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ME4 Writers

Legless In Strensall

It appears to me that a series of technological advances have reversed the geographical condition of serfdom.

In the pre-urban age those that worked the land almost never walked it. To be caught outside one's own parish might mean being clapped in irons.

To travel beyond such boundaries remained largely the privilege of the landed, the ordained, or the enlisted. Fast forward a few centuries to the mid eighties and it seemed to me that the haves were the only ones with the ability to stay put.

Living as I did beyond the boundary of Lady Hilda Roberts's southern estates her gamekeeper Tebbit provided me with a set of wheels and instructed me to use them. Another Norman invasion. Another harrying of the North.

That's where my map begins. Peddling furiously across the morning mizzle characteristic of the Vale Of York in autumn. Fog tinged with the acrid treacle taste of the sugar refinery. Destination Strensall and that was the first time that global capital attempted to kill me. Bloody Strensall. To meet your end there would be akin to being mown down by a motorised wheelchair.

A sawmill contains many ways in which a stupid kid straight out of school can be horribly slain. In this case specially grown Nordic timbers had been transported to England to be made into roof trusses so that they could be dropped on me. Of course I survived in a manner similar to Buster Keaton diving through the one window in a collapsing house. They hadn't reckoned on my knowledge of old silent comedies.

The absurd is our secret weapon.

My foreman greeted me by asking why I wasn't dead.

There were still more attempts to thin the herd. Hanging from a window sill 30 feet above a deluged Morpeth garden was a purely domestic adrenaline rush I'll grant you but international finance remains extremely dangerous.

The rubber that made the fumes that burned the lungs and caused the steam that made me slip and miss the press by inches. That came from Malaysia.

My father experienced his own version of youth training. It was called conscription. Several people tried to kill him although he had to get on a boat and meet them halfway. I only had my bike.

So as you can see. It is remarkable that I'm here at all but not that I am here particularly. Eventually the residents of Lady Hilda's bred children with such an overweening sense of entitlement that the expending of effort became anathema.

So they called for us. Not just from the north or midlands or Scotland, but Poland and Nigeria pretty much everywhere really. There are only 3 known world languages not spoken in London as far as a recent survey can be believed. There is something rather sad about a vet from Zimbabwe lumping sheet metal about near Woking but at least he had all his fingers last time I saw him. **FENTIMAN**

Memories of my world in RUBY slippers

Bristol: I am born and go to school. **Cornwall:** With my family. In a chalet at Butlins. I jump on the trampolines and don't make lasting friendships with other children. **Meston-super-mare:** With my granny. In various self catering flats. Granny sits on the dunes and smokes. I have imaginary adventures down the Alice in Wonderland tunnels on the edge of the golf course. **Isle of Wight:** With my school. Roommates are mean to me - try on my clothes. I win a prize for best diary when I get back - but is it a sympathy vote - or a foreshadowing of things to come? **Bordeaux:** School exchange. My exchanger wears bright orange foundation. I find kissing boys on the cheek embarrassing. **Texas, Tennessee, Florida, Ciudad Juarez, Victoria:** Holiday with other grandmother to see her GI bride sister and extended family. I fall madly in unrequited love.

Leamington, Moscow: School trip. 2 years after Chernobyl. My parents are worried. I fall madly in unrequited love. **London:** I meet someone. I go to University. **Edinburgh:** We go to the festival. We split up. I graduate.

Chilapas, Oaxaca, Mexico City, Mexican coast: An old school friend from Bristol who lives round the corner from me in London as it happens, decides to travel

round Mexico to help me get over a 'thing' I have with a trainee solicitor. I write a play about him 10 years later. **Malta:** An old university friend and I get together. More from there being nothing or no-one else to do. We go to my parent's timeshare. It is a boring holiday. **Paris:** His mum wins a coach trip to Paris. We go via the Chunnel. It is a boring holiday. **Venice:** He drags me round shops looking for a gondolier's black and white striped shirt. It is on the rocks by then. He insists on videoing everything like an American tourist. **Croatia:** By then he is in love with a colleague, whose parents' house we borrow in Split. We can't work the gas cooker, so we eat out every night. He is allergic to nuts and not speaking Croatian, nearly gets an anaphalactic shock. He goes back to Croatia on his own the next year. **Naples, Rome, Sorrento:** I go to Italy with my friend. I can't sleep. I feel it's over. A year or two after that we split up. He loves another of his colleagues by then. I read his diary. **Dublin:** Single, I spend the New Year with a friend who is working there. **Slovenia:** When she gets back we decide to go snowboarding. I am not a natural. **Morocco:** I go somewhere hot with my old school friend. We are both

pale and ginger; everyone thinks we are German. **Turists:** With the friend I went snowboarding with. Sitting by a 5* pool after her redundancy. **Rome:** A birthday trip with a screwed-up father of two. He sees me more than he sees his kids, says he would give up his says he loves me three times, on all occasions drunk. **Brussels:** We go to the top of a high building. Only after does he tell me he is terrified of heights. We split up after I find he has been 'seeing' someone on the internet. He goes to America to meet her. **Geneva:** I visit a friend who is in a play. She stays up drinking all night, then sleeps with the director. I go to bed and listen to the frogs croaking outside the window. **Bath:** A boutique hotel. A bald Northerner. **Brighton:** A dusty room. An allergy attack. I try to remember to go all the cool places I went when I was a student. **Ullapool:** An amazing sunrise. Snowy cold air.

Whitstable: A sea-buffed pub on the beach. Huddling for warmth. Watching the wind farm in the distance. **I finally take off my ruby slippers. And say there's no place like home.** But home is wherever you are.

HALL

In 1982 I left home and moved to Paris. Yeah, just like that!

The Medway Towns had become too small for me, and I wanted to live somewhere hot. Well, Paris was the nearest opportunity, at least a little bit more southerly than Walderslade.

I went to live with my penfriend in the Villa de la Croix Nivert, in the fifteenth arrondissement, near the centre of the round snail shape that constitutes Paris' prefectures. Her parents weren't very pleased, but soon I was working at Burger King in Alesia, and paying them rent. My first job however, was at the Montparnasse Park Hotel, what was then the Sheraton. Even in those days, the French showed a high level of personal paranoia. I had to have a lung x-ray as part of the interview, to prove I didn't have TB. They also weighed me in at 55 kilos, which I had no notion of, but I guess was light as I was only just 18.

So I had gone from being the Queen of the Hip Set in Medway, tipping off my friends as to which party to gatecrash on a Saturday night, to being a humble room service telephonist.

Things progressed though, and by April 1983, I had met my life-long Danish friend, Elly, who invited me to go to Italy for the summer season. At last I was going to see the sun! And indeed I did, in Sottomarina, working in a piano bar at night, windsurfing by day and even have singing auditions by the local Cowellesque DJ, Gino Levantacci.

So I was still small, but I was embedding myself in Europe, learning French and Italian, a bit of Danish, and getting tanned.

I came back in September to a frosty reception. The Hip Set were resentful. Wheeler told me to go back to Paris, and that I should be proud of being English. Obviously a closet NF supporter, I hated the hypocrisy. It was too late. I was on my way.

MARCH D'ANGELO

From Tierra del Fuego to Constantinople,
Papua New Guinea to Kristiansand, a deep
calling. Contact, the collective currency
binds peoples. Vox populi, the true opium.

Far off voices from distant worlds. Messages
sent through ether, finding receivers over oceans
and deserts. The gargantuan step, not so great,
as imagined. It avalanches from tacky grasp,
shudders; wavering and weaving, then contact.
We find more in common, than in difference.

Ten thousand Gandhi's liberated every
moment. Universal movement replacing
reportage born to extremities. Hands scuttling
across rafters, finding, meeting, fusing. Touch
points lift the cyberspace mask, reveal another
face. The one we want to see.

They reject celebrated parasites covered in rooks.
Renegades and scavengers vacillating between
mendacity and stomach turning lies. No sacred
cows here. The high priests exposed, bad karma
extinguished. The small becoming big. Bigger. Vast.

Vassals peel off restraining shackles, become
free thinkers. New membranes make public perfect
creatures. Brussels and New York, redundant,
superficial power gone. Authors of conformity extinct.

The few are becoming many, the many a Tsunami. Tear
down the walls, take flight. Reject the sheep's creed.
Fly high, make the picture bigger. Don't let it make you.

The world was big, you were small.
No, the world is small, you are big. **RADFORD**

LIBERATION

the
old
man

Somewhere subterranean everything moves the same. Collected, connected and corrected it gathers moments, whilst the old man of Toompea gurgles beneath a land-locked wave. He waits, chuckling to himself with a bronchial edge, as the waters calm before the swell and albino fish flap between his toes. A low rumble shakes clumps from above and the iron mole burrows deep. Inside, a traveller bites into the flesh of a kingsmill white, its succulent filling spreading out either side to his sticky fingers. Eyes stare disapproval, tapping at unreadable words, until the pictorial message breaks through. A burger and coke crossed through, protesting fast food. As whirring slows to choppy stops, pointing glacial north, where nothing much is very old, but rarely new, a timeless space, open grey and welcomed by a ring of bears. Each is painted in bright colour, reaching out to touch or hug or rip, it isn't clear. **SMITH**

of
Toompea

Barry Fentiman

Somewhere out there in some lonely backwater STNL Barry skulks in the background muttering to himself. He flickers at the whim of the collective consciousness of whatever locality he is in. He went to a university. Up north. Then another in Surrey. He scribbles things down and sometimes remembers to submit them for publication.

Sam Hall

Leads ME4 Writers. She has an MA in Creative writing (plays and scripts). She used to edit and write for magazines and now writes in just about any genre, and has had plays and short stories performed in that London town.

You can download her short stories from www.etherbooks.co.uk - search for Samantha Hall.

Sarah March D'Angelo

Sarah March D'Angelo studied at Middlesex Polytechnic and Lancaster University, and lived and worked in marketing in Paris and Ivrea, Italy until 1989. She currently lives with her husband and three sons in Rochester, where she teaches yoga, French and ICT to secondary school pupils.

Roy Smith

Roy lives in the Medway Towns, where he works with young people and spends a lot of time writing nonsense. He studied English at UKC and Informal Education at YMCA GW College. He writes at night and other inconvenient moments and is regularly interrupted by his dog.

Read more of Roy's work on <http://royalansmith.wordpress.com/>

Clive Radford

Clive began writing poetry and short stories at school, then university but mainly through subsequent life experience. Clive's work has been published in poetry magazines and by United Press. His novel, 'One Night in Tunisia' is available at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/1456587951>

i am small THE WORLD IS BIG

A response to our workshop with Accidental Collective on
16 April 2011.

Performed live at Kent County Hall, Maidstone, 28 May 2011.



ME4 Writers are a writers' group based in Medway, Kent.
We host literary events - our Write Now! events - and singly and
collaboratively write things.

ME4 Writers:

Barry Fentiman

Sam Hall

Roy Smith

Sarah March D'Angelo

Clive Radford

More about the writers:

<http://me4writers.wordpress.com>