



WRITE ON!



BEFRIENDERS HIGHLAND LITERARY NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NUMBER 7

WINTER 2015



As we approach the Christmas period it's our pleasure to introduce to you Edition 7 of *Write On!*

Inside this issue we have lots of great submissions including poetry by Muriel and Jenny and a variety of entertaining stories. From Jim we have a heart-warming description of Christmas Eve spent with good friends. In a cleverly woven piece of his own, Colyn introduces us to the architecture of spider webs. We've got two cat stories, one from Jenny and the other from Isolde. And Vanessa has given us the conclusion to her three-part story "Crumbles". So sit back, turn off the tele and enjoy what our group members have been writing!

We have some terrific entries for the t-shirt slogan challenge so if you like what you see, feel free to contribute your own "t-shirt wisdom" for our next issue.



This year, for the second year running, *Write On* successfully participated in the annual **Scottish Mental Health Arts & Film Festival** in Inverness. Group members wrote & produced a short film titled 'Passion' and Isolde & Graeme performed live their own excellent individual pieces. For an in depth review & photos of the evening turn page 15.



Happy Christmas & Hogmanay to all our members

We look forward to seeing what you create in the New year!

- Alan



IN THIS ISSUE:



- Alan's Welcome
- T-REX-MAS
- T-Shirt Wisdom
- Poems
- A Carer's Thoughts
- "Who Said That?" Winner
- Member's Profile
- Christmas Story
- Animal Tales
- Conclusion to "Crumbles"
- Film Reviews
- SMHAFF 2015 Review
- BH 2016 Calendar

NEXT SUBMISSION DUE DATE :

31st March 2016



Alan Duncan
 Distance Befriending Coordinator
 Befrienders Highland

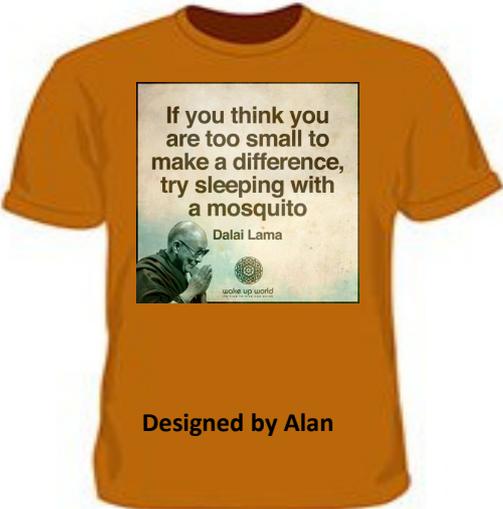
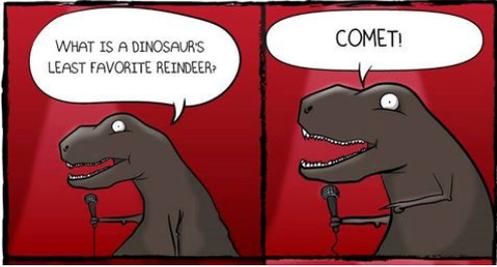
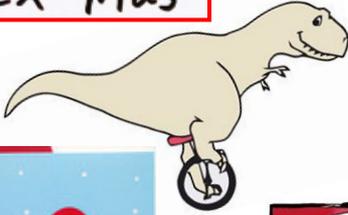
19 Church Street
 Inverness
 IV1 1DY

01463 235 675

Befrienders Highland Limited, a Scottish recognised charity (number SC029384) is a company limited by guarantee, registered in Scotland (number 199867). Its registered office is C/O Leedingham Chalmers, Kintail House, Beechwood Business Park, Inverness IV2 3BW



T-Rex-Mas



T-SHIRT WISDOM



ODE TO DAMACLESE
by Jenny



www.shutterstock.com · 27788650

You eye me from your quiet corner
With dark unrelenting gloom
We look each other up and down
Across a silent room
Your one blind eye accuses me
Of robbing you of sight
So I turn on the surge
That gives you life
And alleviate your night

You leap into life
I jump back alarmed
And again we are at war
I lose your tool bars - one-two-three
You glare at me once more
Accusing me of hating
Your delicate plates of knowledge
You must remember I am human
With a brain like a bowl of cold porridge
I call you Damoclese, shortened to 'Dam'
We battle relentlessly, you and I
I try to type a letter but it's all a sham
You do it all. You spit it out
And correct mistakes as well
Most people love computers
But to me you are plain hell

Whatever I try and do
You find a way to misunderstand me
I click on this and click on that
And still you undermine me
I hate your supercilious look
Your sanctimonious air
And yet you draw me closer
And nearer to despair

One of these days I'll beat you yet
You'll find I've had my fill
You need electricity so don't forget
I'm the one that pays the bill



A Christmas Gift - Carlton Cottage
By Muriel



All is still. All is silent,
Save for the distant murmur of the traffic
And the contented purring of the cat.
The gentle music of a hidden phone intrudes momentarily
And then unheeded, dies away.

The fire grate rests,
Coated with the dusty remains of a fire long dead,
Small dunes of ashes and cinders heaped beneath it.
Boughs of holly decorated with baubles and tinsel,
Adorn the ancient wooden lintel of the inglenook.

The air of expectancy,
Of waiting with baited breath,
Is enhanced by the presence of two brightly coloured
Stockings waiting to be filled.
The gentle tones of the unseen phone once more
Break the stillness but again go unheeded,
There is no-one here to hear, so once more it fades.

A quilted fur rug lies in front of the hearth;
An island of softness in a sea of beige.
Proud unicorns embellish the large comfortable settee.
A multitude of pictures adorn the rough plastered walls.

A life sized china dog sits quietly in the corner,
Tongue lolling, ears pricked, eyes watching
For a signal, a command.
Beyond is the snug, offering,
A chance to step away for a short while,
To just rest and be,
An offer of peace and solitude.

The cottage rests;
an ancient entity which has protected its
many charges over the centuries.
Its spirit is that of an ageless grandparent
silently watching over and caring for all
who live within its walls,
Sharing their joys and sorrows,
Their excitement and disappointments,
But silently and unobtrusively.

If they could only connect with that spirit,
Its strength, wisdom and ability to accept
And silently, care would be theirs.

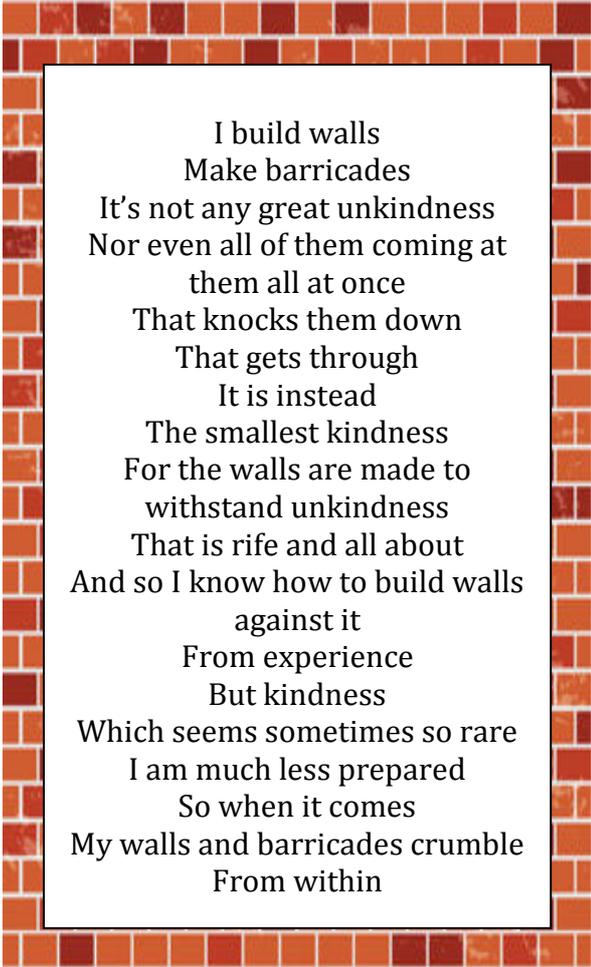


A Carer's Thoughts & Poems

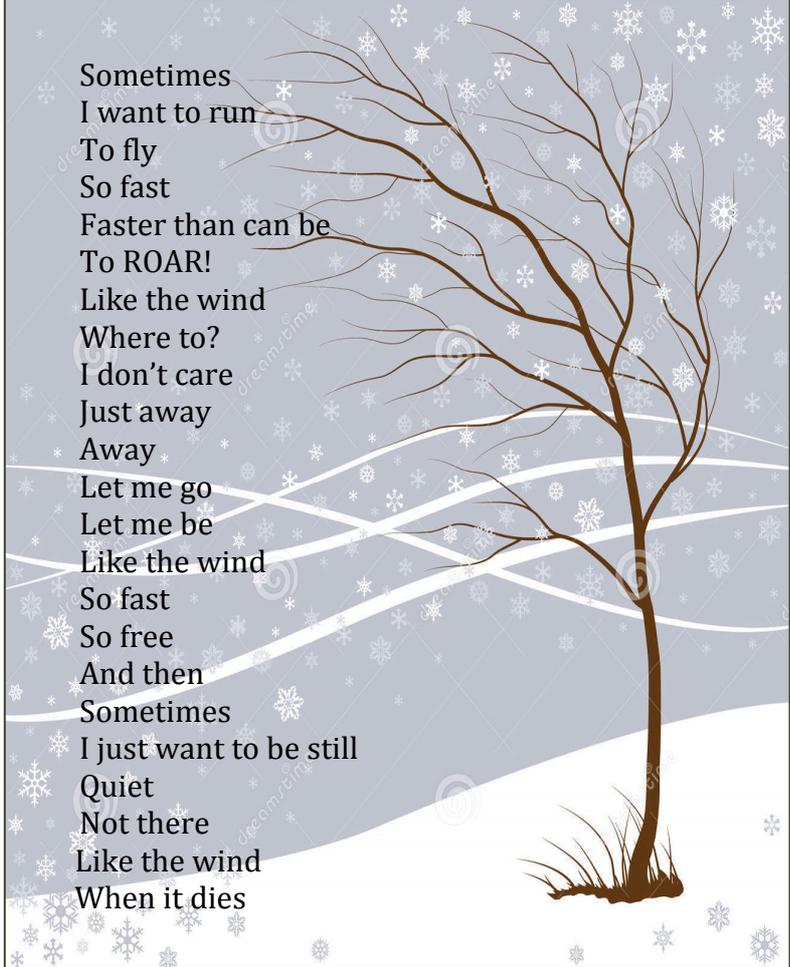
Introduction

My Partner, Margaret, has been a resident at Moss Park since 2012. I hadn't written a poem until soon after she was admitted into care. The poems reflect my ensuing and continuing struggle with depression, loneliness, and acceptance, and my need for company, love and understanding.

- Stephen



I build walls
Make barricades
It's not any great unkindness
Nor even all of them coming at
them all at once
That knocks them down
That gets through
It is instead
The smallest kindness
For the walls are made to
withstand unkindness
That is rife and all about
And so I know how to build walls
against it
From experience
But kindness
Which seems sometimes so rare
I am much less prepared
So when it comes
My walls and barricades crumble
From within



Sometimes
I want to run
To fly
So fast
Faster than can be
To ROAR!
Like the wind
Where to?
I don't care
Just away
Away
Let me go
Let me be
Like the wind
So fast
So free
And then
Sometimes
I just want to be still
Quiet
Not there
Like the wind
When it dies

It's not her tears that come anytime, that she can't explain.
It's not the gradual switching off of her lights that flicker for moments,
grasped for but lost when they go out again.
Or the knowing that they will all go out, no matter how hard she fights.

It's not the long quiets of there being nothing there, but sorrow.
Not even the thought of where this will take her, sooner, or later.
Or the forgetting, sometimes, for a little while, that it isn't there at all.
Or the wondering what she knows of it, when her lights flicker.

It's the lifting of her arms to help me undress her for bed, without asking.
It's her smiling and laughing at her wrongs.
It's the hug she gives when I can't hide my grieving.
It's her trying to sing along to the words of her favourite songs.

It's her joy of simple things that we've lost, in the fray.
It's the not knowing if she knows that there isn't going to be a choice.
It's that I can't share in her shrugging it all off.
It's the *thank you's* that she says when I help her, and I hear it then, in her voice.



Norma has been in touch to share with the group which book she bought with the 'Who Said That' prize tokens and her words are as follows:

I have chosen a book with my book token from the Write On competition on St. Kilda. The title of the book I chose is *St Kilda The Last and Outmost Isle*, by Angela Gannon and George Geddes'. This book is of great interest to my husband. He would love to visit this island at some point in his life as it was a fascinating way of island life and survival in such a remote place. So this book is really for him although I am sure he will let me have a look too.



The islanders packed wool for export to the mainland, but the wool from the sheep intended for the island would be carded, spun and then woven or knitted into cloth and made into clothing. As I am interested in craft work I have a great respect for these hardy resilient people making their own woollen cloth under such difficult weather conditions. Intense weaving took place in the winter months during the dark days and nights. I am hoping to learn how to spin wool in the coming year in exchange for helping a friend to learn how to crochet.



Jay's Write On! Profile

What has made you interested in writing?

Since I was 7 or 8 years old, I've always enjoyed making stories and I also kept a simple journal where I could explore and use my imagination without being laughed at.

Can you write about your "process"?

I've always started with the main topic inside a circle. Then I branch out, expanding this topic to make extensions that can be explored.

What excites you or inspires you to write?

A subject I want to learn about. I research it, even making helpful notes, and then write it up. At 56 years old, I get great satisfaction from doing this.

What do you look for in a piece of good writing?

It needs to hold my attention with lots of details and to have been researched well.

What topics are especially interesting to you?

Family life during WWII – that is, helping one other out in a daily struggle to get through very troubled and desperate times. What counts is the wider family commitment where everyone pulls together by sharing food and coping with the children.

A Christmas Story by Jim

"The beginning is closer to the end," muttered smoking Joe as he puffed endlessly on his well-worn pipe; only stopping to refill it with fresh tobacco that usually came from another person's tobacco pouch. Seated around this table sat friends he had known since childhood. Every night they would discuss anything seeking to find an answer that would satisfy everyone. Of course that was never going to happen so they would drink and smoke until any answer was the right one.

The Inn in which they all gathered was at the end of Featherbed Lane. No streetlights there, just the glow of light from the bar behind which the Widow Leadlow stood to serve everyone's needs. A lovely woman, full of laughs, she was everyone's best friend.

Seated at the table was Ian, better known to everyone as Curly for he had very little hair left on top. He, being the local Postman, he knew most people's business but their secrets were safe in his hands. Now Curly was married to Mary, also seated at the table. Surrounded by children, Mary swore that him being at the pub meant that Curly would be less likely to increase their ever-growing family. It never seemed to work.

Then there was Jim who was always good for discussion. The trouble was that halfway through delivering his view point; his memory would need a little refreshing. A Malt Whisky would be enough to bring forth new words and opinions. He had the habit of sitting at his place at the table and after refilling his glass, firing everyone else there with fresh thoughts. Then he would utter that of course everyone was entitled to their own opinions.

As the evening wore on, the room gradually filled with smoke, drifting here and there until it reached a small coal fire which gradually sucked the smoke up the chimney and out into the star-lit night.

The other female at the table was Pat, a devout Christian and single. Though she always sat with Tommie at dinners and dances, no one ever seriously thought it would amount to anything more than a friendship formed over many years.

So there they all sat - Smoking Joe, Ian otherwise known as Curly, Mary, Jim, Tommie and Pat. They'd all been born in the same village and grown up together. And now together in the twilight of their years, each of them would do whatever was necessary to help one another enjoy life. All of them had become very philosophical, wisely understanding that to enjoy life you needed to give love and friendship in order to receive more in return.

This particular night, though much like most nights, was Christmas Eve, so all had drunk a little more than normal. Pat stood up and said that she was off to the Christmas Carol Service at her church and would any of us wish to go with her. Every person around the table gave her a resounding "Yes". So, into the dark star-lit night they went and wandered up to the old church where they sang as they held each other's hands. After the service, upon leaving the church, white snowflakes began falling and they felt themselves truly blessed that night.

-- Happy Christmas Everyone. Jim



Chocolate Point Cat Show by Jenny

For anyone who is not interested in the finer points of cat showing and breeding, a cat show must seem like the most boring thing on earth. In fact, you probably wouldn't go to one. But believe me, it can be very entertaining for anyone watching but not always so much for the owners of the cats being exhibited.



About fifteen years ago I had thirteen cats of which I used to show one *Seal Point Siamese*, one *Oriental White* and one huge *Tabby Household Pet*. I had entered the Siamese and the Pet in 'The *Chocolate Point Show*'; the results of which I shall recount to you.

A cat show is usually held either in a Village Hall or a Sports Complex. This *Chocolate Point Show* was held in a lovely little hall in Shakespeare Country, Stratford-Upon-Avon. I entered 'Noki', the Seal Point boy and 'Neb' (short for Nebucanezzar), the Household Pet.

When you first arrive, the cats have to be 'vetted in' to make sure they are healthy and don't have any fleas. Then you are given a number and you go into the Hall that is filled with rows of cages. You find your cage(s), settle the cat(s) and meet friends and/or enemies. You should remember that there are two kinds of people in the cat fancy world: cat people and catty people.

Noki was third cage from the end of the fourth row and Neb was end cage, seventh row. Noki took an instant dislike to the *Red Tabby Point* who was opposite to him so he sat glaring at him for the next four hours, whereas Neb went to sleep.

The cats were both judged and both placed *First* and Neb got *Best in Breed* which is very clever of as he was a rescue Moggie and no one knew what breed he actually was. Both were also nominated for *Best in Show*.

For those of you who have never been to a cat show (I'm sure there are many), the judges sit up on the stage behind a number of trestle tables (around six of them). By the very nature of being a cat show judge and having been a judge for many years, these poor souls are fairly old. They've left their walking sticks, Zimmer frames and wheelchairs below; having been hoisted up by those who have been stewarding for

them. Well.....while we are waiting for our cats to go across the top table, my husband got fed up with the waiting and went down to the pub for a beer.

In the following ten minutes Noki had also gotten fed up with that Red Tabby Point who kept looking sideways at him. He aimed a stream of projectile vomit across at his cage, hitting his owner fair and square on her bottom as she bent over to clean his litter tray and refresh his water.

As I watched this horrified, I heard a shout of hilarious laughter over at the front of the Hall. I went to see what was going on only to see my cat Neb being passed to the first judge Mrs. Penny. But him being so big and heavy, while she grabbed hold of the top end, the bottom end landed in her lap. With one paw in her left ear and one hind leg under her armpit, she tried to shovel him up to pass him along to her neighbor. She'd made the mistake of tickling his chin and kissing his ears which only made him go all gooey and flop over on his side. After a couple of goes at getting rid of him which was not easy for by now he liked her, she finally managed to unload him onto the next judge.

Mistake number two....Mr. Manton nearly dropped Neb completely but caught him by the back half. By this time Neb had become a very relaxed boy indeed and his front half seemed completely asleep.



The entire hall was in hysterics for now Neb was oblivious and snoring his head off.

There were another four Judges to go. It couldn't get any worse could it? It did. Ned lay comatose along the full length of the table, taking up the whole thing, all the while snoring like a drunk. The first two judges hauled him along in front of them. One judge poked him gently with her pen...not a flicker. The other softly tweaked one of his ears.....nothing.

Two last judges to go. He was shuffled a little further along. With a silly grin on his face, Neb's whiskers were twitching as he likely dreamt of rabbits. Everybody was in stitches...how embarrassing! The first Judge was laughing so much that after putting a

mark on a piece of paper, she had to be excused and then she retired to the restroom.

The last judge was John Shorebridge, a lovely man who liked to pick up the cat “exhibits” and blow raspberries on their tummies. I held my breath.....He wouldn't, would he? He did. I couldn't look. John scooped Neb up in his arms and cradled him like a baby. Neb woke up with a loud purr, slurped big wet

kiss down one side of John's face and then lay still in his arms while looking up adoringly at him.

The outcome of the whole charade was that Neb was awarded *Best in Show* and *Best Exhibit*. Noki, on the other hand, didn't get anywhere because he still smelt of vomit since I did not have time to wash him down. The irony of it is that Noki cost me £250.00. Neb cost me nothing. But never mind..... we had a lot of fun that day with both of them.

Kalamoona by Isolde

If he wasn't going to shoot the lioness, what was he going to do? Would the tribesmen be satisfied with the removal of such a dangerous big cat and her relocation as far away from human habitation as possible? She wasn't a man-eater yet but she certainly wasn't going to be dissuaded from preying on domestic stock roaming the grasslands. Herders would never be safe if she was in the vicinity and the time would eventually come when the lioness might go too far and hunt down a man instead of a goat or a calf. As much as he disliked doing it, the only solution would be for her to live out her days in captivity.



The plan had been devised and now it was time to implement it. Captain Jenkins signalled the volunteers to remain motionless hidden among the vegetation encircling the oasis pool. As the lioness silently moved through the palms towards the watering place, she didn't detect those waiting in position. The direction of evening breeze was not in her favour. At the signal, the men rose to their feet and began clanging beaters against metal pans. Pressured by her pursuers, she bounded right over the spot where they so hoped she would go. One moment she was fleeing through the palm trees and the next moment she was hoist into the air and dangled within the confines of a net. Her captors quickly closed in on the net, lowering the squirming bundle to the ground. They quickly secured it on to a long pole that two bearers would carry to camp. There the lioness was manoeuvred into a crate with everyone breathing a sigh of relief as the crate's door slide down; shut at last. From there, she was taken on a flat-bedded wagon to the regimental compound. Here, she was released into a cage wagon, something akin to what a circus used to transport lions and tigers. Circling around and around the floor of the cage, the lioness growled menacingly at onlookers.

Tomorrow at day break, she would be taken to the court of a wealthy Sheik who prided himself on having one of the best royal menageries in the principality. This lioness might never again be free but she would

lack for nothing in the Sheik's care. He had pledged that his lion tamer would do his best to tame this lioness. Secretly, the Captain admired her passionate bid for independence. It was a passion that life in the highly regulated world of the cavalry seldom afforded even an officer like himself. The lionesses' fiery golden eyes staring guardedly through the prison bars, told him with certainty that she acknowledged no one's authority. The locals nick-named her Kalamoona, after a species of plant that aggressively took over space as if it exercised authority over its domain and therefore commanded the respect from farmers trying to eradicate it.

Captain Jenkins wondered if Kalamoona's entourage of men and animals should chance crossing the one wide wadi that they would encounter on their journey. He knew all too well that crossing this dry river bed at this time of the year was not to be taken lightly. The monsoon season was in full swing. Among the many problems caused by this annual occurrence, it made the crossing of normally dry river beds exceedingly hazardous. As the flood waters appeared following each downpour, the force of the torrent was capable of sweeping anything in its path down river in the fierce swell. The morning the caravan departed had been clear, with a few scattered clouds on the horizon. By afternoon a storm was brewing with ominous dark clouds closing in overhead. Already a myriad of plump drops of rain spattered the sand like miniature meteors, leaving little round craters. It would be a race against time to get the cage wagon safely across.

“We should have left earlier” the Captain told himself. But with loading pack animals with provisions, saddling cavalry horses, and hitching the harnessed team of draft horses to the cage wagon, it had all taken longer than he had anticipated. He looked across to the other side of the riverbed, trying to gage the distance and calculate the time he'd need to get the whole party across. So much preparation had gone into this undertaking that to his way of thinking it would be a shame to abort the mission at this point.

Weighing the risks, he turned to his sergeant and said "Right Johnson, better get this lady across".

As if conjured by a magician, water bubbled up from the sand bed and a tiny curl of surf began making its way down the centre of the wadi. The slim stream of water that followed in its wake was neither wide nor high enough to pose any threat at present. Still in the middle of the channel, the water barely reached the outer circumference of the cage wagon's wheel spokes. If all went well they would be across with time to spare before the falling rain fed the rising waters to the point of flooding.

A chain of pack horses and camels waded dutifully through the low waters, followed by the team pulling the wagon. Halfway across and the wagon lurched abruptly as one of its back wheels hit a half hidden boulder. The wheel shattered and the wagon tipped dramatically down at an angle. Kalamoona snarled angrily as she suddenly slid down towards the corner bars. Just as perturbed, the Captain ordered that the rest of the party should all proceed to the other side and wait while a group of men would assist the stranded wagon. He dismounted and sent his horse with the others. The team of horses hitched to the wagon stepped about nervously in the water as if they too wished to follow. The driver kept them standing in place while the water lapped against their bellies.

Just as the sergeant barked out the order to move out, a lightning bolt zig-zagged across the sky and then the heavens opened up with a deluge cascading down upon them. This spelled trouble. With no time to waste the men set about trying to right the wagon to remove the broken wheel. It wasn't an easy process given the situation. All seemed to be going well until one man foolishly moved too close to the bars. Without warning a set of claws lashed out and caught the man unawares. He screamed in pain, grabbed his shoulder and slumped into the water. Attention turned from fixing the wheel to rescuing a wounded comrade. Meanwhile the rain continued to come down heavily; sheets of it nearly blinding everyone's ability to see what they were doing.

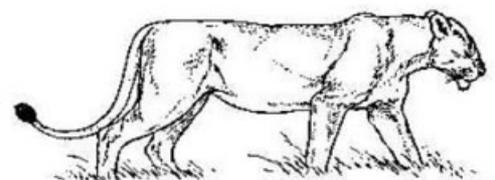
As the casualty was carried back to the river bank to be taken back to the compound for medical help, there came to their ears a distant low rumbling sound. Familiar with the pattern of monsoon flooding, everyone knew what was coming next. Upstream the river had swollen to the point of becoming a raging torrent. Now a great wall of water, tumultuously advancing with great force down the river bed, was heading their way and would be upon them in just a few moments.

Captain Jenkins loudly gave the order to unhitch the team of horses. They anxiously ploughed through the waters towards the bank, nearly dragging the men who were attempting to lead them by their bridles. Everyone else following the Captain's order to proceed to safety scrambled through the rising water as fast as they could; spurred on by the voices calling to them from the banks.

The captain knew there was no chance of saving the lioness but he would not allow her to drown inside the cage. He made the snap decision to release her. He pulled the bar from the latch hole and pulled the door of the cage open. His heart pounded as he saw Kalamoona move towards the open door. She crouched at the entrance uncertain. She stared directly into the eyes of her captor; her own wild amber eyes sending chills down the Captain's spine. He dearly did not wish to experience a close encounter with a panicked lioness. But he misjudged her intentions. In one powerful leap she cleared him by inches and dove into the waters.

He had no time to watch her swim away, for the flood wall was almost upon him. Heading to the bank he was dragged down by the waters lapping about his chest. He was thankful to see that his men had thrown a rope out for him to latch onto. He tied it around his waist, grasped the rope again and let them pull him to safety. He clambered to his feet and immediately looked behind him. The massive wall of water, shoving gravel and stones in its path, came rolling past them and moved on down the river bed. When it reached the cage wagon, the force pushed it over and tumbled it along like a wooden match box until it was out of sight. The onlookers stood in silence, awed by what they were witnessing.

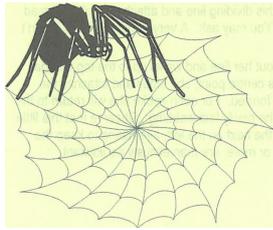
Everyone was safe and accounted for, so it was just a matter of waiting out the storm, then moving on to the palace to report the bad news to the Sheik and rest there until the level of the river subsided enough to re-cross. After their return, in the days that followed, there were no further reports of any lion attacks on villagers and livestock. The Captain wondered if Kalamoona had drowned after all. He told himself, "a beast so passionate about survival – surely not." While sitting on the terrace of his bungalow listening to the evening sounds, he distinctly heard the chuff of a lion. Then he thought he saw the reflection of the porch light in an amber pair of eyes hidden in the bushes. He knew it must be her saying her farewell.



Mrs Sally Spider by Colyn

BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER!

That can well be stated with regard to Sally but sadly when Sally happens to come in contact, with one of those giants of the earth, 'man or woman', she is greeted with screams, stamps, brushes, washed down the drain or hovered up.



Her workmanship, one of the marvels of the world of 'small' things, is called a cobweb, to be 'brushed' away. Of course, some humans do speak of the beauty of a dew-covered spider web at dawn. Some do know that Sally is actually mankind's friend, helping to control the insect population and generally striving to stay out of man's way. But if more persons knew of her architectural ability! Might not even more, change their minds?

Despite her eight hairy legs and matronly figure, might they not see the beauty of her artistry? Consider just a few of the designs by some of this lady architect. At first glance many spider webs would appear to be little more than a jumble of thin threads. But further examination will often reveal great ingenuity. For example let's take Mrs. Platform Spider. (Notice it is always Mrs. as males do not spin webs. Typical!) She begins by stringing many guywires in a crisscross pattern. Below these she constructs a tightly woven silk sheet or very fine net. Flying insects hit the wiring and fall into the net below. Other spiders build a bow shaped sheet, or a rounded dome under which the spider hides. Captured insects are pulled through these sheets. Mrs. Platform Spider, a very tidy housekeeper, will afterwards often repair her silky tablecloth.

But not all webs are motionless traps. One type of spider actually spins a lasso. This small, elastic web is pulled taut between the twigs of a tree and held in place by the cowgirl, until some unsuspecting insect bumps into it. Flash! She lets out some slack on her line and the

web springs forward, entangling the hapless intruder. With a series of such snapping movements, the insect is thoroughly corralled.

While not all varieties of spiders construct webs, such designers are numerous among the more than 33,000 known kinds. Yet, amidst them all, one family is considered distinctive, the artist par excellence. They are the **orb** (round web) weavers like the garden spider Sally. These, build the most beautiful and complicated of all webs.

Would you like to observe an orb weaver, and see how she does it? Let's observe Sally, the queen of the spider architects as she vigorously begins her next project. First of all, you will have to watch closely, for she moves quickly and decisively. Her first accomplishment must be the securing of a mainline from which to work out the foundation lines of her web. You may wonder at her choice of location, right over a small stream. Why not pick an easier place? But she knows the value of setting her net, over an insect airline. But how will she get a line across the stream? See her perched on that twig and raising her belly into the air casting out a silk thread. The breeze will lift it like a kite as she continues to play out line. Holding the string by the claw of one leg, she feels when it hits something on the other side of the stream. Her objective reached, she pulls up the slack in the line and so has her tight-rope over the water.

Working from this bridge line, she lays out the foundation lines, forming a rectangle. Other supports will later stretch this into a many sided pattern. Now, see how she goes to the centre of the topline of this rectangle, attaching a silk thread and drops through the air to the middle of the bottom line. With the rectangle thus halved, she goes to the centre of this **dividing line** and attaches another thread. How does she find the centre without a measuring tape? You may ask. A very good question but I can't tell you the answer for no one has discovered it.

In any case, from this midpoint Sally carefully plays out her line and walks up to

the top foundation line. Travelling along this line a short distance from its centre point, she stops and attaches the new rope. The first spoke of a geometric wheel has been formed. For each following spoke she will return to the centre point or hub and play out a line by walking along the newly laid webbing. Observe that this little engineer puts one spoke, on the right hand side and then the next on the left, alternating to keep the strain balanced until all the spokes are in. All twenty-four, or more, are marvelously equidistant.

After strengthening the centre with a few spiral lines, Sally now seems to lose interest. Starting from near centre, she lays down a rough, wide spaced spiral across the spokes. Sloppy workmanship you say? Certainly not! For this spiral is simply scaffolding; a platform from which to do more difficult finishing work. Sally will dismantle this scaffolding as each section of it is no longer needed.

Now, starting from a point near the edge of the rectangle, she works in a spiral toward the centre. For this circular webbing she has switched to elastic, sticky coated silk. For years this sticky webbing has amazed naturalists. Why? Because each segment had beads of glue exactly equidistant from one another. How could this tiny creature measure these out so precisely? Then, finally, the secret came out. After Sally has laid her glue-smearred line between two spokes, she plucks or twangs it like a guitar string. The vibration separates the glue into equidistant drops!

Sally moves slowly from spoke to spoke in concentric circles, tying, gluing and twanging around 13,000 of these short sticky lines. Finally, after a few finishing touches, she is ready for the last step; installing a telephone service. She runs a silky telephone line from her web to her hideaway which is often under a nearby leaf. As Sally cannot see very well, she depends a great deal on her excellent sense of touch. When an insect flies into the web and gets stuck there, the thrashing sends vibrations down the telephone line, telling Sally that her groceries have arrived. In fact, since these vibration signal mealtime, when Mr. Spider

comes home, he wisely drums a little tune on the edge of the web. This serenade prevents him from being pounced on, by his hungry nearsighted lover!

In considering the engineering and craftsmanship possessed by Sally, you may find it difficult to believe that only one hour is needed by her to complete the entire project.

Can you imagine any man being able to spread out and mount a net over a wide river in one hour, while manufacturing his own rope, glue and telephone system at the same time?

Even more astounding is that Sally will not bother to make repairs when insects tear her netting. She will take the whole web out of its frame and make a new one. Ordinarily she does this once every twenty-four hours. How can she keep doing this? Well, underneath her abdomen, there are usually six tube-like organs called spinnerets. It is from these that the several different silks are ejected. However, it is not as if she simply has moveable hoses. Each spinneret is a small lump composed of more than a hundred tiny tubes; each able to be individually controlled by her. Commenting on the threads produced by this intricate equipment, one naturalist says: "The spider's spinning machine is far superior to that devised by man to spin bridge cables, for the spider can vary the size and strength of its cable at will merely by spreading the spinnerets apart or placing them closely together."

"Amazing" declares the scientist who studies her anatomy. But if he is a proponent of evolution, Sally presents him with a serious scientific dilemma. How did this tiny "animal", (spiders have eight legs which sets them apart from insects with six), discover and evolve oil glands in her feet thus preventing her from sticking to her own glue? Who taught her the principles and application of engineering and geometry? "Instinct" says our scientist. And it is true that the ability to make webs has an instinctive component. Many baby spiders make perfect miniatures that are no larger than a postage stamp.

But we still face the mystery of how such a small creature evolved such a wide

range of instructions. "Well, she evolved them over the centuries," the evolutionist will reply. But as one researcher notes: "There are no scientific grounds for supposing that the habits of spiders generally have greatly changed." So with each discovery about her, the question resurfaces. Why does she display intelligence not found in much larger, so called more advanced creatures? For other

persons there isn't any dilemma here. They accept a concise answer found in the Bible in Genesis 1:25 where it is written: "And God proceeded to make every moving animal of the ground according to its kind." So in the final analysis, you have your own decision to make! When you next see, the gauzy web of Sally, ask yourself about the Master Architect who taught her to weave so skillfully?

The Crumbles: Part 3 by Vanessa



Still puzzled by what had just occurred, Daisy found her mother alone in the kitchen preparing a meal. She climbed on a stool. Her mother turned and smiled at her but continued with her task. If there was one thing that Daisy knew about the world of grown-ups, it was that they were always busy. At least, this was certainly true of her parents.

'You've been out a long time, Daisy. Where have you been? Playing with friends?'

'No I went down to the Crumbles.'

'Haven't you got any homework to do Daisy? Why don't you go and do it while I get on with the tea? I'll call you when it's ready.'

Daisy was used to her parents talking in non-sequiturs like this. It was as if nothing a child said could be worthy of listening to or any considered response. She didn't take it personally – she just assumed all parent-child communication was like this. Both her parents had jobs, and when they finished those jobs for the day and came home, they still had jobs to do around the house, and when they had finished *those* jobs they were either too tired to do anything but sleep or else they had to go out to the pub. Daisy of course knew nothing about the world of the pub, but it didn't concern her because it meant at least two nights a week she could watch all the unsuitable TV programmes that were otherwise banned to her. Daisy had been allowed to go to the pub with her parents twice, but she had been made to sit in the car in the car park and they brought her out a glass of Coke and a packet of crisps which Daisy thought she was expected to be intensely grateful for and dutifully obliged. She felt excluded, of course, like something a bit unsavoury and a bit embarrassing - like a bit of dog poo near a picnic which no-one mentions because then it will become too obvious to ignore. Daisy giggled to herself when she thought of this.

Daisy frequently doubted that the adults she knew had ever been children. Grown-ups and children had so little in common they might as well be different alien species from two different planets. Their two worlds were so far removed there was no possible means of communication. Schoolteachers – the only other adults Daisy had much to do with outside the family – were

people she knew you had to listen to and obey, and not much more than that. They were people who only existed during school hours – not real people at all. Daisy blamed the world of work which was an exclusively adult realm and which seemed to be the source of most of their problems and complaining. It seemed to swallow them up and drain them of happiness. It baffled Daisy why grown-ups subjected themselves to it. Work just seemed to be something you *had* to do and Daisy dreaded the day she would become old to *have* to do it too.

Daisy ran upstairs to her bedroom and threw herself down on her bed. She was glad her mother had suggested this – it was another escape. She had already done her homework. She could gaze out at the sky through the window in her bedroom from where she laid – a cloudless deep blue sky which hypnotized her into a dreamy, unthinking daze.

The slam of a door and the sound of voices broke her reverie. Daisy's father had come home from work. Almost immediately she heard her mother shout 'Daisy! Tea's ready! Can you wash your hands and come down please?' She knew she had to obey and she did.

Summer days began to wane and all too soon another school year approached.

Daisy felt unsettled about the coming school year. She had graduated from being the childish baby of the school to the 'second year'. She wasn't sure what this implied about how she should behave. She was aware that some pupils at the school appeared for all intents and purposes to be *adults*. They had bosoms and waists and hips and they wore make-up and they looked like adults and they wore blue metal badges declaring 'Prefect' diagonally and apparently this entitled them to shout at you and treat you as some inferior form of life, like a rat or an amoeba. Daisy had been studying amoebas in her biology lessons.

But still, Daisy had performed well in her first year at the big school. In the end-of-term exams she had come second in her class of thirty pupils overall. In some subject areas, she had come 'first'. Daisy's parents were proud of her, although they were naturally disappointed that she hadn't come 'first' in every subject – but because of her relative success



they bought her a watch – her first and utterly grown-up watch – a Timex no less. The significance of this was entirely lost on Daisy. Time meant nothing to her except when it meant time to escape – escape from the rules and escape from the ‘not allowed’ and escape from the fear of doing the wrong thing and fear of being told off and feeling the disappointment of adults and the fear of therefore feeling inadequate and the fear of simply being coerced and being a puppet that performs when their strings are pulled.

Daisy was growing up.

It was an Indian summer that year, when Daisy was twelve. A gloriously warm and balmy September, folding everyone in unexpected comfort and indolence, just before the leaves dry up and Autumnal colours and leaf drop heralds the winter. Daisy was walking home from school one Friday when she encountered Mr. Sutton again. He was ... Daisy didn’t know what ... just doing something in his immaculate front garden, his presentation to the world that said, ‘I’m OK. I’m a success, I’m untouchable, so piss you all off.’

‘Hello Daisy!’ he said cheerily. Daisy stopped and smiled. ‘How are you’, he asked, but Daisy knew, somehow, he didn’t really care.

‘I’m fine’ she said with a smile. ‘How are you?’ This was the response Daisy knew she should make and she knew she could do it, completely convincingly.

‘Oh, I’m fine thank you Daisy. Have you been down to the Crumbles recently?’

No, Daisy thought. That’s something that has been forever spoiled for me now – but would someone like you understand or care? Could you understand that it was *my* safe, secret place and you were an intruder?

‘No, not recently’ she eventually replied.

‘Have you got any plans this weekend? Going out and about with friends perhaps?’

‘No. Nothing planned.’

‘There’s a new Disney cartoon on at the Odeon – perhaps you’d like to go and see it with me tomorrow afternoon?’

Daisy pondered this question. Why on earth, she thought, would an old man like Mr. Sutton want to go to the pictures with a young girl like her? Was it because he had no children of his own?

‘Oh, no thank you’, she replied. ‘I wouldn’t be allowed to.’ She waved her goodbye and ran into her house before Mr. Sutton had time to say anything else.

Daisy’s mother was, as usual, busy in the kitchen. She turned to smile at Daisy and said ‘Hello Daisy, have you had a good day at school?’

‘Yes. I got nineteen out of twenty in my Maths test.’

‘Well done Daisy! Clever girl! I’m going to let you have a *small* piece of cake as a treat for being so clever!’ Daisy noted the way her mother emphasized the word ‘small’. It implied she needed to be grateful for what she got and not expect more. *Large* slices of cake were considered the work of the Devil and heresy in her mother’s house.

While Daisy was eating her cake she thought about telling her mother what Mr. Sutton had asked. She couldn’t be sure her mother would believe her. Daisy’s parents often implied that she was lying, or making up stories, or had simply misinterpreted her experience – and sometimes Daisy would become convinced that they were right. Adults were the ones in sole possession of the ‘Truth’. She remembered telling them that her friend Judith’s Dad could turn himself into a woman whenever he wanted to and they had just laughed in that slightly, mocking, condescending way they often did and told her not to be so silly. And she had thought, yes – she had found it difficult to believe what Judith said – but why would she lie? And why would she beg Daisy to keep it a secret? She decided not to say anything to her mother about Mr. Sutton. It wasn’t important anyway – just a bit puzzling. She would avoid him in future, by rushing past his house and ignoring him.

‘Daisy, why don’t you go up to your room and play?’

‘Play with what?’

‘Oh, I don’t know – your plastic animals or something.’ Daisy’s mother was referring to her huge collection of plastic farm animals. They all had names and they all had individual characters and they had been engaging in epic adventures and heroic feats defeating the forces of evil for as long as Daisy could remember, both within her imagination and with animation in the privacy of her bedroom.

Daisy considered it but wrinkled up her nose. ‘I’ve decided to stop playing’ she announced.

Her mother put down the scraper she was using to peel the potatoes and turned to look at Daisy.

‘Why?’

‘Oh, I just think I’m too old for playing like that anymore. Can I watch the telly instead?’



The Martian (film review by Isolde)

Astronaut Mark Watney (played by actor Matt Damon) must summon all of his courage and ingenuity to endure a seemingly impossible situation, that of being left behind and alone on Mars. Trying to exist on his own without help in a perpetually lethal environment would to the average man seem to present extremely poor survival odds. But like Robinson Crusoe our hero is a survival-oriented pragmatist who sees each new life-threatening crisis as a problem solving exercise. Provided he can get his fear and despair under control long enough to think straight, he will put his prodigious technical knowledge into action and succeed in carrying on. A traditional Hollywood hero, we know he'll come through but we still can't help fearing, hoping and cheering.



Based on the Novel by Andy Weir

Mark keeps himself busy devising ways to keep alive for what he knows will be a presumably long stretch of time before a rescue mission will reach him. Before establishing audio-visual contact with NASA headquarters, he stays off loneliness by making video diary entries. He listens to music via his captain's laptop left abandoned at the Mars station. Hilariously, much of the film's soundtrack consists of these retro-disco tracks. He spends a lot of time talking to himself while doing tasks. In this way he walks us – the audience - through his processes, sharing the practical scientific “how to” he applies to make a devise or a scheme work. These are some of the best segments in the film.



Action-packed Space Adventure Quest



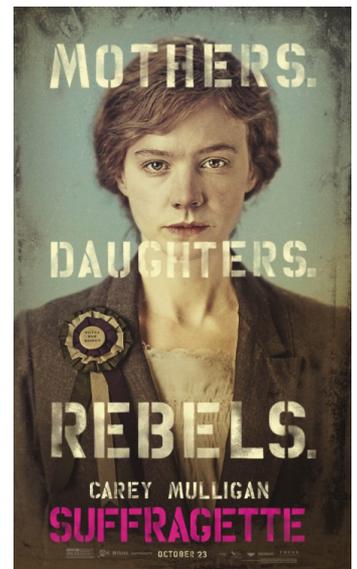
Out of a sense of honour and obligation, the head of NASA's Mars missions wants to bring Mark home. But others involved are initially sceptical. It's not a question of whether they want to do the humane and heroic thing, but whether such a thing is actually possible. Despite the heated discussions about how risky, time consuming and expensive a rescue mission would be, NASA decides it will indeed have to stage one. Once they are all agreed to go ahead with this rescue, the NASA technicians, scientists and managers pool their resources in a race against the clock to work out each phase of the operation. In the final stages of the rescue, billions of people gather worldwide to watch events unfolding on live TV. Though months have passed when the astronaut's precarious existence on Mars has not been especially newsworthy, at the critical moment, all of humanity is focused on Mark's fate.

SUFFRAGETTE (film review by Graeme)

A drama that tracks the story of the foot soldiers of the early feminist movement, women who were forced underground to pursue a dangerous game of cat and mouse with an increasingly brutal State. These women were not primarily from the genteel educated classes, they were working women who had seen peaceful protest achieve nothing. Radicalized and turning to violence as the only route to change, they were willing to lose everything in their fight for equality - their jobs, their homes, their children and their lives. Maud was one such foot soldier. The story of her fight for dignity is as gripping and visceral as any thriller, and it is also heart-breaking and inspirational.

The story of how women got the vote is the one of the best films I have seen this year.

With powerful performances, especially from Carey Mulligan as a mother who finds herself becoming involved in the movement, the film really makes you think and appreciate the effort women made to get the vote.



I have had several discussions with women about voting so this film really made interesting viewing. The most shocking aspect of the film was the apathy shown by other women whom seemed happy to accept their circumstances. Nobody should accept their circumstances, especially when they are being put down, bullied and made to feel like second class citizens.

Befrienders Highland at the 2015 Scottish Mental Health Arts & Film Festival

This year was the second year *Write On* group members successfully contributed to the *Scottish Mental Health Arts & Film Festival* (SMHAFF). Congratulations to all involved who made the evening so enjoyable. With the eyes of the 100-strong audience upon you, it takes a lot of courage to get onto the stage and share with them your own personal work. I hope you will join me in thanking them for their contribution and doing the group proud! If performing isn't for you but you would like to be involved in next year's event there are many different ways to get involved. Get in contact with us and we can tell you more.



This year the theme of the festival was "Passion"

Graeme's refreshingly honest spoken words accompanied his partially improvised visual take on his dreams and reality in his performance piece titled '*Dreamality*'. Graeme spoke openly and frankly about his ambitions, issues and responsibilities. Sharing this often private aspect of life highlighted to the audience that we all go through our own trials and tribulations and are not alone in this. Graeme finished his performance with a positive message - That feeling good about yourself isn't about measuring up to others and to be proud for what we do have.

Isolde returned to this year's festival after delighting the audience with her take on a viral *Youtube* clip last year. At this year's event she met the high praise she received with another really impressive performance. Isolde performed her poem '*Silk Stream*' in which the lines expressed her wish to find her "passion" in life. This new piece blended poetry and dance to produce a captivating display. The alternation of her words spoken in moments of silence with dreamy musical passages was mesmerizing. Floaty movement of her silk shawl choreographed in perfect harmony with a moody piano solo, created a hypnotic audio / visual treat, taking the audience into a dreamlike world where they discover Isolde's passion is her veil dance.

Film: As we advertised earlier in the year, group members came together to produce a film to be shown on the opening night of the arts and film festival this year which was successfully premiered on the evening. By way of background information, Graeme together with Jim wrote the script before going out to shot footage in the summer. Martin Bannon from Inverness College kindly helped us bring the film together by editing the footage. We also had contributions from Marion Roberts who provided the voice over to accompany Graeme's part. The film is titled '*Passion*' and can be seen on *Youtube* by searching '*Befrienders Highland Passion*'. The film explores life & friendships. Have a look for yourself! Congratulations to everyone who contributed towards the film on your fantastic achievement.



Befrienders Highland 2016 Calendar

We had a great response to our request for pictures for our 2016 calendar. There are some talented photographers amongst us.

This year's theme was 'What Makes You Smile' and there was quite an array of different photos submitted which just goes to show that everyone is different and different things make us smile.

Thanks go to all of our contributors, we really appreciate the time and effort you took to take your photos and submit them to us.

We managed to include at least one photo from everyone who contributed and we think the finished calendar is a credit to everyone involved.

Here is a selection of some of the photos included in the 2016 calendar.

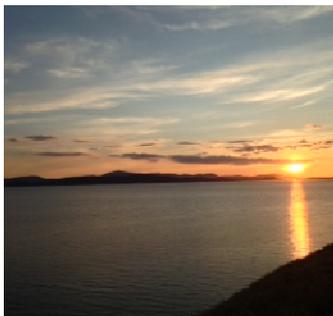
Isolde Nettles Mackay



Sara Lucock



Rebecca Wallace



Simon Campbell



We are already on the lookout for photos for our 2017 calendar on the subject of 'What Inspires You?' So get your thinking caps on and get those photographic masterpieces sent into us – you have a whole year!