

Issue 8
Winter 2009

Scribble

THE

JOURNEYS

ISSUE



FREE CREATIVE WRITING MAGAZINE PUBLISHED BY TELL US ANOTHER ONE



HELLO

Well here we are, after three years, at the end of phase one of the Tell Us Another One project. 'Journeys' is such an appropriate theme for this edition of Scribble because the project has simply travelled the most amazing route – through this magazine and all the community literature projects and events that we've run – meeting and inviting on board lots of brilliant characters from across Rochdale Borough's communities and beyond. We thank you very much for your good company on this very special trip! We are currently seeking funding to develop Tell Us Another One – and Scribble – in the very near future. So let's not see this as a goodbye, merely one of those essential service station breaks!

This issue is as packed as ever with great offerings from professional writers (**Zahid Hussain** and **Qaisra Shahraz**) and the very best work by new and up-and-coming talent. Thanks again to Penguin Books for another tantalising extract, this time from hot new scribe, Marion McGilvary.

We hope that you enjoy...and see you for the next leg of the journey!

Kim Haygarth
Editor



SCRIBBLE
SPOTLIGHT
ON...

ZAHID HUSSAIN: GOING THE EXTRA MILE



Virgin Territory

Metal leashed to ground and track
Zorros through the GM green.

Stowaways in manky hoods
Elbow elbows across the floor
With snarls and stares and ghetto airs.

Doppler is as Doppler does.

Sound is stagnant in the breast:
A nun sits silent to confess.

London blooms on hilly lips.

On time plugged out in Carriage C
An MP forgets encrypted disks.

A nose against a window pressed
Condenses reveries.

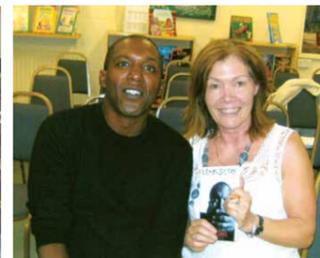
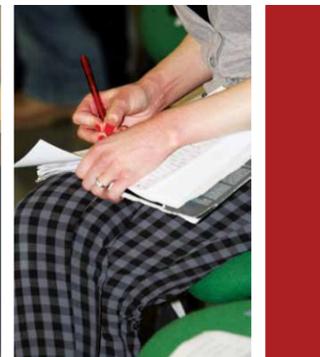
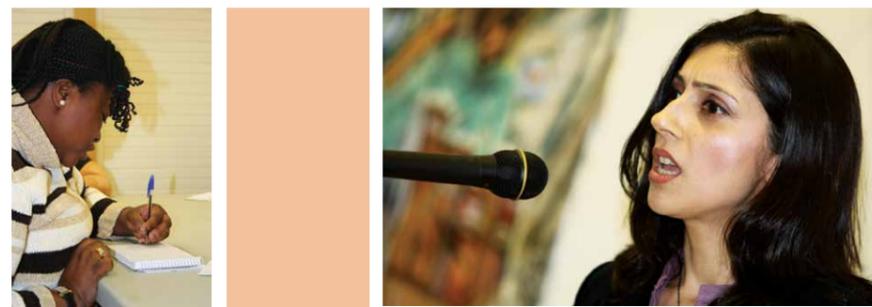
© Zahid Hussain

It was comics and keeping his first diary on a journey to Pakistan that set Blackburn-born **Zahid Hussain** on the road to loving stories and becoming a writer. Attempting to write his first novel at the age of 14, Zahid went on to write the lauded **Curry Mile**, set around Manchester's renowned Wilmslow Road area: "All stories require good characters, a place where the story takes place and a plot. All these ingredients are easily found on the Curry Mile. Sometimes a story starts with a scene in your head. Sometimes a conversation you overhear. **The Curry Mile** began with a scene and the story continued from that." But what about a Blackburn-set epic at some point? "Blackburn has some interesting quirks and features that would work well in fiction. In fact, more needs to be written set in our smaller towns and cities. Not all stories need to be based in London or New York or Paris."

Zahid is an extremely industrious individual. When he's not writing novels, he's working on screenplays, short stories, poetry and maintaining the **Writetopia** blog geared towards "those who are beginning the writer's journey". Not really reassuring us that he ever takes any time off he says: "Writers have the easiest - and hardest - job in the world. All they have to do is day-dream. Then begins the hard bit: transposing it to the page." On top of all of this he also holds down a professional job in the voluntary sector, helping communities to empower themselves. How does he do it?!

As the theme of this Scribble is Journeys, we ask Zahid what his favourite book would be for a long journey. His philosophical answer is: "That's the best bit about journeys, you can absorb the world. My favourite book would actually be people who are on the journey. All you have to do is open your eyes and look and lean forward and tilt your head and listen and there's a story unravelling there right before you. What could be better than that?" So people, the next time you're on an over-packed bus, put down your Harry Potter and check out the characters around you!

Find out more about Zahid at: www.zahidhussain.com and check out his Writetopia blog at: www.zahidhussainwrites.blogspot.com. The Curry Mile is available from all good bookshops.



TELL US ANOTHER ONE CHAPTER EIGHT

The Tell Us Another One office has been a hive of activity since our last update. In November we celebrated the launch of **Dress Code** – a stunning magazine featuring fashion stories, poems and glamorous photographs from various community groups across the Borough and specially commissioned pieces by the best North West writers. From African traditions and sentimental reflections to futuristic fantasies, it's a wonderfully diverse anthology. If you haven't had a copy yet, pick one up from your local library or contact us at the office.

We launched Dress Code at **Kulture Klub**, a multicultural spoken word celebration. The side-splitting Julian Daniel and inspirational Zahid Hussain (see opposite for profile) were our special guests for the evening and local writers lined up to join the bill. We organised this in association with Write Out Loud who have been our partners on the regular **Middleton Open Mic Poetry Night** at the Olde Boar's Head pub. This has been such a successful event that Write Out Loud will be continuing it every month. See the back page for details and get on down there!

Our largest project this quarter has been organising the **Scribble Festival**, a grand finale in February to mark the end of this stage of Tell Us Another One. By the time Scribble is published the party will have happened! We hope you didn't miss this fabulous daytime of discussion and workshops about the value of community literature ventures and an evening of star names including Tony Walsh, national poetry slam winner, Tachia Newall, Waterloo Road's finest young actor – and poet – and Will Tang, Rochdale's prodigal pop star son.

For more information about Tell Us Another One, contact Kim Haygarth at Cartwheel Arts on: 01706 361300 / kim@cartwheelarts.org.uk



We hope to publish a new issue of Scribble in the summer (pending receipt of funding!). We would be delighted to receive your best poems and short stories in the meanwhile.

Send them to:
Scribble, c/o Tell Us Another One,
Cartwheel Arts,
110 Manchester Street,
Heywood, OL10 1DW.

01706 361300
kim@cartwheelarts.org.uk



SCRIBBLE FOCUS ON...

QAISRA SHAHRAZ: AN INSPECTOR WRITES

Qaisra Shahraz is an acclaimed novelist, scriptwriter and short story writer of international standing, as well as an OfSTED inspector, trainer and top mum. One of Tell Us Another One's writing groups has recently been lucky enough to work with her in Rochdale. Here she chats to Scribble about Elvis Presley, period dramas and a very spiritual journey.

You started writing aged 17. Can you remember any of your early stories?

Yes, I wrote a short descriptive piece set on the island of Hawaii. I think some films, perhaps with Elvis Presley, must have influenced me. My 'real' first story, written much later, was called **A Pair of Jeans**. I have been very lucky with this story - with publication in 5 countries, most recently in the USA, and in Germany it has become prescribed reading for students studying English Literature.

Tell us a little about your highly acclaimed novels, *The Holy Woman* and *Typhoon*.

The Holy Woman was inspired by a British documentary showing what took place in a small region of Sind in Pakistan, where people made their daughters into nun-like figures in order to keep the land in the family. Horrified by this I thought it would make an interesting story. In fact it turned out to be a powerful love story enjoyed by readers all over the world. **Typhoon** is a sequel and covers a number of themes including three people caught in a relationship. In Indonesia the books have become bestsellers. Now they are published by Penguin in three languages in India.

Are there issues that you haven't written about yet but that interest you for the future?

Yes, a project on Muslim women around the world. I have started my research by interviewing 23 women in Indonesia and 11 in Singapore. In February I am interviewing women in India and Dubai and in April will be meeting American Muslim women. This is such a fascinating thing to do. I have learnt so much by dipping into women's lives and letting them tell their stories and speak up on different topics.

You also write plays for radio and television - how do you decide if your story is going to be a play, a novel or short fiction?

If I feel very strongly about an issue and want to reach a large audience I opt for scriptwriting, writing for TV. You can reach millions of people this way. My 14-episode drama **The Heart is It**, which was produced and dramatized by Pakistan TV, was shown on digital channels around the world.

What are your own favourite television dramas?

A whole score of comedies including **Mr Bean**, **Only Fools and Horses** etc and of course **Coronation Street** and **EastEnders**. They help me to relax and remain grounded. As a scriptwriter, I really appreciate the quality of writing in these dramas. Adaptations of the nineteenth century novels of Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell remain my favourite dramas.

What have been your most frustrating and uplifting experiences as a writer?

There are many frustrating moments, for example: having to redraft and edit the novels over and over again; losing snippets of dialogue you had in your head at night-time but lost in the morning; the computer crashing and losing some documentation; having so many deadlines to meet... A really uplifting experience is when you meet your readers in person and receive good feedback from them. Another is when a piece of writing is finished - I have just finished my third novel!

In line with the theme of this issue of Scribble, what is the most amazing journey you have ever been on?

Going on Hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia to the holy sites in Mecca and Medina. What a fantastic journey. In fact I describe this journey in my first novel **The Holy Woman**. There is no parallel experience because you get caught up in a special atmosphere and set of rituals. Over a million people from all over the world gather together. On returning you are spiritually refreshed and with a new perspective on life.

What are your three top tips for other aspiring writers?

1. Keep writing - even if it seems rubbish. Get critical opinion and accept it with grace. If you love writing never give up but persevere with it.
2. Keep another job as writing will not pay your bills unless you become very successful.
3. Don't submit any work for publication unless it is polished and well edited. You don't get a second chance with editors / publishers.

Find out more about Qaisra at:

www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/qaisra-shahraz and www.topofthetree.info/artists/qaisra-shahraz

Qaisra's novels *The Holy Woman* and *Typhoon* are available from all good bookshops.

A tall mature tree stood in the middle of the crossroads, and Gulshan leaned against its trunk, trying to regain her breath. A sudden shaft of moonlight revealed her husband walking up to the well beside an old Banyan tree, with its dry, gnarled roots spread out on the path and disappearing into the nearby field.

'Har...!' Her husband's name jammed in her throat when a tall young woman stepped out from behind the tree. Bare-headed, and with her long hair draped like a dark curtain behind her back, she walked up to Haroon and leaned towards him. Instantly, and with a sickening jolt, Gulshan knew who the woman was.

Gulshan's world stood still on its axis, as she watched the woman lay her head intimately against Haroon's chest. Before Gulshan's dazed eyes, her husband's arms rose and clasped the woman in a firm embrace.

A scream of agony ripped through Gulshan's throat before reaching her mouth. Frantically she stuffed the edge of her chador in her mouth and bit onto the cloth, strangling her scream.

Before her horror-struck eyes, she saw her beloved husband bend down over the woman's face and shower it with passionate kisses, moving from her forehead down to her throat.

A sense of unreality and disbelief crashed over Gulshan. Caught up in the nightmare, she found her feet held to the ground.

Extract from Qaisra's novel, Typhoon, published by BlackAmber

OVER TO YOU... JOURNEYS



Walking Away From Platform 6

The train now departing from platform 6 is taking your daughter away, we apologise for any inconvenience which this may cause

There is a residual pain in the knee and a bump on the head from rough wrestling
And there was a frown in the glance whilst getting changed as the door swung open
The Weetabix went soggy for laughs at the funny men on the breakfast DVD
I am walking away again, but love walks with me

Barbie colours and quick little legs keep up as we head for the train
And the split-sides laugh of a naughty joke cackles in the chilly air
The knowing glances of passengers from the quiet coach said they had been there too
I am walking away again, but love walks with me

Her knowledge with age of a new rude gesture tested shines in her eye
And the dragging thoughts and whining mope of chores undone all fades away
The unspoken words of laughter are mimed through the tinted train window
I am walking away again, but love walks with me

She sits with her mum in rear facing seats and grips her arm, two girls together
And the gibbering bursts of exciting news and secrets are all spilling out
The elastic distance between us is about to be tested once more as the train pulls out
I am walking away again, but love walks with me

Remnants of news bounce back by echo pulse texts beating in my back pocket
And the letter of eight kisses is checked by my left hand every five minutes
The monotone buzz of the station's voice sounds across the open platforms
I am walking away again, but love walks with me

The train now departed from platform 6 has taken your daughter away, we apologise for the inconvenience which this will cause

© Winston Plowes



Warning!

This person is hard of hearing so you have to shout.
Make things clear to her as she is easily confused.
If she has a book in her hands leave her alone.
She doesn't like to be disturbed!

© Anne Kennedy



My Mother

I don't know where to start and where to stop talking about my mother. My mother was like a cool breeze; when she was in my presence it was like a breath of fresh air. Her words, sentences, talks made sense. Every time I knew I faced problems or was in a difficult situation, I knew I would be able to sit with my mother. I would be under her shade, she would shelter me. My mother was like a strong tree. I don't know where to start and where to stop talking about my mother.

© Tasneem Hussain



Postman

- Item deliverer
- Big dog quiverer
- Big sack carrier
- Bad weather warrior
- Uniform wearer
- Bill delivering scarer

© Steve Busby



The Rule of Thumb

I travelled this road many years ago,
My ticket, an outstretched thumb,
But now I'm older, less radical,
Am I happy with what I've become?

The backpack grew heavy,
The boots didn't fit,
Too many long waits
I have to admit.

I drive the same road this crisp autumn day,
Watching the landscape unwind.
Travelling in comfort, you by my side,
Multitudinous turnings declined...

© Syd Rawcliffe

Motorway Fields

Down the rusty highway
Weeds split through the cat's eyes,
Death picnics at the lay-by,
Mysteries paint lines that roll.

I take a closer look,

Dead leaves on the sidewalk,
Witch-black puddles,

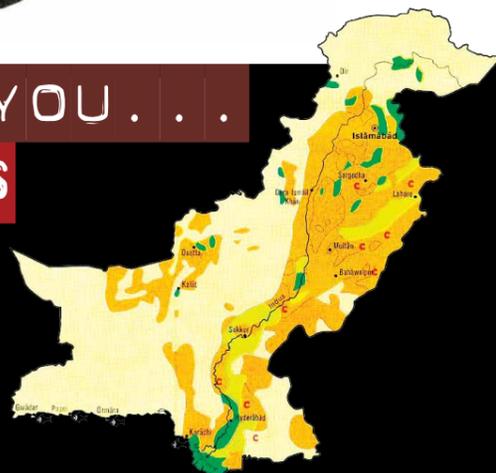
Decaying animals sit,
Petrol grey ornaments
With six month old smiles.

I watch rabbits twitching
Near the hedgerows;

My t-shirt is wrapped around a fence,
Clinging to the barbed wire.

© Dunstan Carter

OVER TO YOU... JOURNEYS



Our Map of Pakistan

I was born in Burewala, a town near Sahiwal, because my grandparents lived there. I can't forget Sahiwal. It is twinned with Rochdale. I was a baby in Gujerkhan where there were too many fields. I spent my childhood skipping in Gujerat and playing hide and seek and dolls in Karachi. I went to school in Rawalpindi and I loved assembly and school trips. When I was 3 years old I went to the zoo for the first time in Bahawlpur and saw elephants. I can't forget when I nearly drowned in the waves in Karachi. Lahore is a city full of life, home to film stars, a tinsel town like Hollywood. I first went to the cinema there. I visited the historical Badshahi Mosque and - oh God! - I absolutely adore the mouthwatering food, the speciality pajeys pai - curry with feet of lamb - and haleem and naan. People say if you have not seen Lahore, you're not in this world, you've not been born yet.

© Shaista Butt, Attiya Malik, Ghazala Jabeen, Shagufta Jabeen, Balqis Akram, Nabeela Khan

Another Place

We wanted to see 'Another Place'
One hundred iron men in the sea
The date was fixed
For a half term day
At nine, for my friend and me.

On waking I found it was frosty
And then it started to snow
But it soon cleared up
We got well wrapped up
Off to the bus stop we'd go.

Got off the bus at Bowker Vale
Thought we'd get on the tram
The platform was jammed
The trams were full
Every carriage was crammed.

Back to the bus stop and here comes a bus
"Are you going to Manchester?" asked I
Well it did get to town -
By the scenic route -
And another half hour went by.

Time had moved on and I wasn't sure
If Liverpool could still be our aim
We decided on Wigan -
A bit nearer home -
So to the train station we came.

"There's nearly an hour til the Wigan train
Liverpool one's out in a tick,"
So the plans changed again
We got on that train
And settled in seats for the trip.

People got on, more people got on
By Newton there wasn't a seat
It was packed to the door
We were glad even more
On arrival at Liverpool Lime Street.

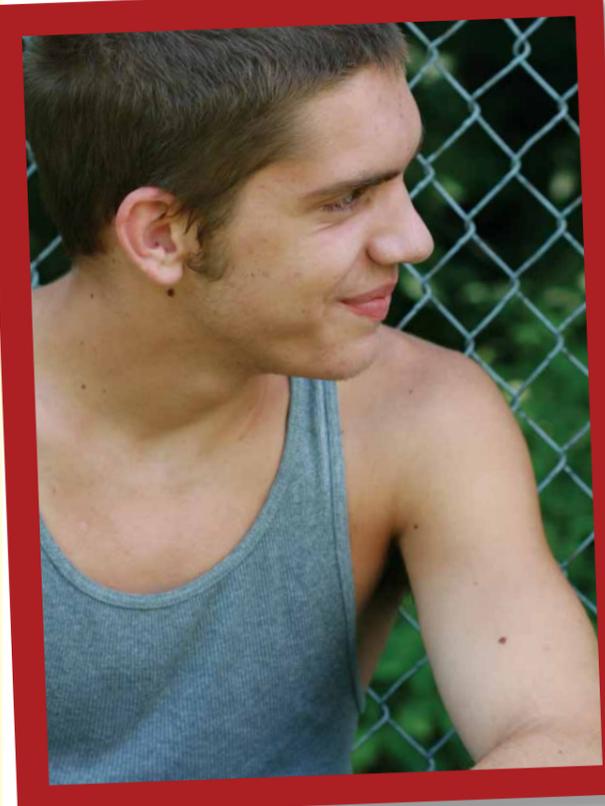
Outside the station we looked for our bus
To Crosby we needed to go
The bus was quite empty -
That made a change -
The driver said he'd let us know.

Walk down that road, the driver said
Can't miss it, it's right at the end
When we got to the bottom
There's just grass and dunes
And the bus had gone off round the bend.

So we climbed over the dunes, my friend and me -
We actually spotted the sea -
The sand was hard going
Then we saw through a gap
The place we'd been dying to see.

The wind it blew, it was bitterly cold
But we'd got where we wanted to be
Antony Gormley's 'Another Place'
One hundred iron men in the sea.

© Ann Robinson



The Son

Have you been on holiday with a grown-up son?
Just a short holiday
When he agreed to go with you,
To humour you, you thought,
Certainly not to have fun.

And you think, how can he want to come with us,
Tired, worn, life-weary, old,
Past fashion, past trends, past,
Looking like your own parents.
Don't embarrass, don't fuss.

Where shall we go in this city? What shall we do
That will suit him
As well as us?
But he doesn't like this indecision.
He's impatient with you.

He takes you in hand, this son, with paper and pen and force
And writes out an itinerary.
Now come on, Mum and Dad.
And you're willing to be led by the hand,
To let him map out a course.

See his broad shoulders, walk behind in his wake.
Will he ever come with you again?
Is this the present or a memory already?
Making and watching and living a dream,
Passed into folklore, mythology, yearning,
This son, this son you are following.

How can you capture and hold what you see?
So short is reality
So fleeting the now
The moment containing the seeds of your grief
The sweetness of present, transient and brief.

© Carol Brown

If you would like your words to be considered for future issues of Scribble, get in touch! Send us in the very best of what you have to offer. Hopefully a new edition of Scribble will be out in the summer (funding permitting). Submissions under 300 words are recommended. Please note that Scribble reserves the right to edit submitted material.





It's all a ride

Let there be fairgrounds
 So children walk freely into welcoming light,
 And world leaders tumble down helter skelters,
 So the flames in the ghost trains of crime
 become dragons fire to fuel each journey,
 And our rollercoaster moments of terror
 are photographed, framed and displayed.
 Let there be fairgrounds
 So we don't deal with money but in fizz bombs,
 pop songs, affirmations and clichés,
 And the hall of mirrors shows hidden perspectives
 so we never feel betrayed,
 So dealers cut candyfloss and all highs are safe,
 And the feathered nests of found souls
 are beacons on fairytale towers
 of luxury and grace.
 Let there be fairgrounds
 So that ignorant minds are ignited
 by the spark from a pyrotechnic display,
 And those who raise the mallet of power
 find peace with prize golden fishes,
 So each funhouse is filled and no one is homeless
 And divorces in dodgems end in laughter and kisses.
 Let there be fairgrounds,
 Let wonder waltzers spin away censorship,
 Let their circling orbits take us on a galaxy ride of inspiration,
 Let the log flume cleanse all doom
 and let the Queen of Speed take those in need
 faster and safely around each sharp bend,
 Let there always be a thank you sign
 in the light at the end of each tunnel.

© Ann Wilson

Virtual Journey

I'd love to go off traveling
 To London, Paris, Rome
 To see the sights I've never seen
 And compare them to my home

I'd love to dare the open road
 Or fly up in the blue
 To sail across a stormy sea
 Or walk a hill or two

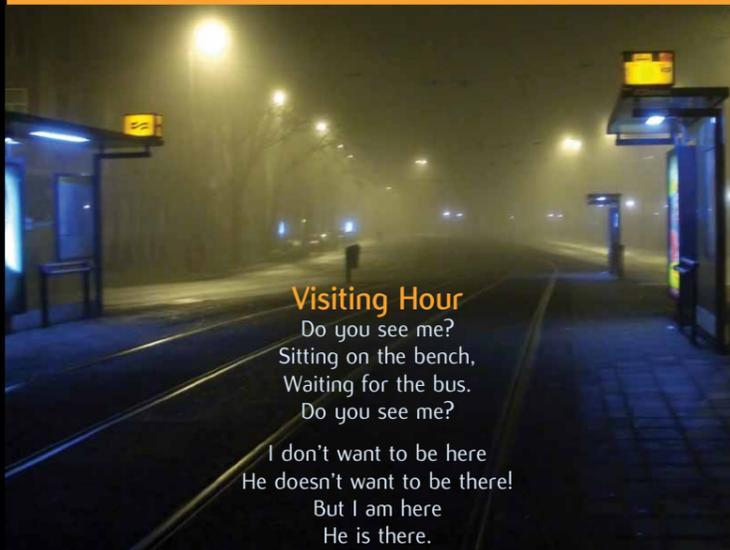
I'd love to cross the desert
 Or hike a frozen lake
 And swim below the barrier reef
 Or scale a mountain peak

But I fear I'll never see my dreams
 Don't think I'll ever roam
 I think I'd rather see the world
 From the comfort of my home

The truth is that I get sick
 When traveling in a car
 And boats and planes just make me heave
 So I know I won't get far

So I'll have to travel in my mind
 Or watch it on TV - anyway
 David Attenborough's done it all
 So the world doesn't need to see me

© Freda Robinson



Visiting Hour

Do you see me?
 Sitting on the bench,
 Waiting for the bus.
 Do you see me?

I don't want to be here
 He doesn't want to be there!
 But I am here
 He is there.

So here I sit waiting for a bus.
 This journey has a beginning
 Tell me, how does it end?

Not well - I fear
 Can you feel my pain?
 Do you know my anguish?
 As I wait,
 Wait for a bus.

Here it is
 Get on, pay the fare
 Sit, staring out of the window
 At what - nothing
 Nothing to see!

Did you see me there?
 Waiting for the bus,
 This bus
 A journey to nowhere.

No beginning,
 But an end.

© Kathleen Chorlton

WINNING WORDS

Where Are You?

There's a silence, we miss you
 The things you left behind (your ball, your bone) lie where you'd played with them
 Your fragments of hair that wait for the Hoover to remove them
 Can't let you go, your smell is here
 Where are you?

You liked to eat the fish food and the nuts that were meant for the birds
 You sat on the step watching the little birds eat and wouldn't disturb
 You liked to lean on the dishwasher when it had just switched off (it was warm)
 You liked to sit and watch me ironing
 Where are you?

Your disc and your collar lie in the same place we left them when we just put them down in shock
 I touch them, you are here aren't you?
 But they are cold
 The glistening sun slithers through the stained glass windows,
 warming the spot where you would lay snoring
 I see you there, but I know you're not
 Where are you?



On the mantelpiece there stands a lone card, it says "Sorry for your loss"
 But you are here everyday with me - the little things we miss, the fun you gave to us, the memories,
 The titbits no longer given, fish from the chippy and you loved to eat prawn crackers too
 Licking your lips forever
 Where are you?

We've cried and laughed as memories flood,
 The time you lazed in the sun against the panelling in the hallway, slowly sliding down
 Then the post came and you suddenly sprang into action
 So funny to watch
 Where are you now?

The sadness of your eyes those last days, the pain in your body
 I knew what you were trying to say
 I had left you to sleep, or so I thought, but then you were here with me, you had walked with great strength
 Your eyes said it - I did it for you
 Where are you now?

We were with you, as we couldn't let you go alone,
 Time to say goodbye
 Death, you were in no pain
 15 years ago we'd met you, near enough to the day,
 Goodbye our friend.

© Ann Ingham

Gaza

Rushing, pushing, screaming past them
 Holding my darling baby boy,
 Into the crowd

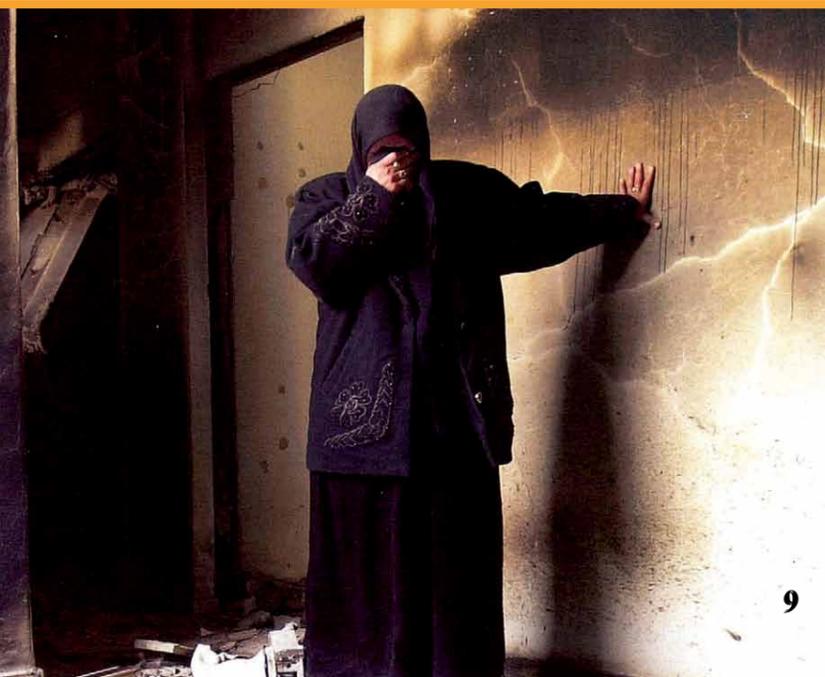
Ambulance sirens, blood, children, women, soldiers
 "Oh Allah, when is this going to end?"

Rushing, pushing, screaming past them
 Holding my darling baby boy,
 Into the crowd

I pass him into the arms of the doctor
 His eyes glazed, blood all over his face

I crumble in a heap on the floor
 Shocked, trembling I cover my face with my hands
 Feeling trickles of blood from my darling baby boy.

© Shahnaz Abbas



OVER TO YOU... JOURNEYS

IN THE FRAME

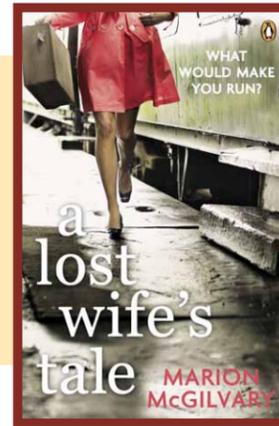


Scribble asks Ganiyu Gasper for the story behind this striking image.

I love this photo, it's one of my all-time favourites. The son on the right has been baptized and is now spiritually reborn into his Christian life. The fact that this teenage boy has chosen this way of life is a great victory for his father. I remember many tears of joy being shed that day by church members and lots of singing and rejoicing. For me this photo captures that, but more importantly, a moment between father and son.

I didn't have much time or space to capture the moment - jostling for position without knocking adults or children out of the way is a real skill. The fact that I shot it with a 50mm lens meant that I had to work hard in order to find the right shooting point as well as get the composition I was after. I was really pleased to get the woman in the top left of the frame with her camera!

Find out more about Ganiyu and his wedding photography and personal work at: www.contactphotographer.co.uk / info@contactphotographer.co.uk / <http://manchestericoc.blogspot.com>



A LOST WIFE'S TALE

We are proud to publish an extract from this chilling, compelling literary debut by Marion McGilvary. Edith Lutz has left behind a comfortable home in a flurry of hastily packed bags, fleeing for an anonymous life in the city. With a new look, new name and new job as live-in housekeeper to wealthy publisher Adam, she's hoping to outwit her past and build herself a new life. But it's not for the first time...

My name was Edith Lutz.

So - what do you think? Thin? Earnest? Maybe broad, streamlined cheekbones flaring like wings from a sharp nose, and perhaps blue Slavic eyes cut like tribal scars into the tight, bare canvas of her face? Or are you seeing feral wariness, muddy skin and nondescript pale brown hair, yanked into a ragged ponytail with a rubber band? Or German, perhaps? A statuesque, Jane Mansfield blonde, with stout legs, an uncomplicated relationship with porn and a wardrobe full of accessorized Birkenstocks? It was open to interpretation.

In fact, once that summer, I met an underdressed American on the bus who, despite the Boston Celtic vest that hung like slack-jawed chins from his moist, hairy armpits, introduced himself with a formal handshake and made me spell it out for him as he held my bony fingers in his sweaty palm.

'So, like in clumsy?' he asked.

'You know - Lutz, klutz,' he elaborated when I gave him the blank stare I used for idiots and men in shorts - which pretty much had my social life covered back then.

'In the "you-ess" it's a person who drops stuff all the time,' he explained.

Yep. Just what you need sitting next to you on the No.88 to Trafalgar Square - a fucking poet. But, anyway, ineptness hadn't occurred to me at the time. On the contrary.

To me, the name was always German. She would be staid, practical, fiercely capable and a bit worn around the edges. The sort of person who favoured sensible shoes like the kind my mother had worn when she was nursing - with maybe a plain, knee-length, A-line skirt and white cotton underpants bought a size too big for comfort. Like the real me, she was in her late thirties - not quite yet middle aged but in training for it - slim, average height, pale and fairly uninteresting. She was a woman who did not care too much about appearances, who could fade easily into the background, like a thin wash of watercolour paint.

I was not perfecting my goose-step or manufacturing an accent with lots of z's in it, but to get fully into character I dressed the part. I went to a department store in the High Street and bought a simple, made-in-the-Philippines, polyester skirt with a liquorice thin plastic belt looped through the narrow waistband and a cotton shirt in a sad shade of nursing-home lilac. The footwear wasn't much of a stretch, since I always wore flat heels, but nevertheless I felt my Indian leather flip-flops were too ethnic to pass muster. I sifted through the cast-off shoes in Oxfam and, since it was summer, picked out a pair of shabby sandals with crêpe soles and the ghosts of another person's toes imprinted on the insoles, like a Turin Shroud for feet. I thought about bleaching my fair hair several shades blonder, but, on the salary I expected to become accustomed to, I knew there was no way I could maintain roots. Of any sort. I did, however, thread my long hair into a plait and then wind it into an amateurish bun. All I needed to do was perch my glasses on the end of my long, straight nose and I would become the stereotype of the mousy clerk I had once been - except then I had been young. And I had looked absolutely nothing like this.

So, would you hire this woman, I asked myself as I pirouetted in front of the mirror in the women's bathroom at Paddington Station. Well, I supposed it would depend on how desperate you were for domestic help. I sincerely hoped the next name on my list would be frantic, because I was running out of time and options. I had not liked the couple at the last interview. Their main pile was inherited, somewhere in the Cotswolds, but in town they lived in a hushed mausoleum cradled in the smug arms of the Boltons. They already employed a cook, a nanny and a chauffeur but were now looking for someone to take sole charge of the wife's bedridden mother. I had told the agency that I was not interested in looking after children, but it had never even crossed my mind that I might be expected to nurse the old. Had I been struck by a sudden urge to transform myself into a Mother Theresa of the Aged, I had a demented mother of my own whom I could care for.

I left without even meeting the invalid.

A LOST WIFE'S TALE is published by PENGUIN in paperback at £6.99. Copyright © Marion McGilvary. www.penguin.co.uk

Many thanks to Penguin for their kind co-operation in re-producing this extract.



WHAT'S GOING ON

Open Mic Poetry Night

Fourth Sunday of every month, 8pm, £1. Olde Boar's Head pub, Long Street, Middleton

Dust off a poem this spring and try it out in front of a friendly crowd! This is Rochdale Borough's unique open mic night for poets and poetry lovers. For more information contact Paul Blackburn at Write Out Loud on 07796 475490 or just turn up on the night.

Jackie Kay and Joe Pemberton

Mon 2 March, 6.30pm, £5 / £3. Martin Harris Centre for Music and Drama, The University of Manchester

This event, with readings by much-loved Manchester writers Jackie Kay and Joe Pemberton, is bound to be a special occasion. Kay's first poetry collection, *The Adoption Papers*, won a Scottish Arts Council Book award and her first novel, *Trumpet*, won the Guardian Fiction prize. Joe Pemberton's acclaimed novel, *Forever and Ever Amen*, describes Manchester in the late 1960s through the eyes of nine year-old James. Tickets can be purchased from www.quaytickets.com and more information can be found at www.manchester.ac.uk/arts/newwriting/events

Freed Up

Thurs 5 March / Thurs 16 April / Thurs 21 May, 8pm, free. green room, Manchester

Free yourself from the shackles of... whatever's been shackling you! Then sit back and enjoy Manchester's finest new poetry. This is another opportunity to air your own original writing in a relaxed and non-competitive space. No need to book, just come along on the night.

The Search Party

Mon 9 – Tues 10 March, 7.30pm, £6.50 / £4. The Studio, Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester

Since September 2008 the Royal Exchange has led workshops with over 150 young Muslim playwrights aged 16-25. Most had never tried to write a play scene before; all were keen to give it a try. They have put together two evenings of highlights – presented as rehearsed readings by professional actors and theatre practitioners. More information can be found on www.royalexchangetheatre.co.uk or by ringing 0161 833 9833.

Writing for the Theatre Workshops

Weds 18 March / Tues 21 April / Weds 13 May / Tues 9 June, 6pm, £5 per workshop or £15 for 4 workshops. The Bolton Octagon

Les Smith and Martin Thomasson, award-winning authors of last year's smash hit *And Did Those Feet* and creative writing lecturers at Bolton University, are running a series of four workshops that will take you through a variety of techniques for writing for theatre. Each 60 minute workshop will cover a different aspect of the creative process. For more details go to www.octagonbolton.co.uk or ring 01204 520661.

Bollywood Stills

Until 28 March, Free. Contact Theatre, Manchester

This is a major new exhibition which pays homage to the action still in the Bollywood movie industry, charting the history from its heyday in the seventies and eighties to the current (digital) day. For more information ring Contact on 0161 274 0600 or check out: www.contact-theatre.org

Seeing Beyond - Eric Fong

Until Sun 5 April, Monday to Sunday, Free Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester

Eric Fong is a London-based visual artist working in video and photography, whose art is informed by his former profession as a medical doctor. From encounters with people of diverse ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds, Fong creates video and photography works that seek to open up a dialogue about the way we perceive and treat issues related to the body, medicine and disability.

Blue Black Sister

Fri 1 – Sat 2 May, various prices

The Studio, Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester

Fusing dramatic spoken word, music, photographic image and digital film, *Blue Black Sister* takes the audience on an emotionally charged journey through blues and sadness, storms and pain, sensuality and new birth. *Blue Black Sister* has been conceived and presented by the three Kunda sisters.

COMPETITION

To win a £15 book token and other brilliantly bookish goodies, simply answer the following question:

What is the name of the autobiography by new American president, Barack Obama?

Deadline: Friday 22nd May 2009



Scribble
c/o Tell Us Another One
Cartwheel Arts
110 Manchester Street
Heywood
OL10 1DW
T: 01706 361300
F: 01706 361400
E: kim@cartwheelarts.org.uk



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