

FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH - March 2025. Edition No 123



Dear all, I hope you are well and happy. My month has not been good as I have had a terrible bout of OCD. I am being open about this in the hope that other people will realise that they are not alone in suffering from such an affliction. Anyway, putting together the finished version of this edition of the magazine seems to have really helped me to start thinking differently.

If you feel you want to get involved with this publication (in a non-racist, non-homophobic and non-sexist way), please contact us at: dean@fthm.org.uk Dean

Please note that our website address is: www.fromthehorsesmouth.org.uk

MY NOT VERY SERIOUS STARS



Scorpio 24 Oct – 22 Nov

A beautiful person will try and convert you to their faith, but don't act rashly or else you will once again be dancing to someone else's tune. Life is not a laugh-a-minute at the moment, but a woman with a wart on the end of her nose will come along and put a smile on your face. The sun is about to shine in your world and

illuminate all the good things you have.

Sagittarius 23 Nov – 21 Dec

Your current liquid diet is not ideal, but it is serving a purpose and helping you cope. You will sort yourself out soon. Self-doubt flows around your mind like polluted water, but keep on going until you feel sure of yourself again. A lovely gay man will give you a gift that will help you greatly and bring tears to your eyes. You need to learn to care and share more.

Capricorn 22 Dec – 20 Jan

With spring around the corner, watch those frisky males who want to give you more than a fancy cocktail. You may feel as if the world is against you, but it isn't. It's just people don't welcome your sarcasm. Something great will happen to you soon that will make your life worth living even if you have a crap job with a crap wage. Maybe learn some Spanish.

Aquarius 21 Jan – 19 Feb

People who were once friends will continue to ignore you, but you are better off without them. Your OCD has recently been a problem, but things will get better. It is a good time to buy a new feather duster and spring into action. After a cold and harsh winter, you could perhaps invest in a short, sunny break for you and your loved ones. Sort out your rash.

Pisces 20 Feb – 20 Mar

On Sunday, you may find yourself in church near a smelly, flatulent woman and have to decide whether to grin and bear it, or move to another pew. Some people may think you are too thin or too fat, but it's what you think that counts. We know ruminating is pointless, so nudge yourself forward and record some new memories. Accept help if you need it.

Aries 21 Mar – 20 Apr

You clearly like bathing in a pool of popularity, but now is the time to break away from the crowd and do something new and original. Also, maybe start to brew your own beer as hard times are ahead and you may want to continue feeding your massive gut. As spring shows its welcome face, do something that makes you happy, whatever it takes. Give something away.

Taurus 21 Apr – 21 May

If you are single, someone may propose to you this month. Are you ready to change your selfish ways and learn to cherish others? Your life will improve in general, and you will start to understand that you can change yourself if you want to. You do everything like a slug, but as every woman knows, speed is not everything. Do have some fun if you can.

Gemini 22 May – 21 Jun

In life, there are many things which we can't influence, but you will soon have the opportunity to make a huge difference to another person's life – can you be bothered or are you too self-obsessed to try? Worrying is futile, but unfortunately, it is part of life. If you are worrying at the moment, hold on until peace of mind returns as it surely will for you.

Cancer 22 Jun – 23 Jul

Money is in short supply at the moment, yet you keep on spending it like there's no tomorrow. Now is the time to cut your cloth accordingly and resist following every trend before you are completely broke. A man who has lost a lot of weight will inspire you to follow his new, healthy lifestyle, and you too may shed a few pounds. Recycle.

Leo 24 Jul – 23 Aug

A big amount of money may land in your bank account, and it is nothing less than you deserve. However, someone you trusted will stab you in the back and cause a lot of problems for you, but hold your fire and consider what is best to do about it. A man dressed as a woman will do you a good turn and make you view the world in a more understanding way.

Virgo 24 Aug – 23 Sep

A married person may invite you into their world, but do respect the boundaries they set otherwise there may be problems. At the moment, you may be as mad as a March hare, but try to be considerate of those who do not share your crazy joie de vivre. Think about having dental implants if you can afford them. Stop eating so much junk food and live to 100.

Libra 24 Sep – 23 Oct

You are a sweet, young person with dog breath and some serious problems, but it's okay as someone will make you feel special this week and give you a gift that pleases you. Money continues to be a worry, so don't be too proud to accept help from someone who cares about you as long as there are no strings attached. Plan a holiday as you clearly deserve one.

JUNE'S WORLD



Hello, everybody. It seems a long time since I wrote my last article, and it's time to write another one. Since I last wrote, a lot of things have happened. We still go to Selby and elsewhere, but we're waiting for the better weather so we can go around Allerton-by-Water. It's not far from where we live. We go there to have picnics, take our books to read, and watch the boats go by. The people on the boats are very friendly and always wave to us as they

go by.

Recently, we watched a programme called Canal Boat Diaries which gave us an insight into living on such a boat. It did seem very nice, but you certainly need specialist skills for when the engine and other things go wrong. Robbie says he has lived on his boat for about 8 years, travelled all around the country and wouldn't like to live in a conventional house, but his girlfriend said that she wouldn't like to live on a boat full-time.

Anyway, to talk a bit more about when I was younger – I'm now 87 – and lived in the Potteries in Castleford. There was always a lot going on as we lived near a lot of shops. This was convenient as it meant we didn't always have to travel into town unless you wanted to buy clothes and shoes. If we did need such items, we had to rely on my mother getting Provident cheques for which she paid a small amount each week. On one occasion when I was 16 or 17, I was getting washed in the back room as the scullery was too cold. I overheard the Provident man asking my mam to treat him out of some money he had given her in exchange for some provident cheques. He didn't know I was there, and when I shouted that my mother wasn't going to give him any more money, he rushed out of the house at top speed. I think that's when I realised that I was grown up and had found my voice. After this, there was no stopping me as I began defending myself and stopped people picking on me at work.

At Bellamy's, I worked in despatch and we made up the orders for the van drivers to deliver to the shops. I was good at my job and became quite a confident individual. It's true to say that I went from strength to strength. I appreciated a bonus that me and others received for our good work. I was now in a position to give my mother, who never had much money, a bit

extra. I was so happy with my job and felt very lucky to have it. Also, I got to know a lot of people during breaktimes and make new friends.

As I got older, I started to socialise with four girls called Annie, Audrey, Sylvia and Joyce. We had a good time together. We went to a dance hall in Castleford that was called the Kiosk and one in Pontefract that was called the Embassy. We also went to another in Castleford that was called the Festival Hall. Although I preferred the Kiosk, I liked all three venues very much. I used to love jiving (bopping) and the quickstep.

Today, a Wednesday, we decided to go around the river at Woodlesford, and even though it was a lovely day, it was still cold. We observed many boats, and decided that we would prefer to stay on one for a holiday but not to live on. After that, we went to the supermarket for vegetables followed by a visit to a café, which makes a nice change from cooking every day.

Well, that's it for now. Love June. X

EIGHTIES MUSIC



Written by Graham Townsend

The 1980s was and still is my favourite era for music. This is probably because of my age at the time. I was 11 going towards 12 as we entered the decade. Many people of that age and in that stage of their life are influenced by certain genres of music. In many cases it is pop music. In that respect I was no different. Punk had come and gone by the early eighties, and there was a gap waiting to be filled again.

We were starting to see the evolution of new wave music with bands like the Police, Blondie and the Jam

becoming and remaining prominent during the early part of the decade. They were soon followed by artists such as Duran Duran, Spandau Ballet, Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, the Human League and Depeche Mode who all started to experiment with electro and synth pop. People like Vince Clarke and Giorgio Moroder, the latter having been around since the days of disco, became very prominent during this period. I did enjoy disco music, but synth and electronic music is probably the genre I still enjoy most.

I have recently been looking at creating a list of say 50 or 100 of my favourite songs of all-time. Without any doubt, the majority of the tracks selected would be from this decade. It might sound a little macabre, however, my friend asked me recently what music I would like to be played at my funeral, and this is where the seeds were planted for my list.

I would say that 1983 is probably my favourite year for music. There are so many tracks that I still listen to now from that year. "Is There Something I Should Know?" is the song I immediately associate with 1983, and it is my favourite Duran Duran track. Ironically, it was Spandau Ballet who were my favourite band from this era and they were Duran's biggest rival at the time.

The only part of eighties music I'm not too keen on is the latter part of the decade, roughly 1987 to 1989. This is partly down to the evolution of house music, although there is some I do enjoy, along with the mass-produced pop from Stock, Aitken and Waterman and acts such as Jive Bunny with their rehashed mixes of older songs.

The other thing about the eighties, in my opinion, is that the music was a major part of the overall culture of that period. People seemed to associate certain events with songs of the time. Two instances spring to mind. The first is the Live Aid event of 1985. Following on from the Band Aid campaign of late 1984 to raise awareness of the level of poverty in Africa, Bob Geldof masterminded concurrent live "mega concerts" at Wembley Stadium, London and JFK Stadium, Philadelphia. Everyone I know of "a certain age" can remember what they were doing on 13th July 1985 or where they had watched the concerts. The other obvious one I can think of is the song "Looking for Freedom" by David Hasselhoff. The track is intrinsically linked with the fall of the Berlin Wall and he famously sang the song on a crane above where the wall stood on New Year's Eve 1989.

I hope this article has brought back many good memories of the decade for you and reminded you of your own favourite songs from this period in your life.

BRENDA'S WILDLIFE CORNER



The newt is a salamander. This is a group of amphibians with lizard-like characteristics including blunt snouts and short limbs protruding at a right angle from a slender body. They have semi-permeable skin, equal-sized limbs and a prominent tail. There are about 100 species of newt and they can be found in Asia, northern Africa, Europe and North America. Sadly, they are threatened by habitat loss and pollution. Recently, the Yunnan species has

become extinct and several other species are currently under threat.

It is quite a fascinating species in many ways. For example, it is semi-aquatic meaning it spends time in water and on land. When newts spend time on land, their habitat includes abundant cover such as rocks, earth holes and logs. Newts return to the water on a yearly basis to reproduce. The female lays eggs singly, and these are attached to aquatic plants. They tend to do so in stagnant waters like ponds and ditches, although species like the Danube crested newt prefer slow-flowing rivers. A newt's life is made up of three life stages: aquatic larva, terrestrial juvenile and adult.

Significantly, newts produce toxins to deter potential predators. Those produced by the taricha granulosa newts can be dangerous to humans. Newts are able to co-exist in ponds and streams, with frogs and other amphibians, and some people even keep them as pets!

*Ref. Wikipedia

GRAHAM TOWNSEND'S MONTHLY QUIZ



Questions:

- (1) Which was the first US state to have its own official cookie?
- (2) Michael Cretu formed which musical group who had a UK number one hit with the song Sadeness (Part I)?
- (3) What is the capital of Ghana?
- (4) Which condiment was originally sold in the 19th century as a cure for an upset stomach?
- (5) What kind of structure is a sarcophagus?
- (6) Who wrote the novel "Interview with the Vampire"?
- (7) The Lines brothers, William, Walter and Arthur, formed which toy company?
- (8) What are troy ounces used to measure the weight of?
- (9) Which of the B vitamin family most commonly turns your urine neon yellow after consuming Vitamin B Complex 100 tablets?
- (10) Which sport was illegal in the USA until 1896 when it was legalised in New York?
- (11) How was blues singer Chester Arthur Burnett better known to his fans?
- (12) Who was the first living creature in space?
- (13) How many time zones does Russia have?
- (14) Why can't elephants jump?
- (15) How many dimples does an average golf ball have?
- (16) Which notable author worked for the Oxford Dictionary?
- (17) Which actor was nominated for an Emmy for every season of Game of Thrones?
- (18) Which British band recorded "You Suffer", the shortest song recorded to date?
- (19) Which chemical element found in bananas decays to make them slightly radioactive?
- (20) Which US president had a successful whisky distillery, the largest in the country by 1799, after his presidency had ended?

Answers

- (1) New Mexico (2) Enigma (3) Accra (4) Ketchup (5) Coffin (6) Anne Rice (7) Tri-ang (8) Precious Metals & Gemstones (9) Vitamin B2 - Riboflavin (10) Boxing (11) Howlin' Wolf (12) Laika the Dog (13) Eleven (14) The bones in their legs point downwards (15) 336 (16) J R R Tolkien (17) Peter Dinklage (18) Napalm Death (19) Potassium (20) George Washington

DELVING INTO THE DEPARTMENT STORE

Written By S. Bee

With the sad closure of stores such as Debenhams and M&S, I feel that it's a good time to remind ourselves of the British high street favourite – our famous department stores.

In the mid-1980s, I bravely ventured north to live in the city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. As a Yorkshire lass, the big-city department stores there simply dazzled me. There were Bainbridge's, Binns, Fenwick, BHS, Woolworths, M&S, C&A and Littlewoods; one on

practically every street! They were all so softly carpeted with an aura of a deep hush. The amazing array of escalators smoothly swept the customer to each tempting department.

Growing up in a small Pennine town, I'd only known our own, rather old-fashioned co-op store where they sold clothes, shoes, furniture, and not an awful lot of owt else, really. Choice was severely limited.

However, Fenwick's toy department in the centre of Newcastle was on a much grander scale. Founded in 1882 by J. J. Fenwick in Newcastle upon Tyne, I'd never seen anything like it! There was a never-ending stream of toys, games and *huge* cuddly toys. At Christmas time, I'd gaze in awe at their wonderful window display full of colour and light. Their festive window display held a different theme every year; it was truly magical.

Woolworths (colloquially known as Woolies), one of the original five-and-dimes had two stores in Newcastle. It was founded in 1879 by Frank Winfield Woolworth in Pennsylvania with a loan of just \$300! Over the years, they've held an eclectic and everchanging mix of stock. As a teen, I recall buying makeup, tights and toiletries. They also sold records and cassettes, later expanding into CDs and DVDs. The children's Ladybird brand of clothes was always popular and, of course, there was the famous pick and mix sweets. I loved their Christmas TV ads that proudly featured popular celebrities of that era. They usually forgot an essential festive item and then popped into Woolies to find it! In their final years, the local branches here in Yorkshire were tailored exclusively for the children's market, selling sweets, comics, dressing-up costumes, toys and games.

I have very fond memories of C&A, too. Founded by German brothers, Clemens and August in 1841, they took their company name from their initials. Clothing was reasonably priced and good quality. As a twenty-something, I bought some great pieces from their C&A Clockhouse fashion section. Anyone remember the jingle on their TV adverts? "Come to C&A, see the things you're looking for. Come to C&A and see surprises everywhere. Open up your eyes, mirrors don't tell lies. Have a beautiful day, come to C&A!" C&A had a strong presence on the British high street for over 75 years. It withdrew from trading in the UK in 2000; Primark took over 11 of their stores.

Who remembers Richard shops? Founded by Leeds-born businessman Jack Lyons, it traded from the 1960s to the 1990s. They also has another TV jingle I remember very well: "Richard shops are filled with all the pretty things. Such a lot of pretty things to wear. Hey there, pretty face, make the world a prettier place. Hey, pretty face! Come buy your clothes at Richard shops." If my memory is correct, I think the strapline was "Make the world a prettier place tomorrow." In 1992, Richard shops were sold to the British retailing giant, Sears PLC. The then owner of Selfridges, Philip Green (who acquired Sears) transferred Richard shops to the Arcadia group. They then closed Richard shops, and it was lost forever.

In 2016, this too became the fate of all the well-loved BHS stores. As I became older, BHS was my first stop for the quality staples of everyday wear, including underwear, skirts and tops. BHS was founded in 1928 by a group of US entrepreneurs. It became part of Philip Green's Arcadia group in 2009. In April 2016, the chain went into administration, and by June the company wound down after failing to find a buyer. Its 164 stores were closed and BHS ceased trading after 88 years. What can I say about this business disaster? What a tremendous waste!

I feel exactly the same about the recent mass closure of Wilkos (formally known as Wilkinsons). In a way, they filled the gap left by Woolworths. It was shock when they went under, although some of their stores were saved by another retail group. From what I can gather, it seemed to me that financial administration went wrong somewhere along the line.

What happened to those big department stores? Well, online shopping killed most of them. Binns was bought out by the Frasers Group and Bainbridge's were bought out by the John Lewis group. Littlewoods and Debenhams eventually decided to trade online only.

The department stores that have survived include: House of Fraser, Argos, Marks and Spencer, Fenwicks and John Lewis. On a smaller scale, clothing shops such as Matalan, Boyes, Peacocks and Bon Marche have survived and the discount store B&M is doing well. So, we can still shop till we drop!

ALICE'S THING OF THE MONTH



Written by Alice Kaur

Hello and welcome back to Alice's Thing of The Month! This month we are going to be talking about the film *Nosferatu*.

Nosferatu is a Gothic Horror film released on New Year's Day in the UK and is directed by Robert Eggers. Robert Eggers is an American director and is known for *The Lighthouse*, *The VVITCH* and *The Northman*. Eggers' films are usually quite dark and have occult themes. This film was filmed on 35mm.

I have been excited to see this film since last year. I had seen the trailer quite a few times at the cinema and knew Robert Eggers from *The Lighthouse*, which I quite enjoyed even though it is a bizarre film. I was curious to see what *Nosferatu* would be like. I've never watched the original and knew very little about it. It seemed a very old film to be doing a remake of since the original is a silent film. From the trailer, it looked like this film would be in black and

white, again a common theme for Eggers films, so when it came to watching it on the day, I was surprised to see it was in colour.

I remember *Nosferatu* as a child because there is an episode of *SpongeBob* where they have *Nosferatu* hiding in a cupboard, and he comes out a few times in the episode and *SpongeBob* says his name. I would describe him as vampirish, very pale and with a long, pointed nose.

The film stars Nicholas Hoult as Thomas, Lily Rose Depp as Ellen and Bill Skarsgard as Count Orlok AKA *Nosferatu*. The film is about Count Orlok having an infatuation with Ellen who is married to Thomas and will do anything to be with her for eternity. Ellen has nightmares and can connect to Count Orlok in her dream-like states. The film is set in 1838 in a fictional German town called Wisborg. Despite the film being set in Germany, none of the actors had a German accent and a few of them changed their accents throughout the film. This made it quite messy and brought you out of the themes of the film.

It's now been a few days since I've seen the film and I've had more time to think about it. Overall, I remember enjoying the film, despite the flaws. I felt it dragged in certain places and could have done with taking out a few scenes that were irrelevant to the storyline.

A problem I had with Count Orlok was the exaggerated breathing noises he was making. He was making these noises to point out the character is very old and frail, but he didn't struggle talking and moving around. There was no problem with the breathing noise itself, but to have him talk normally after showing he suffers with breathing was a big flaw for me. I was also expecting him to be scary – similar to the original – so when they showed him with a moustache and furry coat, it was very underwhelming. There was nothing scary or sinister about the character.

I don't want to be too negative about it all in case it puts you off viewing this film, but another flaw was the actress Lily Rose Depp, Johnny Depp's and Vanessa Paradis' daughter. I have never seen her act, but I know her from the show *The Idol*, which got a terrible rating of 4 out of 10 when it was released in 2023. She seemed to act very different to the other actors in the film. For example, she looked into the distance often as she spoke; it was very dramatic. It was like she was in a musical or a drama. This was noticeable as all other characters spoke in a normal tone and phrase. Count Orlok may have spoken this way too, but it seemed normal for him as he was at least 300 years old, so it is to be expected he talks differently. Despite the strange talk from Depp, other parts of her acting were phenomenal. During the dream-like states connecting her character to Count Orlok, her body would contort and her eyes would roll to the back of her head during seizures. This was very believable, but this is the only thing I would praise her for. Her makeup was so pale and made her look exhausted and gaunt. It reminded me of Edward Scissorhands who her father portrayed.

One thing I would like to positively comment on is the cinematography. There was some wonderful shots despite the film being very dark at times. I really like to see a creative shot in a film. I love photography so it always stands out to me when I see one, and there were a few good shots in this film. I also thought Nicholas Hoult who plays Thomas, one of the main characters of the film, really stood out. He was first known for his role in *Skins* as Tony. From there it was unsure where his career would go or if it would end with many others who worked on the show. Over the years, he has really proved himself as an actor and was very convincing in this role.

A fun fact before I wrap up my review: Willem Defoe did a scene with 2000 live rats, and he said they were fun to work with. Rats are prevalent throughout this film. People are afraid there is a plague coming, and when Count Orlok arrives in the town, they seem to go wherever he goes. It also makes comments on a pandemic which made me think that it was a nod to COVID-19. I feel this is a subject commonly brought up in recent films and doesn't look like it will go away any time soon.

I enjoyed the ending of the film. As it concluded, Willem Defoe tells us it's the end of the story and the credits role. I feel this isn't often seen in films now. It's a nice way to end a story, especially when it's a tale so old. Overall, I enjoyed the film and experience at the cinema. It's not a straight remake of the original film as Eggers has written in a lot of his own themes, especially dark themes that seem to relate to the Occult and other cultures that are relevant to this day and age. Some things in this film I definitely don't agree with. There was a shocking scene with an animal. Apart from that, I would rate the film as generally entertaining but not something I would be eager to watch again.

Thanks for reading.

JUNE CHARLTON SHARES MORE FABULOUS RECIPES



West Country Apple Cake

Ingredients:

6 oz of butter or margarine
6 oz of caster sugar
3 eggs
1lb of cooking apples, cored and grated
12 oz of self-raising flour
10 oz of sultanas
2 teaspoons of mixed spice

Topping:

5 oz of plain flour
3 oz of butter
2 oz of demerara sugar
1 teaspoon of mixed spice

Method:

Preheat the oven to 140 C. Grease and line a 12" x 8" tin. Cream the butter and sugar together until soft and creamy, then beat in the eggs one at a time. Add the apple, flour, sultanas and spice and fold together. Put into a cake tin.

Rub together the topping ingredients until it looks like breadcrumbs and sprinkle over the cake. Bake for approximately 55 minutes until golden brown. Serve warm as a pudding with custard or cream, or allow to cool and slice into fingers.



Coconut Fruit Cake

Ingredients:

8 oz of self-raising flour
8 oz of mixed fruit
2 oz of mixed nuts, chopped
4 oz of desiccated coconut
2 teaspoons of cinnamon
2 teaspoons of ginger
4 oz of butter or margarine
2 oz of dark muscovado sugar
4 tablespoons of milk

2 eggs

Method:

Preheat the oven to 160 C. Grease and line an 8” cake tin. Place the flour, butter, sugar in a large bowl and rub until crumbs are formed, alternatively use a food processor. Stir in the fruit, nuts, coconut and spices. Add the eggs and enough milk to get a sticky consistency. Pour the cake mixture into a tin and smooth the top. Bake for 50-55 minutes.



Chunky Vegetable Soup with Crispy Bacon Bits

Ingredients:

4 carrots, peeled and diced
2 pints of chicken stock
1 tablespoon of tomato puree
Salt and pepper
5 oz of potatoes, peeled and diced
5 oz of broccoli florets, frozen or fresh
4 oz of peas, frozen or fresh
4 oz of green beans, cut into pieces roughly 1” long
6 rashers of streaky bacon, cut into small pieces

Method:

Place the carrots, stock and puree into a large pan and season generously with salt and pepper. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the potatoes and simmer for a further 10 minutes. Add the broccoli, peas and green beans and cook for a further 10 minutes. Add an extra pint of water. Add golden, crispy bacon to the soup 5 minutes before serving.



A Favourite Casserole

Ingredients:

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ lb of stewing steak
2 tablespoons of plain flour
2 teaspoons of soft brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of ground nutmeg
1 teaspoon of dried mixed herbs
1 large onion, sliced
 $\frac{1}{2}$ pint of water
1 tablespoon Worcester sauce
2 tablespoons of tomato ketchup
1 tablespoon of wine vinegar

4 oz of mushrooms, sliced
Parsley, chopped
Salt and black pepper

Method:

Cut the meat into cubes and place into a casserole dish. Stir in the flour thoroughly. Add all the ingredients – except the mushrooms and parsley. Stir together and season with black pepper. Cover the dish and cook in the oven for 2 – 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours at 130 C until tender, stirring occasionally. Add the mushrooms 15 minutes before the end, and sprinkle the chopped parsley over the top of the casserole.

HAPPY TO CHAT

Written by S. Bee

I smiled as I joined a sixty-something casually-dressed woman sitting on a local park bench. She seemed kind of familiar, but I couldn't quite place where I'd seen her before...

“Hello.”

The brown-haired woman looked surprised, but I was relieved to see that she returned my smile. “Hello, pet.”

“This is a 'happy to chat' bench,” I explained, as I indicated to the sign on the back of the bench. “It's a new scheme created by the council where strangers are encouraged to talk to each other.” It was a great community idea.

“I'm Amy.”

“I'm Peggy, and I'm happy to chat. I'm pleased to meet you, pet. Well, what shall we talk about?”

I noticed that Peggy had a North-east accent, so I could talk about how I loved the crime drama Vera on TV. The show had recently ended and I felt sad about that... but the conversation took a different direction.

“I wish my boyfriend and I hadn't broken up.” I blurted out.

Peggy looked concerned. “Tell me more.”

“Three months ago, he took a year out to travel. He asked me to go with him, but I had doubts about leaving my office job. So, I didn't go.” A twinge of sadness pricked. Dan had been the love of my life. I was still heartbroken and I missed him.

“Why don't you contact him, tell him how you feel?” Peggy asked.

“I don't want to spoil his adventure. We agreed to have no contact.”

“This situation reminds me of when my husband and I were first engaged. He was thinking about joining the army, but I didn't fancy being an army wife. I didn't want to spoil his future, so I kept my worries to myself.”

I nodded and waited for Peggy to continue.

“Then, he was offered a job as a trainee car mechanic and decided not to join up. I was relieved but I hoped he wouldn't regret his decision.”

I gulped. “Has he regretted it?”

She chuckled. “No, pet. We've been married for thirty years. He has a car mechanic business, and we have a married son and a granddaughter.”

My spirit warmed. “That's such an inspiring story.”

Peggy glanced at her watch. “I hope it can help you with your young man. Now, I need to make tracks. I'm due for a family Sunday lunch.”

“It was good to talk to you, Peggy.”

She smiled. “You too, pet.”

On Monday, as it was such a nice day, I took my lunch to the park. I spotted a woman my own age (early thirties) sitting on the 'happy to chat' bench, studying her mobile.

“Hi.” I launched straight in. “I'm Amy. Did you know that this is a 'happy to chat' bench?”

She smiled. “No, I didn't but I'm happy to chat. I'm Becky. Well, we need to chat, don't we? I have a problem. I'm thinking about applying for a job elsewhere, but I don't want to let my current employer down.”

Peggy had helped me by listening. So, I could return the favour...

“I can understand your dilemma. What do you do, Becky?”

“I work in a call centre. This new job is in IT. They'll offer training to the successful candidate.” She showed me the job description on her phone.

I studied the text. “I would apply. If you're not called for interview, it'd be wise to stay at the call centre. If you are, see how it goes.”

She nodded. “I'll do that. Thanks, Amy.”

We slipped into conversation and nattered about the TV programmes we liked. To my delight, I discovered Becky was a Vera fan, too!

“I like Vera because she's so direct with people,” Becky said.

“I quite like her dress sense, especially the blouses, coats and hats.”

We giggled. Her optimistic mood made me wonder if I ought to contact Dan. When we bid farewell, we swapped numbers. I was pleased to have found a new pal.

I mulled the Dan situation over at work. I'd welcome Peggy's advice again, so at 5:30pm I raced to the park, but a group of teenagers occupied the 'happy to chat' bench. I wish Peggy and I had swapped numbers, too. However, I discovered that she wasn't difficult to find. Later, I spotted her picture in a local social media group. Of course! That's where I'd seen her before! Her profile showed her at Newcastle's quayside. She accepted my friend request straight away.

I realised that since meeting Peggy and Becky, this was the first time since Dan left that I hadn't felt lonely.

A fortnight later, I saw Becky at the 'happy to chat' bench. We'd planned to visit the park cafe for a coffee and a slice of their yummy carrot cake. She arrived with tired eyes and a weary expression.

I was startled. “Oh, what's the matter?”

“I was asked to attend an interview for the IT job I applied for. I was over the moon! I thought I'd done well at the interview, but I wasn't offered the job.” When she blinked back tears, I handed her a pack of pocket tissues.

“Did they say why?” I asked.

“They said it wasn't the right time for me to take this particular career path. I suspected that the other candidates had a natural aptitude for software code,” she concluded.

I nodded. “You're probably right. But look, it's not the end of the world. You still have a job. I guess you get on well your colleagues?”

Becky nodded. “Yes. They're a great bunch.”

“If you'd handed in your notice, they'd have been sorry to see you go. On the plus side, you don't have to feel bad about letting your employer down.”

She wiped her damp eyes. “That's true.”

“It's disappointing. Think about how Vera would react. She certainly wouldn't waste time brooding on what could have been.”

Becky straightened her shoulders. “You're right. I'll stay where I am but I'll keep an eye out for any future opportunities.”

I nodded. “Good. Let's go for that coffee and cake!”

Later, Becky and I discussed booking a weekend away in Newcastle-upon-Tyne to see the famous Vera locations. I thought that maybe Peggy could recommend a good hotel. I arranged to meet Peggy again this Sunday. We'd only exchanged a few words and social media messages, yet I'd really warmed to her. In the park, I spotted Peggy sitting on the 'happy to chat' bench. When she waved to me, I waved back. I had a feeling we were going to become firm friends, just like me and Becky.

Heeding her advice, I'd plucked up the courage to send Dan a 'miss you' text message. To my surprise, he'd enthusiastically replied, saying that he was in France. We called each other, and Dan had confessed that absence had made his heart grow fonder. A week later, he was on my doorstep, gathering me into his arms... things have changed for the better, and it's all down to the 'happy to chat' bench!

ARE PREMIER LEAGUE REFEREE BIASED?



Written by Graham Townsend

This is a very hot topic here in the UK, especially after a specific incident in a match between Wolves and Arsenal, which occurred a matter of days after I decided this was going to be something I was writing about for this month's magazine.

Firstly, I would like to point out that I am not accusing referees of cheating. The point of the article is to look at whether there is an unconscious bias by referees in favour of certain Premier League teams.

The issue was ironically raised last season by then Wolves manager Gary O'Neil. He felt that many decisions were going against his team and in favour of some of the perceived top teams. He pointed out at the time that he was not accusing them of cheating.

There is no doubt that being a referee is a tough job at any level. At the very top level of sport, money is also a key factor and this also plays into the equation in my opinion. Looking specifically at the English Premier League, because the amount of money each club earns for finishing higher up the table increases by place, every single decision seems to be scrutinised

to the nth degree. You also have many players trying to outwit the referee with their tactics and often unsportsmanlike behaviour which makes the referee's role even more difficult. Throw in the VAR (Video Assistant Referee) system and it leaves the officials open to all sorts of allegations, the majority of which, if not all, are totally unfounded.

Fans often don't help with their comments. One of the most common complaints is that certain referees support specific teams or dislike a particular team and this just fuels the issues already facing the officials. Unfortunately for the Premier League and the PGMOL (Professional Game Match Officials Limited), who are responsible for the conduct of the officials, the recent case involving David Coote just added fuel to the fire. Coote was fired after videos surfaced online showing him slating the manager of Liverpool whilst under the influence of either drugs, alcohol or both, allegedly. For those who are not aware, all prospective referees have to declare whether they support a specific team, along with any other potential conflicts of interest, before they can even qualify.

Going back to VAR briefly, anyone who thought it would 100 percentage eradicate mistakes is/was misguided. Whilst human error can play into the situation, this is just not possible. Programmes like Refwatch, which on Sky Sports News every Monday morning, also seem to lead to more questions than answers because of the level of detail they go into.

Older readers may also be swayed by instances from the past where referees were found to be guilty of match fixing. Thankfully for supporters in the UK, most cases have involved other leagues or international competitions. The latest accusation I can think of was, at the time of writing, less than a week ago when Adana Demirspor left the field, under instruction from their club president, as a result of a penalty being awarded to their opponents earlier in the match. The game was subsequently abandoned.



I hope you have enjoyed reading this rational debate on this subject and feel free to contact us at dean@fthm.org.uk if you wish to make your views clear on the topic.

ADVENTURES OF A MAN SITTING DOWN 27

I just checked what episode this is so the above title would be correct. Then I thought to myself does anyone actually care? Well, do you? Having spent a couple of months in hospital, I've come out with a renewed sense of purpose.

This has manifested itself so far in my reading a book about Chernobyl and watching a 9-hour documentary about the Holocaust. These things may sound as though they are passive acts that are more about reflection than action. However, I feel as though watching them has brought to light again the value of keeping track of certain things and making sure that some events don't get forgotten.

Something really struck me during Shoah, which is the documentary about the Holocaust. It is a simply made thing. Interview after interview with survivors and perpetrators is mixed with footage of the sites now very famous filmed at the time of making in the late '70s. There

is no archive footage. It is all images of a Germany that would be recognisable to the people watching.

One of the people interviewed was a railway worker whose job it had been to organise the transport trains. What was powerful to observe was the ordinariness of what he had to do. We've all seen reconstructed footage of the cattle cars filled with people. What was surprising to learn was that each of those people represented a potential fare. The Nazi government paid the railway a fare for nearly every passenger. Horrifyingly, considering their eventual destination, children under twelve went half price and children under four went for free.

Most tellingly, the interviewee struggled to name the location of the most famous concentration camp. For him it was just a forgettable suburb outside of Krakow. He'd probably never heard of it before, and when interviewed it brought up memories, not of horror, but of the mundane and workaday. He didn't even see the trains or their passengers. His job was just to make sure they got where they were going. All of this sounds potentially quite depressing. This wasn't my takeaway. My impression of the whole was that I have a duty to the future to keep on top of things. Work is a seduction. It feels good to be doing something and realising goals is its own reward.

What I got from watching the story of atrocities being committed was the way in which they are enabled by those watching. That man organising the fares for thousands of people didn't ask why there were so many people including children going on one way journeys. Perhaps it would have been impossible for him to do anything. Certainly, it is difficult to comprehend what was occurring in that historical moment.



All in all, my time in hospital led me to reflect that I have an obligation to do something that puts value into the world. It doesn't have to be grandiose, and it doesn't even have to be hugely moral, but it does require me to take ownership of it. The man in the film had to be filmed in secret as he was, in truth, ashamed of what he'd participated in. I don't feel ashamed to have

written 27 of these articles. I hope you agree.

ANOTHER FUN QUIZ FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

Questions:

- (1) What are the three South African capitals?
- (2) What is the currency of South Africa?
- (3) Who is currently the French President?
- (4) What is a rivet?
- (5) Where do Luton Town Football Club play their home games?
- (6) What is the capital of Argentina?
- (7) What is the French word for condom?
- (8) Who played Laura Ingalls in 'The Little House on The Prairie'?
- (9) Which is the smallest planet in the solar system?

- (10) What is the Spanish word for handkerchief?
- (11) What was the earliest form of money?
- (12) What is OCD?
- (13) Who owns Costa Coffee?
- (14) When was the French Revolution?
- (15) Which was the last team that Kevin Keegan played for?
- (16) What is a croque madame?
- (17) What does the phrase 'to hear something straight from the horse's mouth' mean?
- (18) Who wrote the popular song "Walk on By"?
- (19) What is a soutien-gorge in English?
- (20) Who has won the most F1 championships?

Answers:

(1) Cape Town, Pretoria, Bloemfontein (2) South African Rand (3) Emmanuel Macron (4) A permanent fastener that joins two or more materials together (5) Kenilworth Road (6) Buenos Aires (7) Preservatif (8) Melissa Gilbert (9) Mercury (10) Panuelo (11) Bartering was the earliest form, where people exchanged goods and services directly (12) It is a mental health condition that causes people to have unwanted, recurring thoughts and repetitive behaviour (13) The Coca-Cola Company (14) 5 May 1789 (15) Newcastle United (16) A French sandwich made with cheese, ham, bechamel sauce and topped with a fried or poached egg (17) When you hear the information from someone who has personal knowledge on the spoken matter (18) Burt Bacharach and Hal David (19) A bra (20) Lewis Hamilton and Michael Schumacher – 7 each

Editor's Final Word: Thank you once again for taking an interest in this e-magazine. Please note that you can get involved with us through: dean@fthm.org.uk Best wishes, Dean, Brenda, Graham, Willow and Hari.