

UKAway 2009

Paphos Cyprus

**chapbook of the annual writers'
holiday organised by
the UKAuthors.com website**

Gold Dust
A Gold Dust special

UKAway 2009



Left to right: Lillian MacLeod, John Goodwin, David Gardiner, Geoff Nelder

This is the chapbook of the work done by the participants in the 2009 UKAway event at Agios Georgios near Paphos in Southern Cyprus.

This was the smallest number attending any of the UKAway events so far but it allowed us to give more time to discussing each person's work.



This was our hotel, about 18 km from Paphos above a small fishing harbour. It was comfortable, with en suites and a swimming pool, but fairly isolated. Often we were the only guests.



The nearby harbour from the sundeck of a cliff-top taverna where we often had our dinner



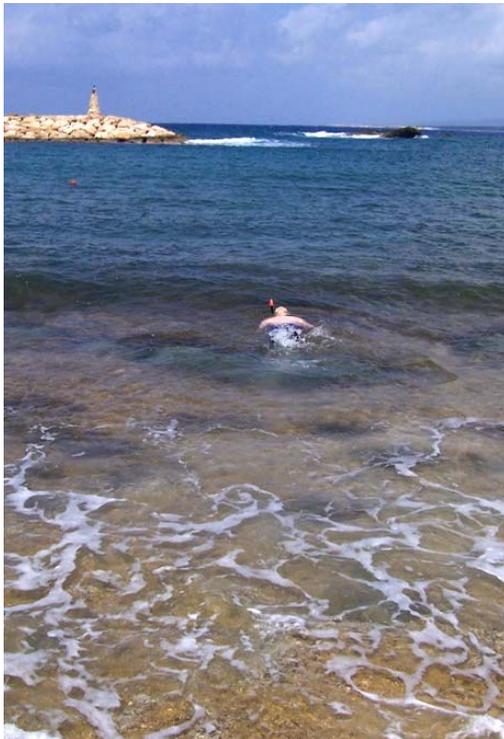
A lot of the surrounding countryside is covered in ragwort at this time of the year



The Avakas Gorge was only a couple of Km from where we were staying



Geoff hired a bicycle to help him to get around and see the sights



David sets out for Turkey
Due to some rough seas farther out he didn't quite make it



The covered market in Paphos sells all the usual tourist items such as local crafts and postcards



A lot of the surrounding land is rough grazing or scrub



Cactus thrives



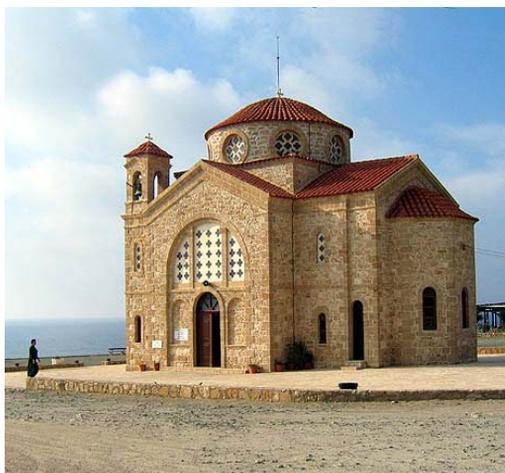
View from the hotel room where the local writers' group met



Amazing scenery near the gorge. Citrus plantation in valley (foreground)



Some of the places that Geoff got to on his bike, Geoff sold pictures and an article on *Cycling in the Akamas*, to *Cycling World*



Small nearby church



Abandoned polytunnels behind our hotel



Flowers for sale in a garden centre... And growing wild



Coral Bay, the site of the impressive Coral Bay Hotel where the writers' group met, was our nearest significant settlement, about 6 Km down the coast. It was a tourist-oriented small seaside town where every building seemed to be a restaurant, trinket shop or night club. We probably saw it at its worst, just emerging from its winter hibernation and preparing for a new tourist season which hadn't quite started yet.

This picture shows some of the rooftop solar hot water systems, which were almost universal, and also evidence of the the local people's love affair with satellite TV.

When we managed to get away to a small local festival in a mountain village, things looked very different ...



Children dressed as tulips perform a dance in the grounds of a large village taverna



Austin 7 belonging to a member of a Vintage Car Club



The event was evidently organised by the local Cosa Nostra godfather



Teenage dancing girls



A Greek beauty by any standard



Everyone has a good time under the watchful eye of the Don

Flora and Fauna



Rare Anemone ANEMONE CORONARIA: (Crown Anemone)

This was spotted and photographed by Geoff near the Avakas Gorge, and later identified by John. The description that follows is from Halliday, S., & Lushington, L., (1988), *Flowers of Northern Cyprus*, Angus Hudson Ltd, London. Geoff's underlining:

This is one of the most memorable and beautiful Mediterranean plants because of its brightly-coloured flowers, which are among the first to appear in the early spring (although exceptionally bad storms of rain or hail and cold winds have been known to retard the flowering time until the sun encourages them to appear). Flower stems 10-30 cm high, bearing a solitary flower head, leaf-like twice cut into narrow segments.

Flowers large, 4-8 cms across, without green sepals, which distinguishes it clearly from the Asiatic Buttercup; 5-8 oval petals, in many different flower colours of lavender, lilac, deep purple, red to scarlet, rose-pink, magenta, and more rarely white, blue or in many and various intermediate shades, sometimes two-coloured, with a white or pale base; even the white have a circle of white in the area near the stamens (the white petals make this circle more difficult to see, but caught in the sun at certain angle the white circle shines silvery-white or white).

The red form and the shades of purple are the most widespread, but it is very exciting to find the rarer pale apricot pink and the deep salmon pink. Fruiting heads become taller and more cylindrical as the petals fade. Stamens numerous; filaments pink, violet or red; anthers purplish or black; styles threadlike 1-2 mm long, blackish. Torus ovoid; nutlets densely woolly. Leaves broadly triangular, 3-12 cm across, divided into 3 triangular, stalked, pinnatifid or deeply divided segments, ultimate divisions narrow, variously toothed; stalks 3-7 cm long.

The Habitat of both normal and dwarf forms (var. *Parviflora*) with just as many brilliant colours, but with flowers no larger than a lady's small watch-face, open spaces, grassy slopes and hillsides, in cultivated and fallow fields, by roadsides; sea-level to 2,900 ft alt. On the Kyrenia range, near Five Finger mts and across from the south face towards the Nicosia road. Flowers from December to April.

Distribution: Kyrenia- Karaoglanoglu (Akamas) according to Meikle in 1962 (var. *Coronaria*). It grows in profusion among the foothills of the Kyrenia range (north face) and on the roadsides, also on the furrow-ridges of agricultural land between Tepebasi and Guzelyurt. The dwarf anemones were in olive groves and open scrubland north-west of Five Finger mts., near the village of Arapkooy.



Local lizard species: a chunky one about a foot long and a small fast-moving one of about 6"



Local toad species – similar size to UK toad

Haunted hotel

The semi-derelict hotel next to ours had a stagnant and filthy swimming pool which seemed to be the home of hundreds of loud-croaking amphibians whose pitiful calls kept us awake at night but which we never actually managed to see or find in the daytime.

Lillian and others occasionally saw human figures at its windows, or men reading newspapers in the foyer who would later vanish as well. We suspected supernatural (or possibly merely economic) forces to be at work.

Our Literary Activities



Lillian hard at work on the patio behind John's house

So what did we write then?

The work that follows wasn't necessarily produced entirely on the holiday, most of us took along work already in progress as well as starting new work while we were in Cyprus, but these are some of the pieces we discussed and analysed at the various sessions.

Two Limericks

By David Gardiner

We scribblers four from UK
Descended on Cyprus one day
In search of some muses
Who would not refuse us
But gallantly show us the way.

A group of four writers obscure
At Paphos are seeking the cure
For an absence of fame
to ensure that each name
In legend will ever endure.

Janet and John Deconstruct a Cassini Ring

by Geoff Nelder

Written in the style of the 20th Century children's reading primers – Janet and John. This is inspired by a British Fantasy Society anthology 'A Dick And Jane Primer For Adults'. The idea is to use their simple, repetitive genre narrative to be creative in a different way to contemporary adult stories. An experiment.

When nine-year-old Janet smuggles aboard a Rusevelt IV shuttle she smiles. When Janet smiles her black hair looks like a mop being shaken. Shaking is something she does when she's nervous but her smiling helps her to get over it.

If you remember Book 6 you'll know that shuttles fly from Earth to Base Mons Olympus on Mars. Janet knew that too. Isn't she clever?

Not really. Sadly, the Rusevelt IV decides to have a leaky turbo ion thruster.

Mars is the fourth planet from the sun.

Janet ended up at the fifth. Do you think she's annoyed to end up at Saturn? Quite right, she is fucking annoyed.

She yells at the pilot, "All you had to do was to keep the sun behind us until the shuttle reaches Mars."

"Actually, Miss Stowaway Janet, it is more complicated than that. Ask in another few years' time if you're interested in intercept and catch-up trajectories."

A stowaway is someone who smuggle themselves on a spaceship. Remember Janet stowed herself away on the Rusevelt IV. Janet broke rules and should be sorry.

"I'm sorry I came now." Janet is sorry but for the wrong reason. Do you know what that reason is? You will in a minute.

The pilot pulls at the semicircular neck on his green T-shirt, then breathes out garlic. "We can't send you back yet."

Janet thinks he should have a proper uniform. A uniform with a smart white jacket.

"I wanted to be on Mars with my friend, John." Now you know why she is really sorry. Sorry too, as she staggers away from the pilot's garlicky breath. She notices his name badge.

"Isn't Gee Force something we feel when..."

"Yes, Janet. Aren't you the clever one? I'm Gordon. My parents had an odd sense of humour. We can't do anything about your John on Mars, but there is a boy your age in the Higgs Accelerator Programme."



G. Force takes Janet by her hand and whirls her around. His large hand envelopes hers in warm smooth skin. She feels comforted, though she is aware that for some reason she isn't supposed to let men hold her hand. Down a curved white corridor smelling of lemons they conveyor-belt for ages. Ages for Janet is any time more than five minutes. After ages, Janet's eyes widen at a strawberry-coloured dome so tall she sees flying chairs like flies.

There are no flies on space stations. Have you seen flies on Earth? Do you think flies might be aliens inspecting us? Janet does.

"Over there standing by the red door, Janet. The boy with the marmalade hair? That's Dick."

Janet likes marmalade, especially chunky. So she likes Dick. Dick is chunky.

G. Force leaves them to talk.

"Dick, can I join you in the Higgs Accelerator programme?"

Janet sees him examining his feet. They shuffle around as if embarrassed.



"G-guess so. I'll give you the..."

"Tour?"

So he does. Another ages along a vanilla corridor takes Dick and Janet to a large curved window. Janet gasps. When Janet opens her mouth she puts her hand in front to hide her missing upper right canine tooth. It saves her the job of describing a play fight with John many ages ago.

"No one can mistake Saturn's rings, Dick. Amazing."

"You see the Huygens G-gap, Janet?"

"Between the A and B Rings near the Cassini Division, Dick?" Janet is a geek, but isn't everyone these days?

His grin makes cheek freckles join up. "That's where we are making the accelerator. I'll tell you how we magnetise the ice fragments... uh oh."

Janet frowns at the two-syllable worry and turns to follow his gaze. An even more frowning girl marches towards them. Dick steps in front.

"Jane, I can explain." Jane's red face and clenched fists don't want explanations.

Janet turns and runs. Running is interesting in low gravity, have you tried it? Janet's sprint muscles worked fine when her right foot pushed off but now her left foot misses the floor because she floats more than she expected.

Janet might appear to be in slow motion but the drink carton Jane threw at her isn't, and it flew in a flatter trajectory. Do you think that makes it fast? It does, and it catches Janet in the back of her head.

Janet's head is now orange flavoured. She lets out an ah, and tumbles slowly to the shiny floor. Once there, she twists as she slides and sees Jane stick out her tongue. Janet thinks that is rude. Do you? Janet sticks a finger in the air.

Jane continues her advance, elbows flapping like an angry seagull. Dick tries to calm her. He is used to running in low gravity and is soon slipping on spilt orange juice.

"We were only looking at the rings."

"Children!" bellows G. Force.

Jane points a skinny finger. "She started it."

"In that case, Janet, come with me."

"But." But Jane stops butting. Would you? G. Force takes her hand. This time he squeezes harder, colder. Less friendly, more jailor.

For two weeks Jane endures lectures from G. Force, who is her parentis in loco on instructions from furious mummy and daddy on Earth.

She makes an effort in the particle physics lab. "Hey, Jane."

Nothing.

Janet wants to ask where Dick is but doesn't appreciate bruises. "I've finished my boson assignment. What's next?" Do you think Janet is being naïve expecting Jane to be helpful? You're r-r-wrong. She has a plan. You'll find out in a minute.

You see, the accelerator hasn't started yet. There's a problem. A problem with... ah, her messenger buzzes on her wrist. Hey, it's John, he's sending a new patch for her Mario game, so her excitement induces bubbles to escape from her nose. She laughs, but Jane's face looks like a crumpled pillow.

Janet skips towards the refectory. Her skips reach the ceiling. When her nose is up there, she can smell curry. Janet licks her lips.

Revealing her plan might take longer than a minute now.

You think buttons keep cardigans from falling apart. They do. So does this one, the Duper Mario Collider Simulator, even though it looks like Janet's favourite chocolate buttons.

"Yummy, brilliant camouflage." She looks around to make sure Dick is looking and to allow John's patch to upload, then wipes it in front of her computer console.

Dick gasps. "We aren't allowed to play Duper Mario games here." He fidgets with his fingers.

"Really? Look."

“Version three with the patch.” Dick grins. Janet realizes that he knows the patch is a rarity.

Janet wears the smile of a superhero having saved a planet. The planet hasn't been saved though, has it? Nor anything else, but Janet has captured Dick's heart and you now know Janet's plan.

Dick looks at the door. “Look out, J-Jane's coming and she has orange drinks.”

Janet has not drunk orange since the fracas with Jane but she smiles as a disguise.

Jane flies into the room. Janet hasn't seen a flying chair up close before. Jane always looks cross though Janet wonders if she smiles when Janet isn't looking. An orange carton is in her hand and held behind her like a grenade. Janet dives under a desk and surprises herself at how far she slides. She slides all the way to the wall, which is curved. She glides up... then down.

Before she can have a proper fight the floor vibrates sending them all in slow-mo fall.

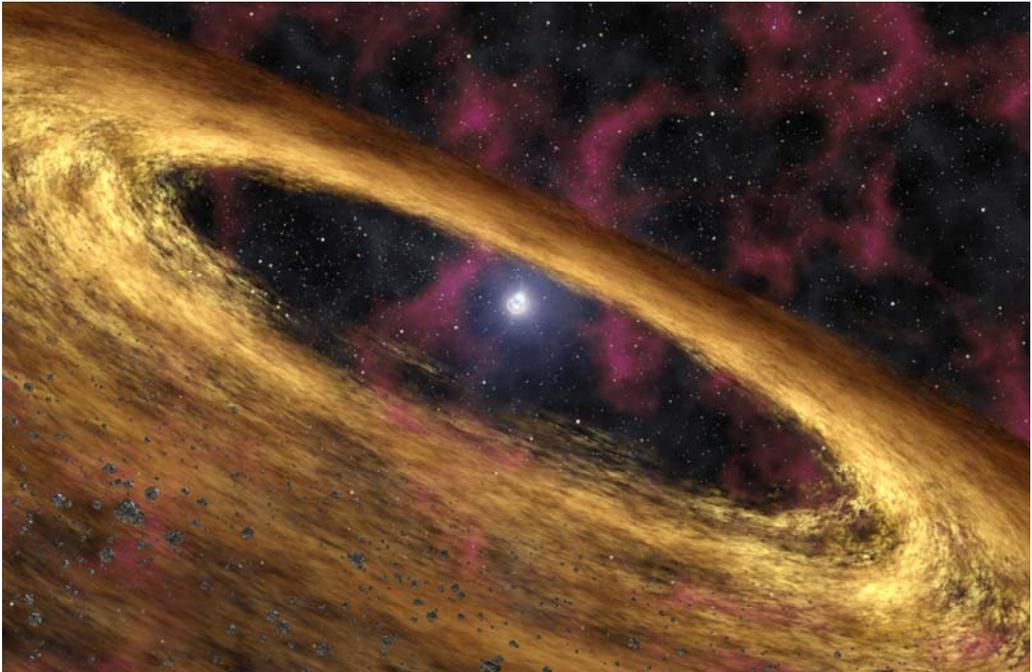
Like during an Earth tremor the walls blur, pencils and cups march off desks and follow the children to the floor. The lights flicker out and Janet's ears hurt from screams. She screams too. A soft blue light begins to illuminate the shaking floor, making them all look like ghosts. Janet sends a message to John.

“What was in that patch?”

“Only the latest enhancement. Dominatrix FX, whatever that means.”

Janet pulls herself up to the window. “Domino effect.” The magnetised ice particles along the Huygens Gap are also vibrating and now nudge each other. A ripple starting at the point nearest the station warps Saturn's rings. It looks like a solar flare, but made of ice. Saturn's rings are about to collapse.

Janet looks at Dick. “Bugger.”



Suicide Note of a Wannabe Novelist

By John Goodwin WRIP (Write in Peace)¹

~~To my friends.~~ *What friends? I don't have any friends; I am the original 'Johnny no-mates.' What an epitaph, to have a cliché named after me. ~~To my colleagues,~~ ~~then.~~ *Nah that implies we were in business together. How about, 'My ~~piers~~ peers'? It still sounds like they should be standing in water. Truth be told, half of them were afraid to get their feet wet. ~~To everyone who knows me.~~ *No one really knows me... I've got it: To those who think they know me. You didn't. I like that; maybe I should leave it there. Enigmatic, poignant, brief. After all those years struggling to keep under eighty-thousand words I sum it up in nine. Brilliant. I'll explain the rest as a footnote.*¹**



1. To be read to the sound of mournful violins.

I tried so hard to write and get it right. I took on board all the comments, made the changes, ran the spellchecker, made more changes and ran it again. I cut some good bits, because that's supposed to be good. I eliminated the crass, cut the clichés, administered the last writes on the adverbs and adjectives and even cut out 'just' and 'then.' Still no one wants my manuscript.

Was I downhearted? Well I suppose I was a bit, but every now and then someone threw me a bone and just when I was prepared to abandon all hope the tunnel would lighten in the distance.

I was cheerful enough most of the time, at least to outside observers. What they didn't know was that inside I was slowly losing the battle with my lifelong nemesis. It was this terrible thing, a construct of man but in my opinion the spawn of the devil, which drove me into my last depression and my ultimate demise.

What, you may ask, has such power? What can make a happy man very old? I'll tell you; it's the comma.

This dot with a tail, purporting to be an aid to the reader has rules, and exceptions to the rules, enough to break the heart of the unwary writer. I tried to be a wary writer but ended up a weary writer. So many options, so many opinions.

Oh...I put a comma in.

I take a comma out,

In, out, in, out, move them all about.

I think its okey dokey then I turn around.

Spellchecker throws them out.

Oh, oh a semicolon? Oh, oh? A semicolon, Oh, oh! A semicolon!

Knees bend arms stretch, Blah, blah, blah.

I got to the point where the next person who said, 'you need a comma in there,' was likely to find one stuffed where they normally keep their colon.

So there it is, the English language has done for me what I almost did for it. I'll take my leave and end it, not with a full stop but with a comma, that way I may not be dead. Perhaps only in a coma, to revive when what I have to say is more important than the way I say it,

Limericks by Elfstone (Lillian MacLeod)

**In Cyprus we gathered for writing;
We tried not to make critiques biting.
We're a civilised bunch
As we chat over lunch.
We wouldn't indulge in infighting.**

**There's fields of bananas and palm trees
Whose fronds waft around in a soft breeze.
The hibiscus look grand,
Flowers as big as my hand
And there's oranges, lemons and sweet peas.**

**We've seen some quite old archaeology
(I know that's a bit of tautology)
And there's many sea caves
All carved out by the waves -
It's truly amazing geology.**

**Quite near to the Avakas Gorge
We stayed, in the town of Saint George,
Where my thoughts all aflame
And my words quite untame
Were tempered in poetry's forge.**

**At Easter we travelled away
For a holiday with UKA
We ate and we walked
And we wrote and we talked
A good blend of work, rest and play.**

**To the country of ancient Ptolemy
A quiet wee voice whispered "follow me"
Through an old orange grove
And wild flowers I roved -
It truly revitalised all of me.**

The Simmons House

by David Gardiner

'This is the kitchen,' our guide announced with her estate agent's cheerful disregard for redundancy, 'the cooker hood is newly fitted and the breakfast bar...' Her voice droned on. I turned to Monica and we exchanged a sympathetic smile. Monica managed to get her question in during one of the young woman's rare pauses for breath. 'Was this the Simmons house?' she asked bluntly.

The woman's fixed smile disappeared. 'Madam,' she said carefully, 'my job is to show you around this property in good faith as a prospective buyer. I can't get involved in any sensationalism about its history. It is a three-bedroom property in very good condition being offered at an exceptionally good price. I think that is all that we need to concern ourselves with, don't you?'

Monica's eyes gleamed and she squeezed my hand. We were right then, that was an obvious yes. Unless it could be a double bluff and the woman wanted us to believe that it was the Simmons house when it wasn't. I doubted if she was that clever.

'We'll take it,' I said quietly, 'at the asking price.'

* * *

I always got Monica to do the direct contact with clients. She had a lot more charm than me, whether face to face or on the telephone. I held her hand affectionately as she spoke to Hollywood. 'We've done a lot better than that,' I heard her tell Miller's people proudly, 'we've got you the actual house. No tenants, no filming rights to negotiate, no problems if you need to knock through walls or make a mess – we've got outright ownership...' There was a pause. 'Well we can't actually prove that it's the Simmons house, but the newspaper records all fit perfectly and everyone we've spoken to thinks it is... Yes, you'll be able to film in the actual room where they found the bodies.' Another pause. 'Well of course it didn't come cheap, but well within the budget we spoke about --- and it's an asset that the production company can dispose of again at the end of filming. I think you'll find that we've got you a pretty exceptional deal... Yes, Mr Miller will find all the details in his in-box right now. And we've put you on the CC.' She bade them farewell and put down the phone. I kissed the hand that I was holding.

'Let's celebrate,' I suggested.

'What did you have in mind?'

I think she could have guessed one of the things I had in mind but I try to be original. 'A meal at Dino's followed by a night in a haunted house. In the very best Hollywood tradition.'

'You're not serious, Sam?'

'Of course I'm serious. How often do you get the chance to do something like that? We could bring our big camping mattress and a couple of sleeping bags. The ones that zip together into one big one.'

'That's creepy. Anyway, who says it's haunted?'

'Only one way to find out.' I gave her a tight hug. 'We're young. Let's do something silly.'

* * *

It was pretty late when I let the two of us in. I went upstairs ahead of Monica and closed the big heavy curtain that I had fitted earlier. The blackout was superb. The big mattress with the oversize sleeping bag on top of it in the middle of the floor. All my preparations were perfect. We undressed silently in the dark and crawled into the sheet-bag.

'Sam, this is the silliest thing we've ever done. There isn't even any hot water for a shower in the morning.'

'Don't be so practical.' I held her gently and started to caress her back. The night had only just begun and I was getting pretty excited already.

'What if that flashlight doesn't work?'

'You're getting scared, aren't you? You'll just have to hold me tight. I won't let the bogey man get you.'

For a few moments we remained motionless and held each other and kissed. 'What was that?' I said suddenly. She clung even tighter and I felt a shudder go through her body.

'Sam! You're horrible! Don't do that to me.' She relaxed and I chuckled and tried to kiss her again. She broke free, 'I don't like this, Sam. Let's go home.'

'Aw Monica. Relax. It's only a bit of fun. A house is just a house. It doesn't matter what happened here. It's just bricks and mortar. Anything more than that is inside our heads. Nowhere else.'

'Okay. If one house is the same as another let's go back to our own. I don't like this one. I'm not going to get any sleep.'

I was disappointed but I could see that Monica was getting genuinely upset and there didn't seem to be much point in forcing the issue. 'Okay, sweetheart,' I said in what I hoped was a conciliatory tone, 'Calm down. It's only a bit of fun. If you don't want to go through with it we won't. We'll get dressed and roll up our mattress and go home.'

'Yes. Let's do that. Please.'

I reached out for the flashlight and moved the slider switch. It didn't come on. 'You're not going to believe this,' I said with a laugh.

'Please, Sam. Stop trying to frighten me. I don't like it. It isn't fun. It's creepy... and a bit sick. Those were real people who died in this room. We shouldn't be doing this. We're treating the whole thing like a Halloween prank. What would those murdered people feel if they knew the way we were treating their memory? This whole thing isn't right. I want to go home.'

'Honest to God, Monica. I'm not trying to frighten you. It doesn't work. It was okay five minutes ago and now it isn't. I think the bulb must have blown.'

There was a worrying silence from Monica. 'I'm telling you the truth,' I said. 'I was fooling around a few minutes ago. Now I'm not. The flashlight has

stopped working. I didn't cause it, it just happened. But it doesn't matter. We can get dressed in the dark. We can leave the stuff and pick it up in the morning. Don't be mad at me, Monica, please. It was a stupid idea. You're right. Let's go home where it's warm and the shower works.'

I felt on the floor for my own clothes and heard sounds from Monica scabbling around for hers. Now that I was out of the sleeping bag the room really was remarkably cold. I pulled my clothes on as quickly as I could, not worrying too much if things were inside out or back to front. I just wanted to be warm again.

'I'm sorry sweetheart,' I said to her, 'you're absolutely right. It was a stupid idea. I've been watching too much Hollywood B-movie crap. I won't do it again.'

She didn't answer. 'Are you all right, Monica? Are you warm enough?' Still no answer.

She was punishing me, I presumed, giving me back a bit of my own medicine. I decided I would be good natured about it. 'Go on,' I said, 'give me the silent treatment. I deserve it.'

Still no answer.

I sat down again on the mattress and reached over to where she had been lying. She was still there but outside the sleeping bag now and her arm felt very cold. I took her hand. It was cold also, and limp. This wasn't the silent treatment. Something was genuinely wrong. Monica wouldn't lie naked in a cold room just to give me a fright. I shook her by the shoulder. 'Monica?' There was no response.

I admit that I panicked. I tried to lift her up, or at least pull her into a seated position but it was almost impossible. If you have ever tried to lift an entirely limp human body you will know how difficult it is. I laid her gently down again. Desperately, I pushed the switch back and forward on the flashlight. Nothing. I thought of our cellphones. I had deliberately left them in the car so that we couldn't be disturbed. That was it. Get my phone. Get help. Use the dim light from the screen to see how bad Monica was.

I thought I knew where the door was but I couldn't find it in the dark. It didn't occur to me to pull back the heavy curtains and let some light in from the street. I found it after stubbing my toe, ran down the stairs bare-footed to the car... and there she was. Seated in the passenger seat, waiting for me. I froze where I was standing. I must have been as pale as death.

Monica opened the passenger door and shouted over to me. 'Sam? What kept you? Are you all right?'

I couldn't reply. I limped over to the driver's door and pulled myself in. She looked at me strangely. 'You've forgotten your shoes,' she said quietly. 'And you look like you've seen a ghost.'

I took her hand. It was warm and alive, and she stroked my fingers with her thumb.

'No, I haven't seen a ghost,' I said hoarsely when I could find my voice again, 'but let's just say I'm pretty confident that we've found the right house.'



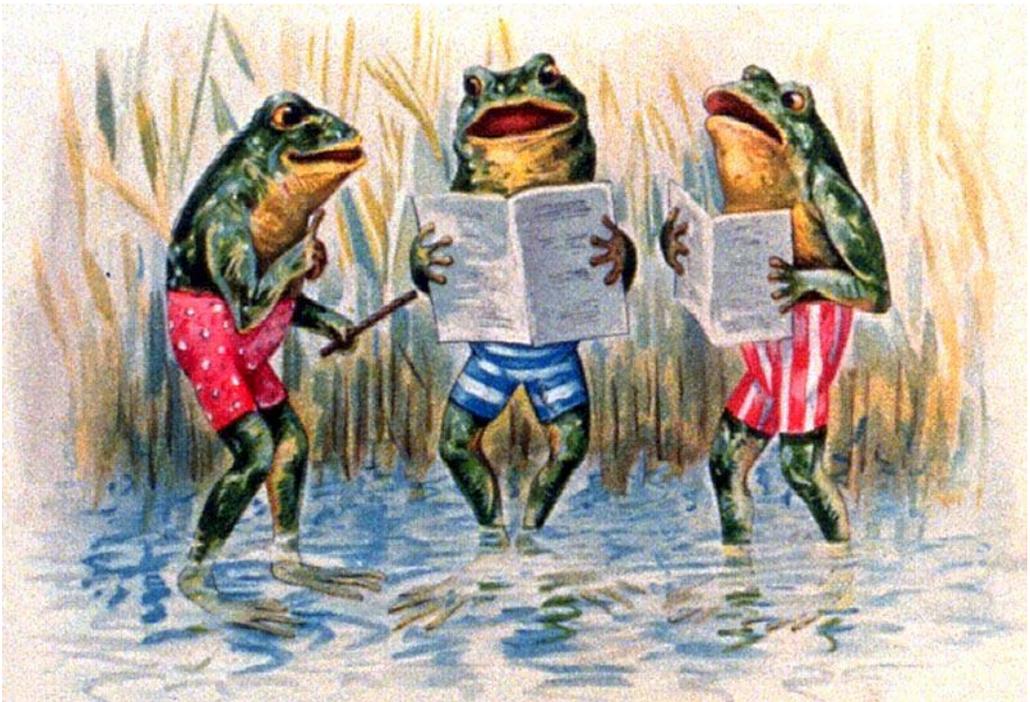
Geoff's Cyprus Limericks and non-limericks

Inspired by sun and Keo,
We tap-typed till our fingers yelled No
So we hiked and we swam,
Ate salads and jam
And talked till our heads hit the pillow.

The sun shone on us again and again
Then in disbelief we watched the rain,
In a trice
It was twice as nice,
Now sunburn is a likely pain.

There are holes in my tyre that are ever so small
Their hiss lets me know that I have to call
The AA for cyclists and come real quick
Before doing a somersault is my next trick.

Deafened by our neighbourly frogs
We rescued them with floating logs.
But they ignored our aid
And kept up their tirade
While hiding in their brackish bogs.



The Laptop of the Gods

By John Goodwin

Apollo and Hermes have been plotting to bring the gods back to Aphrodite's Isle once again. This time they appealed to Helios to help organise the event in the hope that he could arrange some better weather. Being a prudent god Helios hedged his bets by suggesting that they make it a little later in the year when his Sun was more predominant. Unfortunately, Zeus being ever the control freak had been screening their emails and decided to put his usual damper on the proceedings. As a warning, he ravaged the Island with winter storms of unprecedented ferocity. For once, his thunder and lightning backfired on him as this only served to top up the water supply. It also left him with only one decent storm and a few showers with which to disrupt the trip.



Helios was somewhat oblivious to this as he was away in England where he spread a little winter sun after the heavy snows they had recently endured. Helios is rather fond of Skiing but of course, he has limited opportunity as he is always dragging the sun around with him in his golden chariot. His wife the goddess Selene was having a bit of trouble with the moon so had left her silver chariot on autopilot while she had a bypass installed in her Mare Serenitatis (Sea of Tranquillity). It had not been the same since the Americans had bunged it up with junk from Macdonalds. She chose to have it done in England where they are specialists in building bypasses. Almost their entire motorway system is full of blocked arteries so they have plenty of experience.

Helios arrived back in Cyprus with two tasks on his agenda, to prepare for Selene's return and to act as host to the visiting deities. Able once again to use the silver chariot during the day, when it was not towing the moon around, he could greet his guests at the airport.

First to arrive was Apollo striding, tall and hirsute, among the mortals that milled about in the arrivals area. He was swiftly followed by Hermes, who brought sad news. Hera, Dionysus, Hephaestus and Demeter, who were all on the previous trip, could not make it this time. It seemed that the British Government had been promoting a new cereal bar called a 'Credit Crunch' and they were finding it a bit hard to swallow. Many others who might have enjoyed the trip were choking on the same product, as it was now the only diet available. However, Athena, goddess of wisdom managed to get time off from her teaching job in Scotland to join the happy crew. She arrived on a later flight. Apollo and Helios whisked her away to their holiday home in great haste, as it was almost time for the silver chariot to clock in for the night shift.

Although the accommodation offered nowhere near the opulence of Mount Olympus, it provided pleasant rooms and a swimming pool with breakfast thrown in. The following day they persuaded the management to serve the meal

in the dining room instead. The group met to discuss their plans determined to get some writing done and not to be seduced by the delights of Aphrodite's birthplace. A task that proved easier said than done.

They had arranged to visit the Paphos Writers Group who although mere mortals had a thriving writers forum going. Clutching their laptops, they were seated at a table of honour to observe and contribute to the morning's proceedings. Unable to flog many of their books at the meeting they were dropped off near a seaside taverna to enjoy a meal and then walk home.

Hermes having been on a tour of the Constellation of Lyra had adopted a Vegan diet. Products from that distant planet are not generally available in Cyprus so this determined dieteer scoured the countryside, searching the woods, hedgerows and supermarkets for acceptable substitutes. Athena sympathised with him, being the goddess of the olive tree, which also does not grow near her home. She joined him on some of his treks into the wilderness and garden centre. Worrying that she could not keep up with the winged Messenger of the Gods, when he needed to cover more ground, she let him go it alone. Her fears proved groundless as Hermes chose to hire a bicycle for his expeditions. He hoped that by limiting his wing flapping he would not precipitate a hurricane at some distant part of the world by reconstructing the butterfly effect. We all agreed that he probably reads too much.

The away party met on a couple of occasions to discuss the contents of their laptops, once in the hotel and once at the home of Helios. Helios confined the intense heat of the sun to his oven leaving the house cool and at the same time cooking a curry, which included Vegan food for Hermes.

Towards the end of the visit Selene returned sporting a fully restored mare. She rode every night across the sky exhausting Helios. At last, it came time for the northern gods to depart. Already Apollo was planning the next UKAway. This time a trip to India, from whence the curry recipe came. So clutching laptops crammed with new ideas, fond memories and in Athena's case smuggling some local cacti, they departed Aphrodite's Isle for another year. Life returned to normal in the Mediterranean. Helios dropped into his age-old routine of chasing Selene across the sky, he, in his golden chariot of the sun, and she, with the moon in hers.



Avakas

By Lillian MacLeod

A sweetness of lemon
trees
oranges, grapefruits
draping around us,
soft, warm, heady -
aromatherapy to go
at no extra charge.

Heat baked rocks
echoing goat bells
down the centuries;
nameless wild flowers'
breeze bobbing petals
defy us to droop.

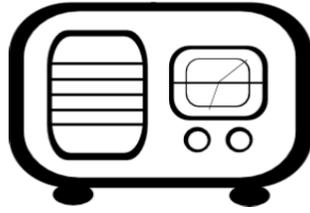
Dust and grit,
back-sweating walking
and each bend in the
track
another view from long
ago
seen for the first time
again.

Narrowing valley
walking me into
opening ways;
deepening gorge
widening my mind.



When answers aren't

by Geoff Nelder
Radio script flash



INTERIOR of a public house.
FADE IN:

Alan: Hello, I've not seen you here before, have I?
Woman: Raining, isn't it?
Alan: You popped in here to avoid getting wet?
Woman: It's nearly a mile away.
Alan: What, your home?
Woman: My feet ache.
Alan: Would you like a drink? I'm having vodka orange.
Woman: I need the washroom.
Alan: Round there. I'll get you one like mine.
(PAUSE UNTIL SHE RETURNS)
I bought you vodka orange.
Woman: It must be a shower.
Alan: I've an umbrella. I could walk you home.
Woman: You have impudence – oh go on then.

(EXTERIOR)

Alan: I like the way wet pavements glisten, don't you?
Woman: I can't wait to get out of these clothes – all of them.
Alan: Really? They don't seem that wet and it was only a single vodka.
Woman: There's no stopping me.
Alan: I'm not the best looking...
Woman: One good turn deserves another.
Alan: I've hardly done anything that worthy, but I'm willing if you are. Is this it – up these steps?
Woman: Get the door open will you? I can't find my keys...
Alan: Pardon? Oh, something's fallen from your ear – hey, it's an earpiece phone...

FADE OUT



Waves

By Lillian MacLeod



Arietta

distant whispers of
electric Atlantic rollers
opening unknown
doors,
flooding the unexpect-
ed.

Limnisa

calm Aegean seduction,
Saronic sultriness lulls
shimmering thoughts,
sparkling the mundane.

Paphos

cool blue Akamas clarity -
deceptive, unpredictable -
tempts,
grinding sediment of knowl-
edge
into silt of possibility.

Harris

salt stinging spume,
wind flung sea-spray
chasing breakers of meaning
through tides of my life.



The foyer of the magnificent Coral Bay Hotel where the Paphos Writers' Group meets

Bangkok Odyssey

The Paphos Writers' Group is forty-strong and meets monthly in a large conference room in the Coral Bay Hotel, about 6 Km from when we were staying. Their members include Douglas Stewart, who has written seven novels and four non-fiction books, Donegal 'Poet of the Year' award-winning poet Phil McCloskey, Beverly Peberdy whose book *Do Robins Cough?* alerted the world to the suffering of orphans in Romania, Ron A Sewell, author of five novels with a naval background, and many others at all stages of their writing careers.

When we went to meet them we took part in a writing exercise that involved writing a short passage, to included five specified words. The words were: Blue; Banker; Cold; Bangkok; Tie.

We had fifteen minutes to complete the task, and when we were done we swapped our scripts around and marked them out of 50 according to a specified marking scheme. Marks were awarded for such aspects as how far apart the specified words appeared in the text, whether or not they seemed to have been 'dragged in', and the overall entertainment value of the piece. This marking scheme was not explained in advance so there was a considerable element of chance in whether or not we complied.

We have reproduced here three of our efforts, with (in two cases) the mark they received out of 50. John's piece seems to have been mislaid but may well turn up eventually, to the great benefit and relief of future literary historians.

Tripping over Bangkok

To his dismay, Edward saw his mistress hugging a stranger on platform two. It could have been innocent: a chance encounter with an old friend, but he felt sick. He couldn't rush over and demand identification; not with his wife stood beside him, waiting for her commute. He recalled fragments from breakfast that she was not going to be a banker today. He shook his head.

Another moment of watched embrace and Edward's frustration boiled over. He ran. Damn, he tripped over the stranger's suitcase with a Bangkok label. He scrambled up and grabbed the stranger by his blue tie. The man cut Edward with cold grey eyes.

Edward's wife caught up. 'Edward, what are you doing? This is my brother returning from his job in Asia, and this is his daughter.'

Geoff Nelder

45 Marks

Field Assignment – Bangkok

Miss Louise Winterbottom was newly posted to the Bangkok branch of The Feral Bank of Chester and this was her first out-of-branch assignment. The prospective manageress of the Pink Pussycat Exotic Dancers Night Spot met her wearing a blue bikini and a pink bow tie. Her girls paraded quietly on the raised stage, practising their pole-dancing routines to a subdued Michael Jackson track. It was up to Miss Winterbottom to open the conversation. 'Don't your girls get cold, dressed like that?' she enquired.

David Gardiner

50 Marks

Connections

The blue air bites,
cold, bright;
the British winter leeching
the laundry-room heat
of a Bangkok holiday
from the banker's bones.

She looks outside
considering duplicity and
idly fiddling with his tie;
Thai - tie,
loose connections:
All of her life.

Lillian MacLeod

? Marks



Missing Pieces

Lillian MacLeod

Patterns of tesserae
partly understood shapes;
ageing depiction
of half remembered tales;
heroic deeds meant
to inspire generations.

Now fading colours
show headless heroes,
broken and crumbling,
fenced and forgotten.

The patterns in my head
like mosaic floors;
finding no shape
the image partial,
unnneeded,
ignored.

A Drop of Oil

by David Gardiner

Barely aware of his surroundings, Colin stepped into the lift and pressed the button for the ground floor. The doors of the antiquated device slid shut like a stone being scraped along a tin tray.

A moment later, he had entered one of his worst nightmares. After seeming to fall a few feet downwards the carriage stopped abruptly with a sound like the twang of a guitar string and the roof light went out. He was engulfed in total darkness, and with the total darkness came total silence.

Colin froze. His throat tightened, his fists clenched and the back of his neck became tight and immobile. He knew he was over-reacting, lifts occasionally broke down, especially in India, people occasionally got stuck in them, it was just an everyday misfortune – and yet to Colin it felt like death. The entire world with all its sights and sounds and smells and movements and textures had been cut off in a single instant. He was a mind floating in the emptiness that came before the first line of Genesis.

He began to count to a hundred in his head. It was a technique that he had been taught as a child to help him overcome his panic attacks. As his mental count reached thirty a voice spoke, almost into his ear. 'Mr Furlow, good Sir' it inquired gently, 'are you all right?'

Colin felt his body judder with the shock of the unexpected company. 'Who is that?' he asked hoarsely, trying not to betray his true level of alarm.

'Jamil, Sir. The lift boy.' It was strange to hear the speaker calling himself a boy. The voice was deep, well-modulated, reassuring.

'Oh. Jamil. I didn't see you...'

'It is seldom that people do.'

Colin paused for a moment, wondering what to say next. 'How did you know my name Jamil?' he asked with a forced casualness. I didn't know yours, he added mentally.

'When you signed the register, Mr Furlow, my humble self was there. I begged the honour of carrying your rucksack to your room, but you didn't want me to. Perhaps Sir can remember?'

'Oh yes, yes of course. Sorry.' In fact he had no memory of the incident.

'No need for apologies, Mr Furlow. As I say, people don't see me. I am an invisible man. A drop of oil between the cogs of the great machine. No more than that.'

'Oh, please, don't talk about yourself like that. People are more than drops of oil in the... whatever you said.' Colin paused but Jamil said nothing. 'Do you know what's going on?'

'I think it is just a power failure, Sir. Quite common in this country. Nothing to worry about.'

'And how long ...?'

'Just a few minutes, Sir, I have very little doubt.'

Very little doubt? Colin wanted more reassurance than that but asking for it seemed like such a pathetic thing to do. He felt along the panelling behind him for a railing or anything to hold on to. There was nothing. 'I know it sounds silly,' he said hesitantly, 'but I'm not very comfortable in lifts at the best of times. When I was a little boy I used to get panic attacks... especially if I was locked in anywhere.'

'I quite understand, Sir. We all have some... sensitive spot, don't we? I don't mind small spaces. This lift is my world. I spend so much of my life in here, you see Mr Furlow. I feel safer in here than ... out there. Out there is where the danger is. The responsibility. The demands. The cruelty. The predators. It's all a matter of mental attitude, isn't it, Sir.'

'Yes, yes, you're right. Mental attitude. Quite so.'



Colin could think of nothing more to say for a while. Then he heard himself beginning to recount a very personal story to this complete stranger – this sympathetic lift boy. He couldn't help himself. If he was to survive in this predicament he had to talk.

'When I was a little boy in Ireland,' he heard himself begin, 'my father looked after me by himself. My mother died not long after I was born. Cancer.'

'I'm very sorry to hear that, Sir. The death of a revered mother is a terrible burden for a family to bear.'

'Yes, her death was a terrible blow, as you can imagine. He started to drink when she died. He was the village postmaster, until he lost that job. Then he worked as a sort of caretaker and handyman at the local school... he was good at using tools, but he wasn't reliable. That job went too. I'm not sure what he did after that. A bit of farm labouring, I think. A bit of cash-in-hand work on building sites... anything he could get. The drinking got worse. I got farmed out to a series of relations. Some of them were all right. One of them wasn't. But it was better than being with him. Anything was better than being with him.'

'He used to lock you in, Sir, is that not so?'

'How did you know?'

'I suppose I just guessed. A young son that he couldn't cope with. A need to go out drinking.'

'Well, you've got it. We lived in a three bedroom terrace house in a tiny village twenty miles out of Belfast. The third bedroom, the one people called the box room, wasn't much

bigger than this lift. That was where he made me go. He put bars on the window so that I couldn't get out. I had a potty under the bed. When he wanted to go out for the evening he used to pretend I had been bad, find some excuse to send me to my room. He wasn't even honest with me – or with himself – about what was going on. I hadn't been bad. I hadn't done anything wrong.'

'No, Sir, of course you hadn't.'

'Sometimes he held on to my ear and dragged me up the stairs. I can still feel his grip on my right ear. Once, he didn't come back for two days. It was night time again and I was starving. I'd thrown up and I can still smell my vomit, and my excrement. At least he didn't do it again after that. Then my aunt came and took me away. It was then that I started having the panic attacks. I couldn't bear to be in small, closed spaces. I even had to leave the door open when I went to the toilet. Can you imagine that, in an old maiden aunt's house?'

'I'm sure your aunt was a good woman, Sir. I'm sure she understood.'

'I got over it, of course. Children are good at getting over things. I think the very worst thing about it, looking back, was that it was so unfair. I hadn't done anything wrong, you see. I didn't deserve to be locked in that room. That's what really matters to children. Fairness.'

Jamil didn't reply right away. He seemed to be thinking about what Colin had said.

'That's one of the wonderful things about childhood, Sir. The way children expect life to be fair. The optimism of the young.'



When we get to our time of life, we know differently, don't we Sir.'

'Yes, Jamil, we do.'

There was another pause. Colin's mind went back to the tiny bedroom, the bars on the window, the smells.

'I made up an imaginary friend when I was in that room – somebody to keep me company.'

'Did you, Sir? What was his name?'

'Do you know, I can't remember. I can't remember anything about him really. Only that he was there, and that he helped.'

'That's all that matters, Sir, isn't it?'

'Yes. All that matters.'

For a while, neither of them spoke. Colin listened to the sound of his own breathing. Eventually, it was Jamil who broke the silence.

'Do think that you've ever forgiven him, Sir, for what he did to you?'

For a moment Colin was at a loss for words. 'I've never thought about that,' he admitted at last.

'Perhaps you should think about it, Sir. Perhaps that is what both of you need, to take away any bad karma.'

'On, he doesn't need anything. He's been dead for decades. He only lasted a couple of years after I went to live with my aunt.'

'What you need then. So that the weight of anger is lifted from your spirit. That is how we view such things in my religion, Sir. We would not wish to carry our anger along with us into our next incarnation.'

'You know there's something in that, Jamil. Because whether you're talking about this life or the next, while I feel the way I do about him... it's not really over, is it?'

'Meditation is a great help in these matters, Sir. Sometimes it allows us to catch a glimpse of things from another

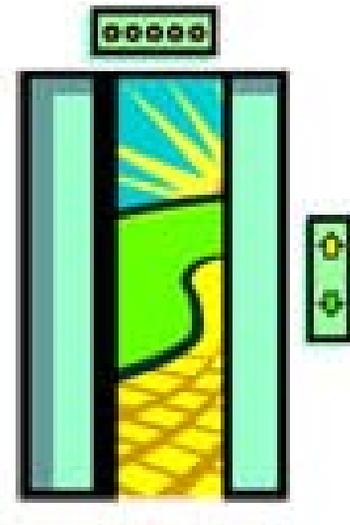
person's point of view. Perhaps, Sir, a wise man would ask himself whether or not life had been fair to your father as well. Does that seem like a relevant question, Sir?'

Jamil's words hit home. Colin went silent. This time the silence persisted. It became embarrassing.

'I think I've remembered the name of my imaginary friend,' Colin said at last. But just as he said this the carriage of the lift lurched and the fluorescent light in the ceiling flickered back on. Colin felt the device resume its slow descent to the ground floor. He looked around him.

Apart from himself the lift was empty.

'It was Jamie.' he said quietly, 'My friend's name was Jamie. A bit like your name, isn't it?'



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