

The Hedgerow



Issue 27, Winter 2010 ...a tangle of words from local writers...

The Hedgerow, a free publication from writers in the Epping Forest area, is distributed in libraries and bookshops from east London to Epping. Thank you to everyone who sent in submissions or helped with this edition. If you would like to write for *The Hedgerow* we would be pleased to hear from you.

Down Memory Lane: a discussion about childhood reading

About twenty people shared their experiences of childhood reading at South Woodford Library as part of the Woodford Festival. Discussion included how we'd learned to read, role models who had encouraged us and favourite stories that had made an impact on our lives. We heard reminiscences from childhoods spent in Guyana, South Africa and Australia and how general knowledge was gleaned from reading at an early age. Familiar classics such as *The Water Babies*, *The Secret Garden* and *Little Women* evoked nostalgia and strip-cartoon annuals such as *Rupert Bear* were fondly remembered. Several people brought books they had treasured, including one surviving the Blitz, and others were encouraged to track down those they had lost on E-Bay!

It appeared that most of us who enjoyed reading as children were avid readers and books were still an important part of our lives. One member recalled that 'it didn't seem like Christmas' the year her presents didn't include a book as usual. War time experiences were recalled and the lack of reading material available made books even more precious. All too soon, time was running out so we agreed to continue to discuss 'the teenage years' another time. Thank you to all those who contributed to make it such an interesting afternoon, to Nick Dobson from Redbridge Libraries for providing the use of the Hollis Room and Jonathan from South Woodford Library for his support and for arranging refreshments. **Penny Freeston**

Books Enjoyed When Young

Books read by the young are very much influenced by the choices of adults. The Beacon Readers were chosen by our headmaster with care warnings for books were scarce. How I delighted in the adventures of, *The Gingerbread Boy*, *Chicken Licken* and *The Little Red Hen*. I was always the first to offer to read to others because it gave me the chance to read them again.

"It's a waste buying books for Marilyn because she reads them so quickly," complained my mother. She did take me to the Church Bazaar which yielded such treasures as, *Little Women* and *An Old Fashioned Girl* and only sixpence each. At that time I identified so much with the characters especially Jo, I could quote whole passages off by heart. Aunts would ask, "What would Marilyn like for Christmas?" "Another book by Louisa May Alcott please," I replied without any hesitation.

Being a tomboy^ my beloved Auntie Beattie, who was anything but, regularly gave me a *Just William* book. I was the eldest of four always expected to set a good example so I revelled in William's escapades roaming the countryside with his friends and accompanied by his dog.

This enjoyment was repeated when my niece and nephew loved listening to the readings by Martin Jarvis,

On Tuesdays we had a comic the *Dandy* one week followed by the *Beano*. My sister and I were never late from school on a Tuesday, nor did we quarrel, our worst punishment being to miss out on the adventures of *Desperate Dan*, *Lord Snooty* and his Pals and *Jimmy* who travelled back to the past.

We did not have a Library in our village which made the books in our Primary and Grammar Schools all the more appreciated for education and enjoyment. Long may this be available to all. **Marilyn Hawes**

Early Books

Early Books I wish I could remember more about the first book, particularly its title. What I do remember are the illustrations - delicate, colourful watercolours. They showed a boy and girl in the care of a woman dressed in long dark clothes and a black hat, brandishing an umbrella. It must have been one of the first books read to me so I recall more about the pictures than the story. In one the woman and the two children are walking along a street with tall houses fronted by forbidding railings. They pass a man selling red and blue balloons. In the next picture the two excited children are being lifted high up into the air by the balloons they are holding, escaping the woman who is angrily waving her umbrella at them. My second book was a 'proper' read whose words became very familiar. It was "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*" a Sunday School prize carried home with great pride - a red hardback of the right size for small hands. It was the first book that was really mine. There were not too many books about then in the 1940s with war-time restrictions on the use of paper so this was a luxury. I can't recall any pictures, which seems strange today with the wonderful variety of pictures books for children. I had to have it read to me, but I think it must have been the first book which really switched me on to learning to read for myself. Later there was "*The Water Babies*" by Charles Kingsley which did have wonderful pictures, and then I escaped, as did many others, up "*The Far Away Tree*" with Enid Blyton.

Monica Mukherji

Were people more honest 50/60 years ago?.

I remember as a young lad starting out to take a book back to Manor Park Library, which I had borrowed, but going first to Woodgrange Park Station and taking a steam-hauled train to Barking, to see the miniature steam train running in Barking Park. You can guess what happened? Somewhere along the line (excuse the pun!) I left the book, and didn't realise until leaving Woodgrange Park Station on return. I kept quiet about it to my parents, as they would have to pay for the book, until finally, I plucked up the courage to go along to the library to face the music. Imagine my relief when the librarian told me that some kind soul had handed the book in. Which goes back to the question at the start. **Alan Wheeler**

sifting

i lie in bed, alone,
sifting the ashes
of this day.

remains of passions once
embraced in absolute
certainty.

the unspoken words that
could have made a
difference.

damon bazzeghin

enigma

upon a time when we are entrenched in our defenses
there comes with the wind a certain melody of
release that is both puzzling and magical

one cannot solve the puzzle alone
it becomes magical as two
find its true purpose

damon bazzeghin

Memories of Childhood Reading

I don't remember when I could first read, but we always had some books and my mother read to us when we were in bed. We preferred her to read to us as my father would make up the stories and we would protest that they were not the way they should be as we just about knew them by heart. In the 1950s in Australia there were not as many children's books as there are today. I always looked forward to a book in my Christmas stocking which was a pillow slip attached to the end of the iron bedstead with huge safety pins. One year the expected book did not appear and I remember being very disappointed and feeling that it couldn't be Christmas without my anticipated present.

We read Milly Molly Mandy in its yellow and black dust cover and my mother got all the jokes and innuendoes that were there for adults, and I didn't! I liked Enid Blyton as she was prolific and there wasn't a lot else. The Magic Faraway Tree with Mr Pink Whistle was a favourite. Most of the reading matter was English and my mother ordered children's magazines such as Sunny Stories from a Newsagents in Fremantle and they came along very out of date as they came in on the long boat journey. If the boats were delayed, so were our magazines, which I think were published monthly. I was puzzled by things like robins and mud, snow and English plants and trees, which were not in my experience.

There were Australian books like May Gibbs' The Gumnut Babies. My neighbours had these books, but I didn't and I was captivated by the wonderfully detailed pictures of the personified creatures in the charming illustrations.

We also had a book with Arthur Rackham illustrations which I found rather dark and scary.

Later in life my favourite children's book is the Very Hungry Caterpillar which I got to know with my own two small children. This book has everything, it is short, colourful, true, interactive by putting your little fingers into all the holes, and it has a happy ending. What more could you ask of a book? **Rhonda Anderson**

The Pleasure of Reading

Books support us in solitude...and lay our disappointments to sleep. Stephanie Felicite-Grenlis

A few years ago I attended an event at the British Library to celebrate Michael Morpurgo's tenure as Children's Laureate. He invited several writer friends to talk about and read extracts from which books had influenced them as children and what they had enjoyed. Michael Morpurgo told one of Kipling's *Just So Stories*, Jacqueline Wilson read from E.S. Nesbit's *Five Children and It* and A.S. Byatt read Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*.

My late aunt, an avid reader, would make me smile when recalling how her mother, not interested in books, would say: 'That's big book, couldn't you find a smaller one?' Jeanette Winterson remarks: 'for some, perhaps for many, books are spare time. For me, the rest of life is spare time. I wake and sleep language; it has always been so'. Carol Ann Duffy says that one of the bonuses of friendship is the way in which friends share books and writers from their own past.

An anthology, *The Pleasure of Reading* recalls A.S. Byatt saying that the rhythms of poems she enjoyed reading as a child 'haunt everything I write, especially the Tennyson'. Anyone familiar with her novel *Possession* or *Angels and Insects* cannot doubt those influences there.

As a life-long teacher I have always believed in the adage that 'nothing comes from nothing'. If you want children to produce creative writing you have to inspire them with imaginative texts.

In preparation for a discussion on childhood reading I came across the first book I learned to read: a story called *The Magic Horse* with silhouette pictures. Illustrations have influenced me lots – the waistcoat in the Tailor of Gloucester gave me a life-long love of textiles and embroidery and some purple velvet shoes from a fairy tale illustration gave me permission never to resist a beautiful pair of shoes! The fairy godmother in my childhood picture book of Cinderella was a role-model from early on without me realising it at the time. Last year my daughter found some Princess Picture Library stories on E-Bay for me. I read these avidly when I was about eight and it's wonderful to see them again; they're all about a ballet dancer who has adventures abroad – I knew then that one day I would visit lots of the places I'd read about. One children's story I wished I'd read as a child was Lucy Boston's *The Children of Green Knowe* but I came to it as an adult and like many other children's stories it's stayed with me ever since. 'There is no frigate like a book to take us lands away', wrote Emily Dickinson, and so it did.

The Pleasure of Reading, edited by Antonia Fraser, contains essays written by forty leading writers revealing their own literary loves. Published by Bloomsbury, 1992. ISBN 0747508135. **Penny Freeston**

Learning to read

Armchaired together, growing cushioned against grown,
eyes learn to feel lines of shape brought close.
Calyx of ear, soft scroll of cropped hair,
straight innocent nape.

We are learning to read.

My son's eye moves over the slow page.
Finger waits below word, lips mouthe shape,
careful voice tries sounds.
Head turns, eyes touch, face shines.

We are learning to read.

Jumbled lines fall into place, fixed.
Sense leads quietly on, one step ahead.
Words are tender and cruel, like children.

We have learned to read.

Hazel Dongworth

Lickit Spoon

Alone I bake my favourite cake
Pinny tied on to keep me clean
Radio switched on to keep me sane
Into the bowl the ingredients go
Brown flour. Stork, mixed spice, sultanas, currants,
cherries.
Sprinkle sugar and spice to make it nice
Line the cake tin, gas mark four
Set the pinger for the time
Wooden spoon to stir the mix
Slurp of brandy to give it kicks
Into the oven it goes to cook
Time to relax and read a book...

But something is missing from the whole -
No demanding small child to lick the bowl
"Lickit spoon Mummy!"

Jean Medcalf

Peaksid

"This place is full of ghosts", said my companion, nodding in the direction of the bay. The coast path that curved ahead of us disappeared into a haze of warm mist. We had been walking for most of the morning. Peering now at the map, I could see that the path ran on for several miles along the cliff edge, past the old works and fields of ripening corn, down to the fossil beach and over the broad, limestone pavements to the famous smugglers' cove and tourist haunt. "I can well believe it!" I replied. The weather seemed to be conspiring against our ramble going any further. The clouds were thickening rapidly and soon we were shrouded in a dense fog. It felt unsafe to press on. "Let's go back", suggested my friend. We were staying in Chapel Cottage, built as a barn for livestock with honey coloured wall of local sandstone and low, deep set windows. Designed to withstand the elements, our cottage retained the welcome feel of a sturdy shelter. As its name hinted, the building had served as a Methodist chapel for over one hundred years.

Tapping at the dividing walls inside, I could imagine how the place might have looked; a long plain room for worship, with a rudimentary kitchen to one side. Wooden stairs running up into the hayloft that would have been used to store the apparel of this working congregation: men that quarried these coastal hills for more than two hundred years, and their families. When we arrived I had noticed a solitary marker stone, carved to represent a man wielding a heavy pick axe. Without inscription, this piece of public art served as a memorial to their centuries of labour. It stood sentinel at the top of the lane, by the side of the now dismantled railway.

Come late evening, the cottage was feeling snug and we were well rested. The mists, as my companion had faithfully promised, had "burnt off". The evening sun lit up Peaksid - showing it to be a remote and deserted place. The sea had retreated, leaving the beach exposed. I wanted to clamber down the rocks and look up at the steep cliff side, where once cannons stood to repel pirates off the bay and a wooden jetty had run to dock the cargo that had made the former occupant of Peak House a wealthy man. Peak House stood high on the headland - a slate grey Georgian mansion that was built to order by Mr Childs, owner of the works. Only the battlements of the estate were visible from the windows of our cottage. Even as we turned to look up the cliff side on our way down to the bay the house remained invisible, a brooding presence beyond our sights.

We set off to examine the famous Peak Fault, just as the day turned dusky. Here the sedimentary layers had buckled and folded millions of years before to create the geological feature that had made Mr Childs' enterprise possible. By aligning the rocky cliffs that supported the battlements of Peak House, with the softer sedimentary rock that formed this Jurassic cliff, good fortune had enabled him to set his men to mine the mineral-rich shale of the quarry. The official footpath petered out well before we reached the beach and our descent was unexpectedly steep. Footholds between stepped piles of rock and handholds of tufted sea grass sprouting from sandy clefts, allowed safe passage to the slimy bank of wet rocks draped in weed that lay between us and the North Sea. We took a moment to drink in the vast quiet of this secret place. Then suddenly light-headed with exertion and hunger, we abandoned plans to stroll along the limestone causeway that projected out into the sea. My companion turned to go. I took one last look across the escarpment. Just then unexpectedly and unmistakably, I heard a faint cry. "Did you hear that?" My friend turned back and we both heard it, a high echoing moan on the evening air. "What do you think it is?" My friend was visibly alarmed. A lonely strangled note rang out again, this time a sustained pleading yelp. "Sounds like some one's calling for help! Do you think they're hurt? Maybe a swimmer's got stuck down there?" "Don't be ridiculous. No one swims off the under cliff at this time of day!" A pale shape dived from a rock beneath into the sea and then we saw them, thirty or more: a colony of seals basking on the beach below. **Emma Liebeskind**

I remember

I remember the way you smiled
Grey eyes crinkling at the corners;
Watching as you slept at night
Golden lashes touching golden cheeks.

I remember the picnics last summer
Lazy days along the river;
How recklessly we spent them
Thinking they would last forever.

I remember our last day together
So ordinary, just like any other;
No warning signs, no bolt of lightning
A lingering kiss and you were gone.

Now I look down into the water
Swirling darkly far below;
I drop red poppies in one by one
Like drops of blood they flow.

Valerie Haddad

Baggage

Will I see a flickering candle to lead me to the light?
If only I knew which way is home....
I chase to scare a ghost-train but there is no sign of Life
I missed this gospel train to take me home.

There is a road to freedom but I stand in slavery
If only I knew which way to go
I hold a heavy handbag weighed down
Still wondering if I've been left on tow....

nostalgia of the past; distractions of the now
If only I could lay my luggage down
I feel an empty echo in the vast vacuity
The gospel train pulled out the night before.

So a rolling stone gathers more moss downhill
If ONLY I knew which way was home
The clutter closes in and the shutter shouts "Hello!"
Where is this gospel train - I'm all alone!

Freedom's finger beckons yet I stand in slavery
If only I could shake these shackles off;
Deserted by the crowds so the spaces form a queue
The train arrived on time but I was late...

Bags are sagging; and a millstone round my neck
If only I knew which way is home
I weep and wail in misery; laughing baggage leers
Dragged down I drown my sorrows in the rain.....

Judy Studd

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The Hedgerow has grown from a Writers' Circle,
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Editor: Penny Freeston*

Bearman's Revisited

An old advertisement at Leytonstone tube station caught my eye:

Recommendations – we like them, of course we do, but more important, we realise that recommendation over the past fifty years has played a large part in building our store up to the reputable shopping centre it is today. We hope our many customers regard us more as friends – so if we please you, tell others or tell us. At any rate tell someone:

Bearman's, the Store with the Personal Touch.

Close your eyes and come back in time forty years to one of the best suburban department stores in living memory: Bearmans of Leytonstone!

When my mother learned to drive in 1960 she often borrowed the car on Saturdays to give us an afternoon treat: tea at Bearmans served by ladies wearing black dresses and white aprons. This was the emporium where her three daughters first discovered retail therapy! Open those huge glass-plated doors on to the High Road, with handles shaped like swords, and enter a carpeted world to rival the sophistication of the West End. The ground floor comprised of ladies and gents' wear: elegant slacks, cardigans and plush slippers – 'James Bond comes to stay in Woodford for the weekend' type gear - reminiscent of those Martini ads at the cinema! Further along near the escalator was 'Children's Wear' – the loveliest party dresses were bought from Bearmans, often imported from the States. My favourite one was pale pink chiffon with embroidered flowers on the bodice – imagine wearing that now to pass the parcel. There was a vast scented area selling perfumes and cosmetics where assistants demonstrated the latest lipsticks by Revlon, Coty and Max Factor to ladies perching on white leather stools. There were shoes too, though nothing to match the branch of Russell and Bromley close by with their Italian imports and matching handbags. There were two miniscule in-house boutiques, Victoria and Albert, that played music to lure the younger generation away from Carnaby Street and the King's Road but I don't remember them being mobbed like Biba in Kensington. Nearby stood a Victorian double-fronted house converted into a whole-food restaurant: The Nutcracker that was very popular. A lot of our time was spent thumbing through Bearmans' huge dress pattern books. How my mother found time to make our clothes I'll never know. Around 1970 I made a patchwork quilt and a lot of the scraps of fabric had originally been purchased there. One of my favourites was a plum-coloured velvet fabric covered in flowers from a Mary Quant styled dress my sister wore in the 60s. Crucial to our purchases were matching zip fasteners and threads, all packed neatly into distinctive pale blue paper bags with Cyril Bearman's flowing signature across the front. 'Books and stationery' were busy departments too. I recall buying my Penguin collection of *The Forsyte Saga* there with cover photographs taken from stills of the 1968 black and white BBC series. An afternoon at Bearmans was followed by a night in watching the box: Dixon of Dock Green, Juke Box Jury, Adam Adamant and Simon Dee, not forgetting Thank Your Lucky Stars on ITV.

Upstairs were expensive teddy bears and dolls behind glass cases and the record department where we bought our first Beatles LP. We used to slip into little booths to hear the latest single, before committing ourselves to purchase.

And then there was 'the rocket': the annual trip through outer space to visit Father Christmas. It can only have taken a few minutes but seemed to last for hours!

Inevitably, the world has changed and out-of-town shopping malls and buying goods on-line have superseded the local department store. Local streets were lined with all types of shops, large and small, showrooms even, but department stores were thin on the ground. Puddicombe's at the Broadway or Pynes Stores at Epping were the only ones locally to rival Bearmans, I recall. In the West End the stores were bigger and better still. Individual names such as Bourne and Hollingsworth, Swan and Edgar, Marshall and Snellgrove and Dickins and Jones are all long gone although Selfridges and Harrods both survive to weather another recession. In the provinces family-owned stores like Ricemans and Lefevres in Canterbury have been taken over similarly.

And then suddenly, in the 70s, Bearmans was gone, bought-out by the Co-op before its inevitable demise.

So what have I missed out? The impressive food hall, reminiscent of Chasney's grocers at Chingford, electrical goods upstairs, hardware in the basement, the side door that led down to the Rialto Cinema, the elaborate Tannoy system by which we asked to meet our mother by the side door, having lost contact with her? My husband remembers being in the Cubs and trooping round the store carrying elderly folks' shopping for them. For those readers who think I'm making it all up, enjoy this half-page advertisement taken from *The Essex Countryside* in 1975:

We used to go to Knightsbridge to shop. Then we discovered Bearmans Department Store. We get all our furniture there... the new suite, carpets, curtains, light fittings, everything. When we had the kitchen redecorated we bought the fridge and cooker there. Of course, I had a new food mixer and iron at the same time. We get all our clothes at Bearmans too. All the latest styles and they always have something I like. But then we get almost everything at Bearmans. I even have my hair styled there, and we often eat in their restaurant. What surprises me is they don't charge Knightsbridge prices. And our Budget Account makes it so convenient. We don't have travel or parking problems either. They have their own free car park, right next door. We still go to Knightsbridge occasionally – for baby alligators and fresh caviar from the Ukraine. Shopping's a pleasure at Bearman's of Leytonstone.

No credit crunch in those days, then? Happy Days.

Penny Freeston

James Hilton of Walthamstow, author by **Adrienne Reynolds**. Available from The Editor, £2.

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