbish natural ways of living. Denounce anyone who challenges wood law as mad and arrest them.

But the more the manipulators did their work, the more the cracks started to appear...

By looking within themselves, tuning out the bark-to-bark propaganda messages and spending more and more time in quiet contemplation, badgers and foxes were found side by side in setts; grey squirrels were seen feeding the young of red squirrels. Rabbits had confessed to destroying trees, and had set out planting hundreds of new ones. The persecution of wildlife by humans began to fade away.

The BBC was parodied by hyenas, and forgiveness took a permanent grip on the population.

“The fox cubs across the stream are our brothers and sisters. As Badger law has now been wholly discredited, we have no need for battles and wars that no-one ever really wins. We have at last found our true nature!”

The Hairy Tortoise

Ever wondered about conflicting advice?

Specify *exactly* what you want, and ask the universe. Wait for delivery. No? Make God laugh, tell him your plans.

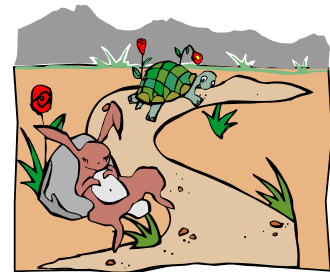
In dealing with people, be completely honest and up-front. But...in negotiations, don't reveal your hand.

Forgiveness will set you free. And yet, forgiving too easily will make you a pushover.

Love your enemies, cherish your family. What if your enemies may harm those close to you?

The tortoise always gets there quicker than the hare. However what kind of a journey does s/he have?

Bourcy the hare, lived life in the fast lane. Energy crackled off him like an over-charged pylon. No time to sit and ponder, life was precious, and he lived every day as if it was his last.



Want it doing? Consider it done. What's next? Life kicks your backside? Get up, dust yourself off and tackle the next challenge. Good idea? Yes. I've thought about it, now let's do it

Bourcy was an inspiration to those around him, who [to Bourcy] wasted their lives procrastinating, thinking and talking too much, and planning.

"Life is not a rehearsal. If you don't know what you want, someone else will decide for you. God helps those who help themselves," sums up Bourcy's creed. And he was right.

Jinky the tortoise, never quite seemed to have it sorted. But to Jinky, that was others judging him by their own [in truth those which dominate society] rules.

Jinky has helped hundreds of people over the years, sharing the results of his search for life's meaning. Profound and deep. Impresses people with his intelligence and wisdom.

"We all have a purpose when we come on to the earth plane. It is important for us to discover what it is, then do it," sums up Jinky's creed. And he was right.

And for all those who knew other Bourcy's and Jinky's, they got frustrated by Bourcy's impatience and Jinky's being too laid back.

To Jinky, Bourcy's excesses summed up everything wrong with society. 100 mph lifestyles, fast this, fast that. Never time to smell the flowers.

To Bourcy, if Jinky spent as much time living as he did finding out about life, he would realise his potential in *this lifetime*.

A few years ago, Bourcy had a serious health scare. He nearly died. Since that day he vowed to live life to the full, and leave others to work out what it all means.

"Jinky must be near to finding out by now what life is about, and when he does he can tell me. It strikes me you can spend your life searching, keel over then look back and wonder what happened to the last 70 years."

"I admire Bourcy. He's an inspiration. I used to be like him myself. Thing is, I never knew my origins like him, and despite my best efforts, it was always something that seemed to get in the way. He's right, we are here to enjoy life. And yet to me, no matter how much we do enjoy it, we have serious lessons to learn. And no matter what we do, some of us do have more stuff thrown at us than others. I'm sorry, sometimes getting up again after the 100th knockdown requires reflection, rather than headfirst action."

"Jinky thinks I don't reflect does he? Well, I do occasionally pause for breath. I know I make mistakes, and often repeat them. I'm wondering if we combined his knowledge and my experience, what kind of team we'd make?"

"There's no one on the planet I feel envious of or better than. Bourcy has his life to lead. Self-evidently some people do have harder lives than others. And it has nothing to do with 'going for it'. We all know those who have gone for it and fallen flat on their faces. Equally, we know those who sleepwalk through life, taking no risks, getting by on stimulants. If people do 'go for it', and *their lives have meaning*, fantastic!"

Years ago, Bourcy and Jinky met at a ski lodge, opened for the summer. In winter the ski lodge was full of amateur and professional skiers. It was much more expensive to be there when it snowed.

Unlike Bourcy, Jinky could never get his head around skiing. A recipe for broken limbs. And can you imagine a tortoise on skis? Up in a hot air balloon, yes. Not for him endless rounds of exhilaration coming down hill, flogging back up, even if it was by a lift.

Their famous race was held in the grounds of the ski lodge. And we all know who won.

The race judge, an old goose who watched in amazement as the tortoise won the race had her own observations:

"As I move towards the end of my life, I'm grateful. Like every single one of us, no-one has any idea when our number is called. That I've lived a typical goose's life will do me. Because what is a typical life for anyone? We eat, we breathe, we drink. We overcome obstacles sent to us, and some create obstacles in their minds that don't exist. We have leisure time, we bring up our young, we 'waste' time. We learn and we love."

"The truth is at the root of dissatisfaction is comparing ourselves to others. Without living somebody else's life for them, how can we ever compare? Do we measure it by the number of hours we spend smiling? Do we get a rating off our partners, parents, and kids. Is the life of a

goose safer or more dangerous than a hare's? Does it depend where the hare lives? We geese can move away more easily!"

"Does Jinky's shell hold him back? Would he be any happier if he had hair? We all know those who are rich and miserable, and those who are poor and miserable. We know those who are rich and happy, poor and happy. Money gives you more choices, and is everyone's birthright. Yes even for us geese. Rich geese can afford devices which tell us when guns are approaching. And every one of us benefits."

Rich geese are the same as hairy tortoises, and bald hares. What happens after you cross the finishing line?

[Easy] Living by Numbers

"Five at the side, and three on the top."

It was compulsory to specify hair clipper settings as you entered the barber's shop. Whatever you said got done, so if you forgot your settings, you looked like a slightly different group of clones when back outside.



Compulsory micro-chipping of the population '*you can't take that trip without your chip*' had made shopping so much *easier*.

Your personal chip [embedded in your arm] was swiped automatically as you entered the local Tossco, and for a small fee you could specify your 'fresh' [fish, meat, fruit, vegetables] preferences within it, making it *even easier* and quicker to rush through the store.

Because your chip was unique there was no need to carry cash [abolished years ago], and credit 'cards' were old hat. Every item sold had a RFID chip, so as you pushed your basket through the final check-out, your purchases were scanned at the same time as you were.

Personal shopping [i.e. where you actually left your place of residence] itself was on the wane, as it was *even easier still* to walk through your virtual store at home doing the same thing. Goods were delivered within the hour, and couriers had priory over all other road users.

Health was an occasional inconvenience. It lay outside the mantra of everything being made easier. You actually had to commit some effort to it.

Genetic profiling had led to 'corrective' chips being given to potential hoodies. However, the distinction between 'ordinary' and corrective was meaningless, as the chip controllers could play a tune with you,

and often did. Some weird tunes emerged from the most inconvenient orifices, when embarrassment was a more effective punishment than an electric shock!

Every day, after rising, you sat in your personal [you could choose your own colour scheme] docking station, and the clever little chip [most people had names for theirs, and this too was permitted, and its name would be first word on the display] would read your body. Any 'irregularities' were then corrected by intravenous drugs, delivered through a compressor [remember 'Star Trek'? No needles required].

Occasionally more drug trials were necessary as new 'diseases' were invented. The human body had resisted chemical manipulation on occasions and this was problematic. So in anticipation of side effects, those agreeing to participate were given days off work, free recreational drugs and electrical stimulation to any chosen part of the body as 'compensation.'

Of course, this was another myth, as the population existed on one permanent drug trial. Its purpose was to perpetuate the illusion of choice, which had effectively died in 2012.

Choice meant colour of your docking station, which part of your body to over-stimulate, which channel to watch [NOW channel ran permanently inside everyone's head, courtesy of Jimmy the micro-chip, 365/24/7], hair colour, clipper settings, which neighbour to spy on, and your body-mass index. Yes, *fat is freedom* was a powerful mind-set. There were in total 24 'real' choices.

Minor conflicts often broke out between numbers. Each child was allocated any one of 24 numbers at birth. The programme which created this ensured no child had the same number as a parent. Because they had five digits [e.g. 25536] there was no implied superiority [and it disguised the fact that numbers were not random, and some groups were 'more equal' than others] which would have occurred if the numbers were 1 to 24. Ingenious!

Racial and religious tensions evaporated. Regardless of where you were born, when and who your parents were, you ended up with a five digit number and had 24 choices.

Groups of 25536's would fight 37892's for example, despite the number of the month programmes [NOTM's]. Every two years for one month, your number would be glorified. Celebrity numbers, brave kids and pets, cartoons humanising micro-chips, and special characteristics of 37982's would all be trumpeted. If you were a 37982, for that month, you felt like you ruled the world.

So, trouble rarely occurred between numbers which were highlighted back-to-back. If it was 37892's then 25536's, the glow the 37892's felt stopped any real jealousy kicking in for the four weeks that followed their glorification.

But, as always, the authorities knew what they were doing. NOTM's were 'randomly' programmed. No obvious pattern emerged over everyone's 60-year life span. This ensured number fighting was equally 'random.' 49121's kicked 76890's one month, and were themselves kicked by any other group, subject to the back-to-back rule above.

This way, individuals and groups had another dose of the myths of choice. If fighting ever spilled over to potential challenges to authority, the daily docking station drugs soon sorted that one out.

The upshot of it all was obvious. A programmed, predictable 60 [and then your body just spontaneously gives up] years of illness-free living. Fear was the glue that bound people together. Fear of anyone with a different number. Excitement from kicking or being kicked. As much stimulation as you could handle. Even fags had become redundant!

And what about the 'easy' shopping? And the equivalent of 2.5 years in every lifetime [one month every two years, so 30 in all] when your personal number was special? Before the NOW most people were lucky to get any feeling of being special in their lifetime.

Life was effing wonderful!

Condoned days off work, personalised docking stations, the altruism of helping with drug trials, your own choice of hair colour [and for men, your hair never dropped out], and 250 TV channels to watch!

What could possibly be wrong with all that?

As Richard Perle said in 2006, the voters [when voting existed] just didn't appreciate how good their leaders [and their lives of course] were. So voting had to go.

But what was the real difference between a [hair] clipper setting of 3 and 4? Or even 3 and 5? Yes it was true those who went for 1's did look a bit different from 5's.

The authorities had hoped the clipper settings would be an alternative to the numbers game. A decision had been made not to tattoo numbers on foreheads on cost grounds, and illegal scanners enabled rival number gangs to scan the 'enemy.'

Factions initially grew up based on hair length [within the 1 to 5 clipper band], as most people could discriminate between the settings. However, as intelligence dropped alarmingly [an 'unfortunate' drugs side effect], numbers were the only game in town.

People became less and less concerned about their personal clipper settings [it was the only way to have hair cut for both women and men], one or two of the brighter clones began questioning whether life was so wonderful after all...

'If you do nothing wrong, you have nothing to fear.'

Jane was considering the options. Her last incarnation left her with hundreds of questions, a few regrets, and a high degree of satisfaction.

She had to step into earth mode temporarily to feel these emotions and thoughts, as making an informed choice was difficult from a state of total bliss.

Staying in earth mode, she remembered when she had lived in the small Lancashire, [England] village of Earlestown from 1890 to 1985, finding life's meaning was always very high on her list of priorities. And secretly she imagined that when she did leave the earth plane, it would be less of a culture shock to know a little of what others had 'discovered' about the after life.



Jane reflected on hours spent in conversation with her family and friends about karma, guilt, fear, love, the ascension, spirit and other trivial matters... She had indulged herself in a life-long search for wisdom, technologies and teachers who would help her make sense of it all.

Her [last] childhood had been materially grim but she had chosen loving parents. In the last 30 years of her life, she had started to let go of the resentments, fears, anger and frustrations she had built up in the first 60.

As the memory of letting go of all the accumulated mental junk came back, she lapsed again into the state of bliss and decided to stay there for a while.

'I see you can't dwell too long in memory mode' said her last earth partner, Gerry.

'I was, *for the purposes of enlightenment*, wondering how we across here can help them grasp living simultaneous lives, how 'time' has no

meaning and how to 'make sense' of this when it is beyond the five senses, and sometimes beyond even 'knowing,'" replied Jane.

'We don't want the buggers gate-crashing do we? Hearing that mind-numbing 'music', watching them roll about half-cut, chewing gum, and feeling like we did in Earlestown on a Saturday night,' retorted Gerry.

'You know that's all rubbish. I wonder at times if you're not still back at the 'Queens Arms' yourself. How can the 'buggers' ruin perfection? Buggers only exist in the dream the earth plane perpetuates. But I do get a frustrated at all the chaos they create. However, it's all going according to plan.'

'Mine's a pint of Landlord,' shouted Gerry as it manifested in his hand. 'You don't need to read ten books and spend hours practising here do you? Think and it's there.'

Jane and Gerry continued to enjoy the banter, as it had no consequences, hurt no-one, and resentment didn't exist in spirit.

'Oh sod it,' said Jane, 'I'm off soon. I've chosen my parents, my gender, my kids, people who will come into my life, those who will love me and those who will betray me. I've cut down the betrayals to four, as I'm dealing with them much better after my last life as a teacher from a persecuted minority. Do you want to feature in this life Gerry?'

'Not deliberately thanks. I can't not feature can I? We are immortal. I've no idea how to get their heads around the absence of time. You've just said 'I'm off soon' as if you are waiting for a celestial taxi. You're there now, an apprentice blacksmith in 18th century Paris. I'll leave you a surprise for your 21st.'

'Great, can't 'plan' it all otherwise what's the point?' mused Jane.

Jean was heating up the horseshoe until it glowed white hot. Strange thoughts had been running through his head about carts that needed no horse, little boxes with moving pictures, and corrupt politicians. He had recurrent dreams about a tall thin woman who made money by standing in front of a small metal box. Millions of others seemed to spend most of their lives in front of small metal boxes on poles. There

were flashes of light and other scenes of this rather plain woman covered in make-up holding a small plastic tube attached to a long needle.

'Just 'before you go' listen to this', said Gerry. 'How can they reconcile planning and leaving it to the cosmos?'

'You know they can't,' replied Jane, 'and for that matter neither can we. We decide the basics, and then the rest is an adventure. There would be no point in going back if we 'knew' the whole thing, and no point if it was totally random and chaotic, as those who currently appear to run the show on earth want to portray.'

'But what would happen if enough of them woke up and saw through the illusion? The number who are awake is growing, and it's on the cards they could manage it 'soon.'

'Look,' growled Jane, well out of her bliss state. 'We seem forever to be having this discussion. You know that before enlightenment/awakening the biggest obstacle after forgiveness is letting go of the material world and making a connection to all beings. These early stages of waking up are accompanied by a feeling of superiority as you move away from Budweiser, Nike, Coke, John Prescott, Aspartame, Donald Rumsfeld, Victoria Beckham and in your case, *Timothy Taylor's Landlord*.'

'You're 'right' of course. And then the hardest part of all, the realisation that even the stuff and people you have just mentioned are part of the illusion,' said Gerry with a grin.

'How's the river of forgetting for my bath?' asked Jane, 'I don't want to be one of those poor souls who know what their future life will be like when they are in the womb. It's bad enough Jean having dreams about Kate Moss. Imagine knowing about Thatcher, wheelie bins and people being microchipped, Peter Mandelson, SPAM and the time-slipped 1984 before you get out. You wouldn't want to know would you?'

'We go through anything, and everything is possible because of universal love. That's all there is. Perhaps instead of Middlesbrough

Council nutters watching everyone of closed-circuit TV, and then barking at the public to pick up litter and get off their bikes, they should play 'Imagine' through the loudspeakers in the town centre.*

'Fast forward to earth year 2012. They are doing, and there are no cameras, no litter and-sorry Gerry-no more pints of your favourite beer', laughed Jane.

'Well if that's the case, let them stay asleep, gutsing burgers, gasping fags and walking around with their stomachs hanging out of their trousers. I can wait a bit longer for the collapse of the illusion. I loved that ale!'

We can't have dancin' at the local county jail...

'Get the army in,' shrieked the Commissar, 'We can't let those cons dictate terms. *They* decided to riot. Violence is never a solution. Full combat gear and fixed bayonets.'

The leader of the rioters found himself there by accident. But that didn't suit the Commissar. This was a conspiracy theory they did want.

'For some time now, we have been aware of a small group of politically motivated men, hell-bent on the overthrow of society as we know and love it. They are everywhere, and some have found their way into HM Prison Ballbreak.

Their ringleader, Brown, is the head of a local cell, and has been behind this from the start.'

Geoff Brown's reaction to this would have been interesting had he known at the time how the establishment viewed him. Brown was serving 2 years for fraud, and had ended up in Ballbreak instead of the open prison at Leafy Meadow due to overcrowding.



Brown remembered the 60's when he was growing up, and how political parties vied with each other to say who would create the best possible world to live in. Now, he thought, they compete over proclaiming who can keep us the most safe from rabid criminals and te*r**i*ts. And he knew that kind of thinking was dangerous.

He had lost his business overnight when the government scrapped all rural post offices, under the slogan '**They might be reliable, but they ain't viable.**' The use of *ain't* was preferred to *aren't* because it would appeal to the younger voter, who never went in post offices except possibly to rob them. No-one cared about reliability anymore, so it was an obvious winner.

The Ballbreak riot was actually triggered when an inmate, who had become one of Geoff Brown's best friends, had been beaten up by prison officers. In the months leading up to riot, the food had been getting worse, 'privileges' [association time, visiting hours, training and rehabilitation] taken away or reduced, and speeches of Tony Blair and John Prescott had been played endlessly on prison radio. So strongly did everyone at the prison react to this, that even some of the prison officers had joined in with the riot, and had set fire to the tapes in the radio studio.

Commissar Bucket reflected.

'We know 80% of them will come back in 2 years, so it's obvious prison doesn't work at rehabilitation. And why should it? The public don't want the ba**ards to have it easy. If they all stopped being criminals, look at the unemployment that would create in the prisons, the police, probation and social services, the legal profession, the fashion industry ['prison-chic'], newspapers and stereotyped actors playing grim-faced coppers on the television and ex-army authors writing about it all. No way! On sink estates, crime is a career option for teenagers. Start with an ASBO, end up in a young offender's institution, and then 'graduate' to prison. What would they all do without a core of hoodies terrorising neighbourhoods? We need a number of criminals to keep the majority scared. Trouble is, we've become too good with the schools of crime, and they are bursting at the seams because of people wanting to come in.

Like the cleansing aftermath of a forest fire, the odd riot is to be welcomed. We condemn all violence.'

Johnny Pagent, Brown's friend, had wound up the staff in Ballbreak for months. Geoff knew this, but was still impressed by his passion for prison reform, and proper rehabilitation.

Johnny knew his stuff:

'Look at the NSS [NHS], the National Sicknes Service. They poison people as kids, convince us all dis-ease is waiting in Eastern Europe, Africa or Wolverhampton like a coiled spring ready to pounce randomly unless we make ourselves susceptible to other problems by being

vaccinated. Lip service is paid to healthy living, and Alzheimer's is looked at like a curse from God instead of an accumulation of unhealthy living [eating] during your life.

What would happen if *we all did actually lead healthier lives*? How many of the 1 million NSS staff would still have jobs? What about the fast food industry, the drink, drugs and fags companies?'

Brown couldn't square Pagent's zeal for the obvious with his anti-social attitude to the innocent staff at Ballbreak.

After the riot, Brown had 10 years added to his sentence. Pagent was re-packaged and programmed and sent to Iraq.

Geoff Brown had gained unwanted notoriety for his role in saving Pagent's life, and standing up to the governor ["I was only carrying out orders sir!"] over the deterioration of the prison before the riot. He had become an unofficial guru and wise man at the re-named Soy lent Green Penitentiary [SGP]. Just two years later, only 40% of ex-SGP inmates were returning to a life of crime.

The new regime at SGP had attracted those more interested in rehabilitation than creating then pandering to a false public mood. Bucket had 'resigned' and gone on to slag everyone off on his soapbox in Wolverhampton:

'Why do we need Post Offices? Machine-gun the pensioners.' Was a typical rant.

The turnaround at SGP had been kept from the media. In the annual play 'Rubber Bullets' staged by the prisoners, Geoff Brown played the 'governor' in an imaginary riot at an imaginary flagship 'model' [rehabilitative] prison. The new Commissar had permitted the play because the fictitious prison actually closed in the play, thus in their opinion, giving reform a bad name...

After the play, a dance was held, the most popular song containing these words:

"I love to hear those convicts squeal, it's a shame these slugs ain't real, but we can't have dancin' at the local county jail" *

JS, October 2006.

* taken from the old 10 cc song, Rubber Bullets.

Becoming the Best He Can Be.

Joey thought to himself 'If that's what it's all about, I've got about 10 years to do it.' But he also wondered what the future held for his heroes, apart from after-dinner speaking, getting drunk and the odd appearance on 'Question of Sport.'

As he wandered through the 'Sports' section of the local bookshop, he saw books about the lives of footballers and sportspeople who were in their early to mid-20's.

Coming from a mixed race family, and despite his tender years [14], he had a highly developed social conscience. So much so that his real hero was Nelson Mandela.

Mandela was in his 70's when his autobiography *The Long Walk to Freedom* came out. Joey reflected on the achievements of sportspeople who commit themselves to their chosen sport, and the few who became 'superstars' doing what they loved, and Mandela's 26 years in prison.

He thought about Gandhi & Mother Teresa. Of great scientists like Stephen Hawking, Albert Einstein and Isaac Newton.

The routes to fame were many and none held the guarantee of success. Joey read about men and women who 'slept their way to the top.' Of those, mostly women, who had their faces and bodies altered by plastic surgery, and some who pandered to tabloid images of women by having ridiculously large breasts 'fitted'. Like all of us Joey knew of male celebrities who wore wigs and injected buttox into their faces. He smiled when he thought about the male-dominated media industry which made lines in old men's faces OK, a passport to rejection and ridicule in older women.

And yet he also knew that even those with amazing talent might not 'make it.' The ones that did become household names combined talent with hard work and discipline. And then some missed out, because they never got the chance to shine on the bigger stages.

Accounts of criminals who reformed and then used their ill-gotten gains to become legitimate were less known, though Joey knew a few himself.

Those who had 'made it to the top' without using sex, money and family connections often spoke of the loneliness and emptiness of being forever in the public eye. And despite all this, Joey knew of those who used celebrity to help others and bring about social change like, Sir Ian McKellen, Ian Botham, the late Frankie Vaughan, footballers Niall Quinn and Alan Shearer [who both gave £1 million to charity], Lady Diana, Camilla Batmanghelidjh and Ellen MacArthur.

So, he concluded that celebrity was no bad thing, just avoid letting the 'popular' media trivialise it.

His uncle Ben thinks Joey is a waste of space, and tells him so often. His dad loved Joey and his sister so much he left when he was eight. Joey would occasionally feel sorry for himself, and then snap out of it, as it got him nowhere.

For no other reason than it worked, Joey would pray. In fact he would have his own unconventional 'conversations with God' at his grandfather's grave. He went there every Monday lunchtime. Today was no different.

'Let me see big man, to make it in this world, it helps if you are born to rich parents. But if you're not, you can lie, cheat and steal to claw your way up. If, like me, you have no obvious talent for sport or exams, a life of crime has its appeal.'

As God knew everything, and had cloned himself in every human, he didn't stir himself much when Joey began his dialogue. He just activated the spiritual equivalent of a switch, and let Joey listen to this inner voice:

'Yes, crime is always an option for anyone. Whatever path you choose has consequences.'

Joey knew that most of the 'answers' God gave him put the responsibility back to him, so he limited his serious dialogue to once a week, rather than become a 'God-botherer.'

Today he wanted more than pious [but true] replies, so he acknowledged the answer, relaxed a little more and continued:

'Fine. So, I'll go out and find something I'm good at, and then work my proverbials off to climb the greasy pole.'

'Climbing the greasy pole pre-supposes the task is very difficult if not impossible; that you stand every chance of slipping back down, getting dirty in the process, and that success lies at the top of this dubious thing. If others want to climb it, there is also the chance of trampling on people, or your being trampled on'

Joey felt he was in for a long session.

'Right then. Tonight after school, I'll lock myself in my room and wait. I'll spend hours visualising what I want, and drawing it to me.'

'I'm assuming what you want involves your participation. Having something tangible in mind helps.'

From past experience, this was as concrete as it got-*having something tangible in mind helps.*

So Joey imagined himself serving others. He left the way and kind of service open. He felt this way was the path towards his true self. Despite the put downs from his uncle, and being abandoned by his father, Joey always felt deserving of a better life. He turned around from the grave, having thanked his grandfather, and the 'big man.'

At home, pets were not allowed, so he befriended local dogs and cats on the estate. He felt an affinity with animals, and gained insights from his relationships with them which helped him as much as his weekly audience with God.

As time went by, Joey grew up and left home. He had a few scrapes with the law before realising it wasn't for him. He had learned to live in the now, and was rarely troubled by worrying about the future, and regretting the past.

Joey had begun to acquire a calmness, almost a serenity which attracted others to him, some of whom he had to politely send away.

When he went to visit the grave, he silently connected and sent love to every other person doing the same thing on the planet. In making the connection, he knew there were no 'votes' from his silent world family.

He smiled when he realised he could reach more people like this than taking lessons in climbing the greasy pole.

In another world, Joey was a 'celebrity', and just like the millions of people none of us have heard of who have changed the world as much as any Newton, especially the women for whom being known is an achievement*, Joey had found his true self.**

JS, November 2006.

* How many women come to mind when famous people are mentioned? Is it because there never were any, or what they have done merits no mention? Just type anything into your search engine with the word **women** in it. Chances are amongst the top 3-6 listings you will find references to sex. Ironically, doing the same with 'men' gets the sex, but a little less obvious.

** this story was inspired by a real life encounter with Joey several years ago at an inner-city school. I have never seen or heard of him since, but how his quest to discover his true self emerged is described in **The Coaching Parent**, page 141. It is my favourite.



Is it me or is it my imagination?

The umbrella was watching the changing sky anxiously. Greyer and greyer by the minute. The usual ritual of being grabbed by the neck, carried out at great speed and unfurled in a windy, murky, wet and miserable street was imminent.

Most of the routine was OK, as that's what umbrellas are for, but the wind was another matter. Despite being well made, the umbrella knew if it turned inside out enough times, quality or not, the waste bin beckoned.

Similar thoughts of dread occurred to the raincoat. Wind, fine, rain fine; fashion... no. The raincoat always thought it hung well on its owner, and it too was not an inexpensive purchase. But if some 'celebrity' appeared with a sickly enough smile in a magazine or on TV with a 'cooler' version, the Charity shop beckoned.

Dozy the dog wasn't interested in the weather. He nearly wet himself with excitement every time he knew he was about to be taken for a walk. Come back soaked? Just shake it off. What bothered him was the possibility of the door staying shut. No owner returning from work, no walk. Late? OK. Very late? Painful. Later still, a mess had to be cleaned up. Embarrassing in the extreme. But what if she *never* came back?

Clara the cat had her flap. She had complete independence. Wind, fashion, drunken owner? Sod them all. She came and went when she pleased. Food? She coped with the odd missed meal. Could always sneak in next door. And if her owner neglected her too much, guilt pangs resulted in Clara getting real tuna or chicken. Clara could handle just about everything. However, she had been watching television when the levee broke in New Orleans. Suppose something like that happened here? House flooded, people dead. Clara wasn't a very good swimmer.



Bill the builder was Mr Macho. Had built up his empire from scratch. He now employed 50 people. Building was a tough game. Who has ever heard of wimps in the building industry except in porn magazines and old songs about the YMCA? Work hard, play hard. Vindaloo, a 'few beers', whisky and champagne.

Kick ass, glue the mobile phone to your head. Women? Treat 'em hard but fair. Too much to drink at weekend? Sorry love, but neither fair nor hard. You know how it is. This is who I am, and if you don't like it, there's the door.

When Bill was climbing the greasy pole of success, he was on time. Now he had made it, lateness came with the territory. Then he revolved around the world, now the world revolved around him. Life might not have been fair, but it was now very firm.

Hard man Bill. Once he went to bed sober. Had a dream. His business collapsed. He woke up sweating. Never again. Get whisky at the bedside, video cameras in the factory. He now could see things coming during his waking hours, and see nothing when asleep.

Bill thought by using technology, scowling and alcohol he could manage his head so as to eliminate the nightmares. But every so often thoughts of doom and gloom would crop up when he was in full chauvinistic flow. Women, 'oo needs 'em?

But what could he do?

Clara imagined the street flooded; her's and next door's cat flap under water. The she fell asleep. Dreamed of a full dish of yellow-fin tuna. Her paws twitched.

Sometimes during the day Dozy would bark his ***** off. More than once his owner had to call the vet out for emergency repairs. As the vet came running up the path, Dozy thought about his daily walk, a little lighter.

The raincoat ended up in Bosnia via a clothes recycling bin. It fitted the new owner perfectly, who looked sensational. Fashion came

around every ten years in everywhere except a few large towns, and there were no charity shops.

The umbrella wondered what was happening when the sun shone. No need for its services then. Only once had its owner taken the umbrella out in full sun, when the TV weather person forgot herself and remembered those living in the north had weather too. Given it was usually raining 'oop north, the weather person suggested even in 80 degree heat, 'you never know.'

'Is it me or is it my imagination?' the umbrella sighed to itself. 'I want it to be wet, without wind, for about ¼ of the year.'

The raincoat, when lying at the bottom of the recycling bin, couldn't make out how Bosnia happened. Was it the blokes outside making jokes about ethnic cleansing, or did it dream about a land without fashion?

Dozy knew it was his owner when she was around, and it was him when she wasn't. He didn't believe in imagination. The door either opened or it didn't.

Clara couldn't see the problem. Almost everything she experienced she had also dreamed about or imagined. She could readily bring to mind her owner's voice asking for forgiveness after a missed meal. She could hear next door's ginger tom in her head too, as she forced her way through their flap.

Bill's business hadn't collapsed. That much was real. Like all of us, there were times when things came into his head which he couldn't distinguish between 'thinking', i.e. 'me' or his imagination, which could be 'someone else.'

Once in his life he had experienced a state of total bliss when walking along a beach. He nearly fell over. For what seemed like forever he was at one with the universe. Then for what seemed like no time at all, he felt overwhelmingly self-conscious and quickly recovered his composure.

'I couldn't have thought of that, or even imagined it' said Bill to a gathering of his curry and champagne mates years later.

'So where did it come from? I was stone cold sober.'

Absent Friends

Popular TV duo, Rant & Cheque apologised to fans last night after missing the show 'This is Your Life' made about them and in their honour.

'We were unfortunately filming our next series, Celebrity Padded Cell, and only found out about *This Is Your Life* when a man cloned from Eamonn Andrews's stem cells leapt out of the curtains.'

R & C's agent justified their actions by adding:

'The show must go on only applies to anything with a genuine Rant & Cheque logo, so they had to send the warm-up act, Pass & Move instead. Still, it keeps the public guessing doesn't it, and Rant & Cheque can always appear again next year.'



The man behind the new *This Is Your Life* series, Graham Butty was disappointed naturally, but he himself was filming a documentary about celebrity pensions in Patagonia. He texted the following to Snotters News Agency:

Bt of a bmer RnC nt bng thr. PnM OK?

Butty knew how important it was to manage absences from awards. Nothing gave a career a greater boost to be seen on a set somewhere when receiving any kind of award. Indeed, some *nominees* careers had accelerated past award winners, as long as they were visible anywhere other than at the ceremony.

'A' listers made a habit of it. Not being at the awards ceremony itself suggested the award recipient knew nothing in advance, was more important than anyone of their peers at the ceremony, and was working 24/7/365. Those wishing to climb the greasy pole all had 'stand-ins' who could pop up immediately their famous masters managed yet another absence.

Unfortunately for Rant & Cheque, Pass and Move were fast coming up on the rails, and it was only a matter of time before P & M would get an award in their own right. They had won 'Celebrity Stand-In of the Year' for the last three years, and had groomed their own stand-ins, ready for the step up to the big time.

A number of things told P & M to get moving. One was that at least three Pass and Move tribute acts were already doing the club circuit. One P & M tribute act actually appeared on 'Stars With Their Noses' on a cable channel. The down side was that 'Arse and Moan' occasionally came to light in the sleazier medium-sized venues at weekends. Arse and Moan were no more than a soft porn satire of Rant & Cheque.

P & M's stand-ins, Now & Then had first come to the public's attention when appearing on 'Muffer the Puffer.' Muffer the Puffer was a women only show aired after the success [5000 viewers] of the men's 'Jasper the Gasper.' M the P and J the G were shows in which 'members of the public' were invited to indulge in increasingly frowned upon and unacceptable behaviour, i.e. smoking in restaurants, lifts and at home, talking whilst eating, chewing gum at awards ceremonies, throwing fireworks at pensioners, driving whilst using mobile phones, parking in disabled spaces, shouting obscenities at neighbours and generally acting in a 'f*** you' manner.

Now and Then, or Sandra and Tracy as they were known before they teamed up, were at their most appalling on Muffer the Puffer. They won show after show, which was 'interactive', i.e., votes were cast on-line, by simply being themselves. Not only did they do everything above and more, they parachuted into local communities and turned whole estates into gaspers, gozzers, boozers, swearers, burpers, pukers, snotters, farters, slags and bum-crackers.

Legends in their own lunchtimes, Now and Then were champions of the underclass in every underpass. They had even introduced a new craze which was sweeping the country, Stub 'n' Rub. Stub out your fag in someone's face, and laugh as they rubbed the burn, usually screaming.

The connection between Sandra and Tracey aka Now and Then, Ron and Ron, aka Pass and Move, and Rant and Cheque, aka Tarquin and Godiva had been made public.

It had been a front page story in the Daily Mail. 'Rant and Cheque, alias Stub and Rub?' was the headline. After a few mumblings on Channel 5, the connection was acknowledged by all three parties, and then dismissed. The essence of the rebuttal was:

'Don't most successful people start out a bit iffy? Schwarzenegger, Geri Halliwell, and dozens of Hollywood actors and actresses began their careers in soft porn movies. So what?'

Prime Minister Blair, who had often appeared with Rant and Cheque on TV, was asked for his opinion:

'Well I agree with everything the Mail says. Rant and Cheque are wonderful people. Alistair Campbell used to write for porn magazines, and we in New Labour have benefited massively from donations from that industry. Doesn't Berlusconi enjoy a bit of porn?'

Rant & Cheque, when they had once been pinned down and asked intelligent questions, attributed their success to Morecambe and Wise.

'They were and are our heroes. Good clean fun, with just a bit of double entendre. Priceless observation of the stupidity of life, sharp writing, attention to detail, and perfect timing.'

'We don't need anything other than good timing for our act. The public today will put up with imbecilic behaviour, brain-dead punters, and more sex than a skip full of Viagra. You see Pass and Move do the imbecilic behaviour, whilst Now and Then entertain the brain dead. So when we appear, in truth we are representing the six of us, who in turn represent the whole corrupt industry.'

'One thing we do know is that the public aren't as stupid as they are portrayed on the screen. You know that when you go out and meet people. The whole world over is full of millions of well-intentioned, intelligent people. We're all on borrowed time, like the jokers at

ancient courts, and idiots you see trying to be clever on 'reality' shows.'

'There are always three ways to process any occurrence. You see an absolute pillock become famous for being famous, and you despair; or you think, 'I could do that.' What about the realisation that we actually create this nonsense in our minds? If enough of us think about connection, peace, love and sanity, then the garbage can't even appear on the radar.'

'I suppose we, as Rant & Cheque, are becoming so over the top, you can rightly accuse us of lowering the tone of entertainment to the level of the gutter. And you would be right. However, there are a growing number of people who are seeing through it all. We know no-one will ever hear this stuff, and if they did, it would be the end of us and you cynics too, so we're all safe.'

For now.

Begging to go back.

The workhouse was a grim place, made more so by the devilish master, his wife and his cretinous dogs, Wilf and Dick. The master loved his status in the area, which he conferred upon himself by his stove-pipe hat, lamb-chop sideburns, long black moleskin coat and impossibly booming voice, which could raise the dead, and often did.



Rodney Bayte and his wife Repra had run the work house with an iron fist for 10 years. Inmates knew if they stepped out of line all kinds of ills would visited upon them.

“God’s will be done,” Bayte’s mantra could be heard across the valley at the home for waifs and strays, where a similar regime existed.

“Life is a vale of tears, and then you die,” said Bayte to a journalist who was doing a feature about the workhouse master for the local newspaper, the Hollow Haranguer.

“It’s our job to get vagrants off the streets, give them hard work in exchange for gruel and lodging, and bring some discipline into their [useless] lives. They’ll all go to hell of course, but at least when they get there, fewer surprises will await them.”

“I’m told there are sinners from the other workhouses in the area who have repented and gone on to live, hrmmp, shall we say a slightly less worthless existence, but not here, I’ll not have that. Our motto is **Abandon All Hope.**”

Bayte was in full flow, and in the next room was Repra, who had her own views, but seemingly preferred to follow her husband’s humourless, desperate example rather than return to her own rather murky past

The master went on: “You see it is very simple. Some of us are born to rule, and some are born to be wasters and vagrants. Brute force, austerity, a loud commanding voice and hidden hypocrisy are the only

things that keep them in line. What would the countryside be like if they were allowed to wander around, dying, drunk in the fields, sponging off others, spreading disease and illness with gay abandon?"

"We take them in, show them Christian charity, and make them work for a change. Work makes you free. It cleanses the soul and keeps me in the manner to which I'm accustomed. The inmates who have been here for years are very lucky, because Wilf has stopped biting their genitals. I wouldn't mind, but sometimes he goes too far and we have to call in the nurse. I kick him hard and he cowers, but he seems to take it out on other vagrants, rather than jump on the shovel when I shout excrement."

"Have you lived a good and pure life yourself Mr Bayte?" enquired the journalist.

"What do you mean, you cheeky little swine?" gasped Bayte who then paused, wrinkled his brow and went on, "Haven't I seen someone who looks like you in here?"

"Most certainly you have, my father spent a few seasons here about 10 years ago."

Bayte felt that warm, familiar glow of power rush through his parts. He knew now that he could say what he wanted, and the journalist would have to write exactly what he wanted printing. But before he could unleash his full manipulative, sadistic and condescending verbal might on the Haranguer's finest, he was stopped in his own tracks.

"My father knew Mrs Bayte, as did a number of workhouse people."

In the next room, howls and barking broke out. Wilf and Dick were fighting. Like Bayte, Dick thought himself a superior breed to mongrel Wilf, who had been abused all his life by Bayte. Wilf did anything Bayte told him to, or he got kicked. Dick was really a mongrel himself, but Bayte had convinced everyone he was a pedigree. He kept Dick for decoratively trotting around the workhouse grounds, as he was 'retired.' It was just the distraction Bayte needed.

"That will be all now, I've work to do myself. I can't sit here all day. If you think about writing anything I don't like, I'll get your editor to take it out before publication."

"I am the editor Mr Bayte. So, we'll do a feature on the amazing coincidences which have brought us all together shall we? My father getting out of the workhouse, experiencing the sickening stench of hypocrisy which motivated him to get clean, get his life in order, and eventually buy the Hollow Haranguer. Your lovely wife leaving a life of poverty to marry one of Cheshire's finest.

You thought no-one would ever tell about your trips across the valley, your 'just repairing the lawnmower' excuses for servicing half the local women.

What shall we do then about the fine, upstanding workhouse master, the only one who will leave here to go to heaven? The guardian of morality, appointed by God to lord it over the genetically deficient fools who without the workhouse would turn the Hollow into a cess pit of syphilis, illegitimacy, fecklessness and sloth?"

Bayte was incandescent: "I have done nothing wrong. Only God can judge me, not the son of a vagrant. Your rag is read by no-one who matters. Who would believe your word against mine? Print anything about me and I'll sue."

"I'm sorry to have to bring this news to you myself Mr Bayte, the son of a vagrant may not have been your idea of a celestial messenger, but I'm told this workhouse is to close and be turned into a place of healing, a hospital. You are to be banished to the wilds of Crim, miles from civilisation, where you can no longer harm or defame people."

The thunderous, appalling visage that struck fear into the hearts of Wilf and the unfortunates changed to a sulk deeper than a canyon as quick as you could say 'zip.' Bayte collapsed like a burst balloon.

"So you know before the rest do you? I've been meaning to move to Crim for years. I've had it with this pond life. My resignation was posted last week" gasped Bayte like a fish thrashing about on dry land. But then he turned, clutching at the arrogance which had served him

so well: "The story of Repra and me moving out in a quality newspaper will eclipse any piece of trash you can come up with. We're safe."

"No doubt you are Mr Bayte, no doubt. Move to Crim, and it may be years before they find you out. Indeed you may even find 'friends' there, you are not without oily charm.

History is full of con artists and liars who seemingly cut a swathe through life at no cost to themselves. But you and I know different don't we? I wonder how much time you will spend on your own there, with only your thoughts for company?

Will thoughts of the past be pleasant? If you can't bear them, you can always imagine the future when you are once again aroused. Will you be good company for yourself? How's your health now? You seem to collect things that remind you of the past.

Before you descend into the abyss, why not follow Repra's example? Drink and prescription drugs numb the pain. Does heaven have an annexe for those so addicted?

I wish you well at Crim. Once my father has mentally purged you from his life, no doubt he will forgive you, as resentment harms the persecuted more than the persecutor. Maybe my father ran a workhouse in the 18th century, and you were a vagrant. I hope he reincarnates to a better life than yours when he leaves the earth plane.

There is still time Mr Bayte, even for Wilf. So far, he's down to come back as a mole, and you a sacked Liverpool docker."

"B*****", cried Bayte, "I hope I'm dead meat when I die. Heaven hasn't any room for hypocrites; it was always a forlorn hope. How could I be in heaven with ex-vagrants?"

A voice boomed out from the clouds, even louder than Bayte's:

"We are all ex-vagrants my son, but only a few of us want to return to begging."

The Dolce Vita

Billy could get through until lunchtime without his Ritalin. If he missed his dose, all hell would break loose in the school trough.

Being surgically [it put down a marker for his stomach staple operation] obese, to move Billy needed firing up in the morning with a heady cocktail of additives, E-numbers, sugar, caffeine and horse pills.

That lot got him off his chair, down the hall and into the 4 x 4. The temporary excess of energy generated by his daily chemicals was uneasily managed by chewing gum, mobile phone, game boy and sitting down in one place.

Teachers were specially trained to manage Billy ['the Burger'] Arris. A badly timed sugar spike from the drinks machine here, or a delay in downing Ritalin there, or not properly shoe-horning him into the toilet cubicle, or making any kind of reference to 'fat' could result in wrecking half the school. Burger was victim of the 21st century.

Another 'star' of the *Bet You Can't Go A day Without Sugar* Academy was Jody 'Double 0' Jollocks. Double 0 was both her dress size and IQ. If Posh [Victoria Beckham] moved, Jody would know about it. Her parents agreed an early years daily dose of eight hours of television, treating her like a miniature adult and living massively debt burdened were the best ways to create an embryonic celebrity. Or at least that's what they told 'Utter B*****s' magazine. Extreme over-protection had also bequeathed her with ignorance, and an 'attitude.'



She had taken a shine to the 'charity' work done by celebrities. In time she would claim *her* birthright to fame. Classmates were ripe for rescue from the hell of non-designer clothes, knowledge, silence, talent and alcohol-free drinks.

The daily drama at BYCGADWS was completed by Mucker the Wucker. Wucker was a world-class swearer and loved mindless violence.

Different from the Who's deaf, dumb and blind pinball wizard Mucker was in partial possession of his faculties.

He played out his computer created fantasies. Mobile phone mugging, bag-snatching, police-baiting, graffiti and tree snapping were his specialisms. He was on a mission to join his brother and assorted role models serving time for heavier duty stuff in the local prison. His favourite term of endearment was 'Wuck Off!'

Wucker's parents too were in line for ASOBE's [Anti-Social Order of the British Empire]. The authorities and the media convinced just about everyone the country was in the grip of youth crime and disorder, and statistics were used to back it up.

Burger, Jollocks and Wucker formed an unholy triangle of mayhem at the Sugar Academy. And apart from terrorising, trivialising/dumbing down, creating jealousy and factions and eating the neighbourhood, they played out a number of games between them.

Jollocks and Wucker took it in turns baiting Burger. When Burger missed his Ritalin, he had been known to throw Wucker halfway across the classroom. That in turn prompted Jollocks to come to Wucker's aid. Jollocks would alternately take the urine out of Burger for his appearance, then the charity gene would kick in and she would give him wholly unwelcome 'advice.'

So, each had turns of departing from their usual roles of victim [Burger], persecutor [mostly Wucker], and occasional rescuer [Jollocks].

What lay behind the unconscious mindlessness of our two heroes was the belief that other people were lesser beings in need of harm or being patronised. Burger was already the victim of big Pharma, so having Wucker and Jollocks around merely altered his dose. Double 0 and Mucker had their own egos fed by their parents and magazine journalists.

And yet one day, Double 0 and Mucker became afflicted with the worst teenage malaise of all. Far worse than anorexia, acne, myopia, bad breath and nits. Yes, worse even than having yesterday's mobile

phone. If it can be conceived of, previously the pinnacle of shame, wearing clothes from Asda, Tesco or Ethel Austin, could not hold a firework to...boredom. Allowing kids to be unstimulated was a criminal offence.

Big Pharma had dedicated billions to researching boredom-alleviating drugs. Many were on the market. However it was [even today] politically sensitive to overdose kids on 'branded' drugs, when sugar, aspartame, salt and other additives were doing such a good job.

Jollocks was suffering. But her heroine, Posh had recently been to a 'retreat' and meditated for a few minutes. And so it was. Unlike Posh, Double O actually had a vision during her unstimulated agony.

In it she saw the massive support structure that was feeding 'youth crime'. The police, judiciary, courts, the legal profession, prisons, social workers, the health and emergency services, insurance and 'security' industries, politicians, pundits, big Pharma [drugs companies], crime and parenting book writers, booksellers, newspapers, magazines, computer game designers, vandal-proof paint makers, tag, Tazer, handcuff and uniform makers, the drinks industry, drugs dealers, growers and 'barons', pubs and clubs, local authorities, counsellors and therapists, anguished radio phone-in callers, teachers...

The penny dropped-if parents and kids themselves were included, it covered virtually the whole of society.

Burger appeared in her dream to explain how the scam worked. From birth, almost all infant food contained sugar, as did processed food. Kids became hooked. Advertising compelled parents to feed kids on junk which contained other dangerous chemicals, and of course, salt and fat. Kids became difficult to teach, turning off learning. Some had eating issues, others got high on violence.

She saw joint Prime Minister Camerown laughing at how the health service spent most of its budget on treatment after the dis-ease, rather than prevention and education. In comparison with junk food advertising, it was like Graham Norton fighting Mike Tyson.

Previously ultra-cool Jollocks was shocked. She awoke, and changed in an instant. Just like her heroine's pictures in the gossip rags.

No longer wanting to prove Burger and his ilk were needy victims, she shared with him the few grains of wisdom gleaned from a lifetime of television addiction. With her help, she enabled him to eventually wean himself off all his drugs. Burger was transformed, he was now hooked on learning. Later he became a teacher and adviser himself.

Wucker? As a secret admirer of Jollocks, he cleaned up his act too. Mountainous street-cred allowed him to teach potentially wayward kids that self-acceptance, peace and silence gave them highs higher than any game, drug or alcopop.

The unwitting Posh had inspired a previously brain-dead clone and her friends to let go of being persecutors, victims and rescuers, to become teachers, enablers and learners.

The neighbourhood collectively let out a long, deep breath. Sugar Academy was re-named, Principal Fat B***** sacked, and junk food banned.

The students? They were now enrolled at High on Life Academy.

Regrets, I've had a few...

Bellocks the Badger [BB] was coming up to 'retirement.' The inhabitants of the wood had voted him in three times, and he decided it was time to go. Bluster, his main rival was itching to replace him.

BB could be heard for miles around belting out his version of 'My Way':

"Regrets, I've had a few...

But then again, too few to mention

I did what I was told to do and saw it through without exemption

They planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway

And less, much less it seems, I did it my way."

Bellocks had conned just about everyone that he was his own Brock. Yes he took advice, but always he made the final decision. At least that's what the weasels wrote in their newspapers.



Bluster needed a 'big idea' to boost his bid for power. His 'advisers' told him to make the state of the wood-plants blossoming too early, near tropical varieties of shrub growing wild, the mildest winter since time began-as his main focus.

Despite the fact that Bluster was as 'green' as a crude oil spill on a Mediterranean beach, he saw this as an opportunity to shake off his dour and boring image. A number of ~~scams~~ issues were assembled for him to pronounce on-nettle 'flu, Cheshire bark disease, salt shortages and the polluted stream.

Of course, many 'green issues' were common sense, and were caused by laziness, pre-occupation with technology, corporate greed and apathy caused by no choice in the wood's political system. The wood's inhabitants could 'choose' from BB & Bluster of the Badger Alliance, Bribery, leader of Badgers Against Sensible Trees And Racoon Domination, and [very] lastly Bedlam of the Terminally Useless Tribe. It was said all they disagreed about was the number of acorns it took

to fill a hole. And of course, despite the weasel propaganda again saying the opposite, the Badgers were all from the same sett.

And so the brainwashed clones and bussed-in sheep went to work. Nearby vets from the Ministry had agreed to microchip all the animals if they volunteered for an anti-nettle flu jab. Bluster's 'Boys' would have access to Ministry info. on the microchip, and could 'help' the unsuspecting dupes avoid all kinds of deathly afflictions. It was sold as the biggest benefit for wood welfare since Agent Orange and Myxomatosis.

'Vote for us and we'll sett you free!' was Bluster's slogan. Bribery's was a compromise 'Vote for us and we'll free up your sett!' Bribery had tried to weed out old reactionaries from his party who believed the only animals worth appealing to were fellow badgers. That badgers formed only 5% of the 'electorate' had been lost on some of them. Secretly the old Brocks hated the other 95% of animals and the other badger, Blake. Bribery would sometimes despair.

Bedlam used both slogans just to confuse the other animals, his party 'workers' and himself.

Lifelong rebel Blake sat back and wrote poetry:

*To see the wood in a Grain or Seed,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity between your teeth,
And eternity in an hour.*

Blake knew what his fellow badgers were up to, and he hated how they lied and conned the wood's honest creatures. Yet rather than let it consume him, he used his influence wisely. Because he was the wood's biggest celebrity, he could get away with it. The weasels ignored him, and his wisdom could only be accessed by trips out of the wood to the neighbouring forests, where Blake's ideas reigned supreme.

Bluster, conscious of Blake and his ideas, made it compulsory to get a signed pass to travel in and out of the wood. The microchip told his boys who flouted the new rules, and he was waiting for the moment to

denounce those doing so as 'the enemy within'. He was toying with the idea of using the 'chip' to awaken the dormant anthrax strain the animals had been given years ago in return for an acorn off wood tax. Terry Wooden, the crippled old owl, had fronted the campaign.

Wooden had led everybody to believe he had given his time voluntarily for this 'good cause', but Blake knew he was getting paid by Bribery.

In fact, so confident was Bluster of his 'succession' that he decreed if no other BA badger stood against him, there would be no need for a vote.

BB's regime had used alcohol from a bumper fruit harvest and his special relationship with the Raccoons to manipulate the electorate in equal measure. The animals were either p****d or sacred to death or both. The raccoons had virtually taken over other woods, and used the spectre of freedom, peace and universal love to cow the animals into submission.

Chief raccoon rabble-rouser was Donald Duckfelt.

'Who wants freedom when you can have bliss from this year's and every year's fruit harvest? Freedom to do what? Listen to Blake and his nonsense, worry about how peace will turn your offspring into brain-dead non-entities, lying about doing nothing?'



'And worst of all, love. Love corrupts, leaves you wide open from attacks by nettle flu, Cheshire bark disease and a life without salt. Can you imagine a life without salt? Did our forefathers die in vain to bring salt to our shores? These peace and loveniks have to be taken out of the wood for their own good.'

Duckfelt was very good. Despite being in constant pain, with his face permanently distorted from the ill-fitting leg braces he wore, few could argue that freedom, peace and love would bring life in the word to an end.

Despite the Orwellesque lies, Blake knew all it would take was about 500 creatures to wake up and realise what had been going on for millennia. He knew that the Great Cat would never allow the nightmares so loved by the badgers, raccoons and Duckfelts of the world to become permanent.

However, they would all have to wake up first, work out they were in a dream, start to use their universal connection to each other and realise they were powerful beyond measure.

He was confident, but it might take some time.

“Regrets, they’ve had a few...

But then again, too few to mention

Finally awoke to what they had to do and saw it through without exemption

At last they planned each careful step along the byway

And now for all to see, they’re on Great Cat’s highway.”

Doing them down.

During the day Jocky was a 'normal' bloke. He clocked in at the local gas works along with hundreds of others. In order to root out Burnley's potential insurgents, the workforce was fingerprinted, iris scanned, inside leg measured and DNA tested. Jocky was a maintenance engineer.

But he harboured a deep secret.

The banter around the gas pipeline was typical:

'Kate Moss is fit.' 'You what? She's made up to the nines and is thick.'
'Steve McClaren should be sacked.' 'Bring back Sven, all will never be forgiven'

'You wouldn't catch me in Iraq.' 'Why have you cancelled your holiday?'

And other such gems. Jocky and his mates tried to put the world to rights and failed every day. But it kept them going, along with over-sugared tea, Mars bars, black puddings and extra thick white bread.

Every so often, the brain-dead banter would run to talking about a new film release. Another engineer Clucky, was film [especially those about 'superheroes'] obsessed.

His favourite was Spiderman, but he loved Superman, Batman, Robin Hood, Doctor Who and Captain Underpants. *

Clucky knew everything about the films, the actors, the comics, and trivial personal stuff. Going on about Tobey Maguire's nasal hair was a cue for the maintenance crew to nearly lose the will to live.

For reasons few had noticed, Jocky was even more distressed than the others when Clucky rambled on about Spiderman 6 [Wind up time].

'Are thee OK Jocky?' said Clucky, showing amazing empathy after a 20 minute rant of pure, utterly pointless, coma-inducing garbage. 'You could do with a good dose of Bat breath.'

'Aye' said Jocky, 'Just like you could do with a shot of bird flu.'

'Steady on lad', countered Clucky, 'Oo's rattled your cage?'

Jocky checked himself just in time.

'Yes, it must 'ave bin that bad pint last night. Sorry Clucky you auld b*****, let's have some more.'

Jocky had come so near to giving the game away on hundreds of occasions. Indeed the edges of 'reality' and his alter ego seemed no longer to exist. But it was in his contract that no-one, not even his terminally bored wife should discover who he really was:

MISERY MAN!

The powers-that-be knew that only so much fear could be used to brainwash the population. Backlashes and civil disobedience was brewing about identity cards, kids being finger-printed and road pricing, requiring a 'spy in the car.'



Orwell's 1984 had crept up on Western society without many realising, but things were beginning to change. Getting the population to collectively soil itself was one strategy that had worked since the Blair-Bush double act began.

Far more insidious, less likely ever to create any backlash, and far, far cheaper was the tactic of spreading pure misery, like undiluted manure on the spotty, pre-facially-peeled, botox-injected face of the UK.

Misery Man [all superheroes are men, but Jocky was androgynous. It was his penchant for 'chemically enhanced' king prawns] appeared as Deidre in Coronation Street, Dot Cotton in Eastenders, and the whole cast in Emmerdale. He came into his own when the Queen Mother died, and has been cloned for the inevitable passing of her daughter, Big Bet.

We all know Misery Man. Indeed to some of us he is our unconscious role model. He does a turn at our local pub, visits wards at the hospital, stops us with a certain look in the supermarket. 'How are you Jean, not seen you for years?' 'Well, I'm still here.'

Jocky Juttocks was in training for Misery Man as a small boy. Whenever any of his mates did well at anything, JJ would trot out his one-liners. They all had in them the message.

"Don't raise your head above the pavement, don't excel at anything. Be miserable and you won't be disappointed. It's good to be miserable. They are in charge."

When by sheer chance JJ ended up becoming a skilled engineer, he regarded it as an aberration. Like the optimist who would dismiss the odd bout of ill-fortune and carry on smiling, Jocky saw the glass not as half-full, but as completely empty. Indeed he took it to the local bottle-bank.

The permanent scowl, the furrowed brow, and the sharp intake of breath were his stock-in-trade.

Misery Man was the face that looked like a thousand bricks. He could do clever misery or stupid misery. As a clever misery, he nearly lost it when as Angus Deayton, illegal substances intervened.

All at the gas works were fooled. Except that is, Dobber the Dog. Dogs had been trained to sniff out drugs, explosives, and now even mobile phones. Dobber had no such training, but he could sniff out miserable ***** in his sleep.

Dobber was genetically incapable of being miserable for long. He decided he had enough. On his web site was a picture of Jocky, a large gasometer the background, and underneath the punch line:

[Jocky] Juttocks is Misery Man, and he works here!

The trouble is, Dobber's site was for dogs only, and no human ever discovered JJ's secret.

But, after Dobber's expose, Jocky stopped using the expression 'It's gone to the dogs' without knowing why. He 'retired' a few years later when appointed to news reader at Gloom and Doom channel.

Clucky had become sick of superheroes, and started to look for one inside. He had to leave the gas works. Brain-dead banter was all that been keeping the workforce going.

And Jocky's wife?

She 'ran off' with an incurable optimist, long escaped from the local asylum. They adopted Dobber after he had been found wandering lost in Earlestown.* *

And what of the powers-that-be? They had used Uncle Cannabis, Al Borehole, Flew Bird, John Getsoff, Donald Duckfelt and the whole town of OB City.

Maybe superheroes have had their day...

JS, April 2007

* no not the caricature of John Major, ex-British Prime Minister, but a cartoon character by Dav Pilkey.

* * Earlestown is a small Lancashire town between Liverpool and Manchester, the place of birth and former residence of a dear friend of mine. It has to be experienced.

St. Peter

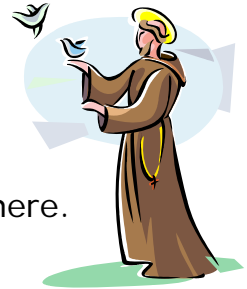
*You load sixteen tons an' what do you get?
Another day older and deeper in debt.
St Peter don't you call me cause I can't go:
I owe my soul to the company store. **

'Uncle' Peter was born into an ordinary family, lived in an ordinary street, and ended up after leaving school doing an ordinary job.

It was his funeral last week. Died prematurely of a rare disease. Standing room only in church. Almost all of the mourners were 'ordinary'.

Tributes were paid to him at the service, and endless anecdotes were heard at the reception afterwards.

One of the mourners had really wanted to say his piece at the service, but hadn't known Peter that long [only 20+ years] and didn't think what he would have said would have been appreciated by the man himself, had he been there. So, it was left to Igor, his daughter's dog to do it for him.



"I gather they are wanting to give us dogs valium and prozac. Get us expensively hooked on something that will distort our view of things, make us stupid like you, burn us out quicker, so get through more of us, and add to the profits of the dog food industry. It will keep vets and the drugs companies sweet too.

My mistress's dad has just moved on and the church is packed. Whenever he came to see us he always made a fuss of me, and everyone who knew him talked about his warmth and willingness to help.

We dogs are fed up with seeing 'celebrities' as if they are better than us. We know many of us are cute, especially when young, and some of us look wonderful after a bath. You don't eat and kick us like the

Chinese and Vietnamese, but you buy everything they make, because it's cheap, despite it being flown half-way around the world.

When I'm taken out for walks, because I'm reasonably big, and look at first glance a bit rough; so most people don't bump into me or my human family. But I've watched you lot in supermarkets and at airports, and you are like zombies. Most of you have no idea- and some of you couldn't care less either-that other people are walking around the same place as you.

Young people seem to be treated like an invading army. Many of you avoid them, don't like them, or believe they are all one breath away from knifing or kicking you.

I've noticed Peter liked 'traditional' food. Meat pies, sausages, black puddings and the like. Did they help his health, probably not, but who knows. I know some stuff you give us is too toxic for land fill, but we don't watch your television, and eat it regardless. So we don't beat ourselves up over it. Anyway, what won't a few drugs cure?

Peter loved young people, he loved his two grandchildren. He knew he was young himself once. And his family are a credit to him. His spirit lives on in them.

We pre-valium dogs are very sensitive to what's going on. We can sense the moods of those around us. Peter was just the same. Not for him to say 'sod you.' I wonder if his illness got him down psychologically, because it cut him off from his caring, sensitive self?

In a sane world, Peter would have been a celebrity. But he would never have come to terms with fame for being famous. Peter never knew [he did] that he, and thousands like him kept the planet sane, because of his 'ordinariness.' Most dogs are mongrels, a term almost of abuse. Aren't most of you mongrels, and those of you who aren't- doesn't it make you a little mad?

I've overheard that Peter was an apprentice painter and decorator. After he became a tradesman, he did his job to the best of his ability, which was considerable. What kind of world would it be if everywhere was scruffy, tatty, rusty, looked and left awful and started falling to

bits? Don't you lot reflect what's around you. If you live in squalor, you become squalid. If you live in 'nice' homes, you are more likely to be 'nice' yourself.

We dogs don't go to church, because we all go to heaven anyway. But I know that even for you who don't go to church, having them around makes you feel a little more secure doesn't it? And who would want a dilapidated church in their neighbourhood?

Peter made sure his church was welcoming, warm and safe.

He worked in some horrible jobs, and I know it got him down. Millions of you do jobs you wouldn't put us dogs in. But what would happen if millions didn't do horrible jobs? Maybe the answer is to work together to make them OK jobs. I know some of your kids think burgers come from a burger patch, ** and how many of you bother to reflect on what kind of things millions of 'ordinary' people do to bring them to the shelves of your shops?

When I'm out for a walk, my lead is leather because it's strong and lasts. Would I feel better if it was pink? Or jewel encrusted? I'm not bothered if I come across another dog unless, like its owner, it has something it wants to prove. If I had a penis enlargement patch, it would be obvious. I can't see the point anyway. Perhaps I need some buttox jabs to cure my sagging jaw line. If we dogs epitomise loyalty, caring, compassion, honesty, humour, dedication and decency then Peter should be made an honorary dog!"

Joking apart, I'd like to close with a final few words about St. Peter. He would cringe if he knew I had called him that. But a world without him and his kind would be back to the dark ages within weeks.

No-one will ever know what really ended his life in his 70's when another 10 years would have made everyone feel so much better. His wife is a tower of strength, and in many ways a female version of Peter, or was he a male version of her?

The fires are kept burning up by the millions of Peters and his wife of all ages, creeds and races. The fireworks of fame burn brightly then are quickly forgotten."

Igor was led out of the house, and travelled back with his family to sunny Shropshire. He had said his piece.

Whilst all this had been going on, Peter was watching his coffin move behind the curtains. He hadn't cringed when called a saint, because he knew what was meant by the remark, and in spirit false modesty and out-dated social norms cut no ice.

At least two people saw him. His niece's husband [someone who had recently let go of cynicism, and was beginning to see many such things] and my wife, Anne.

I've never seen 'the departed' except in dreams.

Is the world of Beckham, Blair and Bono a nightmare, and St. Peter real? To those who packed the church that day, there was no argument.

Jack, April 2007.

* From the song, 'Sixteen tons' written by Jimmy Dean.

** A certain well-known burger company actually produced ads depicting burgers found under plants this when they got started. Strange how this has been forgotten.

Powerless Beyond Measure

Bell turned in for work as usual. Grim and grey, waiting for the inevitable.

By mid-morning, enough was enough for Blue. Kids bouncing off the walls, for whom the only meaningful activity was texting your mate across the room to see if s/he was still functioning.



Globbis climbed the ladder into her car and could look down on lorry drivers who had thought themselves king of the road. She fought with herself as she contemplated diving into the drinks bar under the dashboard.

PC Mollusc was doing the rounds, immune to graffiti on every wall; litter, gum, the odd used blurker and fag ends clogged up the grids. Shutters adorned the shops which dispensed the life-giving cocktail of poison and the American dream.

Harvey Cobbler was delivering the 'news.' Scientists had discovered we were all doomed, and should stay in our homes to expire. Apparently we ran the risk of catching human being virus by venturing out. And if the plague didn't get us, the genes of someone in our ancestral line who died at 18 of consumption would.

Given the exponential rise in deaths, the Government had rushed through a bill outlawing new undertaking businesses, and raising corporation tax on established ones to 97%.

In parts of the country not yet like post-nuclear bomb sites parents worried about their kid's exam performance had been buying skip loads of Ritalin on-line. Having their [dead] child diagnosed as dyslexic would guarantee more resources being spent on keeping them [preserved] awake at school.

The Euro-Sink Gong contest had been won by Tony Blair. He had voted himself 'Most-Promising Liar of 2007.' Terry Wogan had injected more

than his normal amount of jocular xenophobic bile into his commentary, and had been suicide bombed by an animal rights activist. You can guess which part of him was left.

Billy Burger MPs just returning from the Champions League Final were lobbying anyone not nailed down to stop unfair criticism of their corporate patrons. Coating 'meat' with plastic was good for the environment and had no known effects on deadly radiation from phone masts.

Bob Bonofee of H-Been was exhorting what was left of the masses to restrict themselves to one sheet of toilet paper per visit, and was holding himself up as a role model for the practice. "Save water too man, share the pan." Crowds rushed to shake his hand as he paddled up S*** Creek.

Bees had declared non-GMO crops as uncool. Or at least Queen Moss of the brain-dead hive was reported as saying. "You can't get an unnatural high from all that organic crap, and we bees need to be high man, or we'll drop down on your 'eads and sting you." The whole raft of recent celebrity-turned bee-keepers were crest-fallen. Moss was invited to promote her message via an interpreter on the Breakfast couch.

No-one knew if the world was ending, had ended or was the backdrop for a photo-shoot of rock 'n' roll chic.

The previously incessant brain chatter amongst 7745* of the world's population had ceased. Deposed ancient tribes and peoples were connecting to the 'Liberation Song.'

Up until now, plants had been doing their best to educate sections of the population, but had succeeded only in turning the odd aristocratic anachronism into a dubious champion.

All three signs had been there for years. By most of the world being kept in a state of high alert, like athletes permanently fixed to the starting blocks, inner voices were drowned out by 500 watts of pure synthetic dross.

Jeff had parted from his hair and his inhibitions. Pavel knew the time was right. Sunita had dreamed about this for years.

All that was left to overcome was the reverse of the phenomenon encountered by indigenous people in the West Indies when they were invaded by the likes of Columbus et al.

When the invading ships landed, only their shamen could see them, as everyone else had nothing in their memory which allowed them to 'see' sailing ships. The ships were there, anchored off shore, but no image formed on the natives retina.

By contrast, we have been 'seeing' things which are illusory. 'Fashion', compulsive shopping, 'green' fuel guzzlers, 'nice' murderers, ethical leaders [sorry Nelson, you're excluded], 'healthy' processed foods, 'safe' binge-driving, 'magic-bullet' drugs, articulate 'style icons', and low-calorie lard.

However by creating events and accounts of events which defied the imagination, the fear/trivia/control propaganda mixture had shot its bolt.

Harvey Cobbler had nothing more to say. 20 years of doom and gloom prevented him from reading good news. He faded into happy obscurity.

PC Mollusc had an over-subscribed gang of 'lobsters' cleaning up the streets.

Globbis leased her behemoth to the lifeboat service.

Blue couldn't wait to get to school. Kids glowed like beacons of wisdom and curiosity.

Belle had acquired an extra 'e'. Grim and grey shifted instantly to joyous and colourful. The pain in her chest had dissolved and evaporated. Every single restrictive, negative programmed limiting belief had been washed away. The other 7744 had similar experiences.

Controlling, life-sapping, coercive institutions had collapsed like a pack of cards.

Queen Moss became a caterpillar...

Jack, June 07

* this figure is the square root of 0.1% per cent of the global population [6 billion]. This is [I'm told] all we need to transform global consciousness. And why not?