

**MURIEL  
RURIAL  
2015**

I wandered into the library. An elderly man was looking at the daily newspaper the library provides. He was on page two, I must have missed the paper by a couple of minutes. I wasn't disappointed, it didn't matter.

Libraries are wonderful places but they are a threatened species and perhaps it's only a matter of time before towns, villages and cities are robbed of their presence.

I remember as a young girl how proud I was of my library ticket. A small piece of cardboard that gave me access to an understanding of the world. Knowledge alphabetically arranged in serried rows upon shelves. Free!



Adventure, mystery, humour, love. Every emotion under the same roof. Sadly, for me, that's all in the past. I don't seem to have the patience or concentration level required to read and absorb the sort of books I once delighted in. I see books, in the library, on parade. I recognise their titles, classic literature I know I've read but have little recollection of, beyond a phrase or sentiment that has stayed with me.

I run my forefinger lightly down the spine of "War and Peace", vaguely remembering Pierre and the firing squad; his narrow escape. I'm sure it was Pierre although I'm not certain. But it's the same with all these classics. Old friends of mine who lived for me as I turned the page. Ethereal figures now; a faint remembering, strangely comforting to know I once knew them all, and to speculate perhaps the reading of them shaped me and made me a better woman for that.

....The gentleman with the newspaper is still on page two. He isn't reading it but that doesn't matter, the library welcoming him with open arms is of greater importance than the reportage or opinion a newspaper offers.

Perhaps he too has a fragile recollection of times past when those occupants of the shelves became his friends. And yes we do sometimes forget details, but never fail to delight in the company of books or the luxury of libraries.



## March 2015

The Henry Simmons closed down, boarded up. Kenny's Pop-in - gone! And soon we lose the Western Road Post Office. At one time we did have a wonderful tea-room, a cycle shop, a laundrette. I could go back even further to the glory days of Clokes but I won't; because this is not a sentimental trip down memory lane, it's a warning that we are under threat. But let them come, the marauders, the Sainsburys, Tescos, Asdas and the likes. We shall repel them, challenge their advances and stand fast at the barricades. How? Simple! Kent Aloominom... [SOUND EFFECT. DRAMATIC CONQUERING TRUMPET SOUNDS]. "Now is the winter of our discontent, made glorious summer by Richard of Kent...Aloominom".

So this is my plan. Richard will be the modern day equivalent of Mr Selfridge. All things to all people. A post office, a trumpery bargain store, an optician, a dentist, a cycle shop, a laundrette with SIX tumble driers, a chemist, everything. And the genius of the plan, the pièce de résistance, it will be run from that flapship hardware empire that we know and love as Kent Aloominom. None of the bully boy supermarkets will succeed in their rape of our quaint little village, affectionately known as Borough Green, outstanding beauty etc etc. Why go to greedy predators, corporates, when Kent Aloominom can supply your every need, both emotionally and retail. A bonhomie with your postal order. An old joke with those oven chips and more privacy and information with your prescription. Really is that so? Yes, I happen to know that Richard is very knowledgeable in all things medical. Such is his modesty that it is a little known fact he is a full colonel in the St John's Ambulance Brigade, with over two hundred attendances to his credit at the Iwade banger racing circuit. Of course his greatest personal triumph was to be asked to assist at the 2001 "World's Strongest Man" contest final in his capacity of emergency hernia consultant. Not bad eh? What a CV...



Of course there will be some disruption. The church and Foremans will have to go to accommodate the new giant that will be K.A. but every cloud has a silver lining and, for those displaced, the offer of a job in a K.A. department of their choice will be guaranteed. It's a wonderful scheme don't you think? Well I've done some costings and feasibilities on the back of a fag packet (yes Daphne's still on the weed) and yes, to put it in a nutshell and the vernacular of entrepreneur, "The Scheme has legs".

But what about our existing small independent shops and

supermarket I hear you ask. Well they will continue to trade and Kent Aloominom will not be aggressive in pricing items available in our independents ... Now for the coup de grace. In sharp contrast to the greedy B.O.G.O.F. atmosphere those big supermarkets create in their temples to MAMMON, Borough Green's rustic charm will determine the footfall. Our high street will be pedestrianised between the hours of 10am and 4pm, during which time licensed street entertainers will perform but no money must change hands. Mime artists, poets, human statues and the bagpipes are strictly forbidden. So too is the use of amplifiers but crooners may, if they so wish, project their voice through a rolled up newspaper. Artistes are strictly forbidden to change in the library and could be subject to a fine if found ignoring this condition.



Well, like Martin Luther King, Florence Nightingale, Margaret Thatcher, I too have a dream. A dream that Sainsburys and their imposters will not succeed and at the head of this victory, at the helm of the good ship Aloominom, is our captain. All hail Richard. Hip, hip etcetera.



Apart from an ingrowing toe nail, is there anything as painful as unrequited love? The emotional pain of a love, a longing, not returned. I speak of that heartache from the soap box of experience. I am standing on it now, asking you not to judge me, but instead to pity me, forgive me. I have been a fool, squandered the fine reputation perhaps I had in the community. Lost the respect of others and felt shame as a result of my actions. So I'm about to bare my soul and tell you exactly what led me to those actions. Better it comes from me than a palm to the lips of a gossip, so here goes.

We were having tea and scones at Daphne's. Daphne had baked them for the occasion. Mice were waving white flags. Daph' was recovering from her "falls", although they had put so many metal plates in her wrist and shoulder. She is not allowed in Asda as she sets the alarms off and brings the metal shutters down. Although on the plus side of the plates, she says that listening to her portable radio in bed at night, if she holds the aerial, she gets wonderful radio reception.



Stella (money's too tight to mention) supplied the sweets for our soirée - pick and mix and out of date Christmas fare. Then Pam both thrilled and disappointed us when she produced a large Quality Street tin, which unfortunately did not contain everybody's favourite confectionery but was the guardian of sandwiches left over from last night's WI meeting, hosting a talk by retired Major Richard Soverhead, who gave a talk (with slides) on "The beauty of Dust".

Anyway our evening was going reasonably well, despite our often differences. However I did notice a slight elephant in the room atmosphere, then all of a sudden Stella blurted out "Have you seen it, read it yet, Muriel, Fifty Shades of Grey?". Pam chipped in "Come on Muriel, own up, you have seen it haven't you?". This repeat of the question was accompanied by say no more, nudge nudge winks and a chorus of raucous laughter, which eventually subsided enough for me to ask "Why should the subject particularly interest me?". Again, in unison, they replied "Hardware, it's all about hardware, your favourite subject. You're always in Kent Aloominom". They then went on to explain, in that way that people do who have seen the film and delight in telling you all about it, that for some obscure reason some men have great respect for a woman who has an interest, a knowledge of hardware. They find that an attractive quality in a woman. But not any hardware, no, specific hardware like cable ties, electrical flex, rope, straps? Not the sort of thing I buy; mouse traps, bird seed, key fobs, plugs. Eventually the laughter at my expense evaporated, coffee was served and the evening came to a close...



At home in bed that night, I formulated a plan that might endear

me to Richard, that Kent Aloominom supremo, the object of my unrequited affection, admiration and reason for my house being jam packed with hardware but, from what the girls were saying, the wrong sort of hardware. What a fool I've been, but no longer, oh no. I wrote out a list of things the girls mentioned. Electrical flex, cable ties, et cetera and at nine o'clock in the morning, struggling to contain my excitement, I crossed the threshold of Kent Aloominom.

Richard greeted me "Good morning Muriel, what can I get you?". My heart was thumping I couldn't speak, so I just handed him my list. As we moved round the store, that wonderful store, he offered the various items for my approval. I tried to handle them in a confident, knowledgeable manner but was so nervous I got caught up in the electrical flex and tripped over the rope, dropping the cable ties as I fell over. Richard picked the bits up and seemed to be a little impatient with me when he said "Look, leave the list with me and I'll deliver it to your house later". He smiled and I melted, then hastily left the store, embarrassed by what a fool I had made of myself. At home I was in a state. Had to eat two KitKats and half a packet of Wherters. Then, after what seemed an eternity, a knock at the door. It was Steve "I've got your bits here Muriel, shall I just drop 'em here?". Then he was gone. Richard had sent someone else, purposely avoiding me. Now you tell me, at that precise moment, would you have felt more pain from an ingrowing toe nail? I don't think so.



May 2015

Summer and time to face one of my many demons. Gardening! I have learnt my lesson though; don't be too ambitious, this is Western Road not Wisley. Right let's get started then and remember the golden rule for any project is planning. Throughout history the secret of success has been in the preparation, the planning. And so I should plan whenever inspiration visited me - in a café on a serviette, on the inside of a stray fag packet or a hurried biro sketch on the palm of my hand. Planning, yessir!

For three weeks I thought about planning. Cutting pictures out of magazines. Watching and recording every episode of "Gardeners' World", in the vain hope that all that knowledge would inspire a thought process to produce a gold medal garden here in Western Road, Borough Green... Into the fourth week and the page was still blank. A plain white leaf of stationary, empty, mocking me. I felt the pain of frustrated genius and sought comfort, not in wine but KitKats. Four finger KitKats dipped in tea. Decadent behaviour, without losing an ear. I thought of those early pioneers who dared beyond the constraints of what was considered normal. Van Gogh, Emmeline Pankhurst, Napoleon, Hopalong Cassidy. Yes. Hopalong Cassidy, innovator, visionary. Not one but two guns in holsters. A huge brimmed hat, whatever the weather, and the first cowboy ever to wear a smidgen of make-up. What a man, what foresight.



Even so, staring into an empty garden for the fifth week I felt sad, hopeless. Afraid my genius had deserted me. Or if it was ever there. Had I been deluding myself all along? I was no genius, I am no genius. My eyes were stinging, I recognised the symptoms of tears and looked away from the garden to retreat indoors.

I went to the bookcase and took out a book that Pam had given me ages ago. A book that patronised rather than instructed. "Gardening for Beginners". The book talked down to the reader with chapter headings such as "Preparing the soil simply" and "Planting seeds easily". There was even a whole chapter under the heading "Watering" and a sub-heading (with handy hints for

holding the hose). The illustrations, amazingly, were all in black and white. Black and white flowers! And there was often a sickly looking child pointing at something in the distance or holding a cat in her arms and pointing the cat at something. Ugghhh!



The most insulting pages were the centre fold. The whole creepy family. Pets and toys, too many children and lots more pointing into the distance with expressions that suggested "Look Mummy, over there, beyond the hostas; Nirvana". But for me the book's saving grace was the last two page spread. A retired colonel type, with cravat and monocle, was holding a huge marrow aloft, star of the chapter "Grab first prize". His admiring family were looking on and swooning but everyone, including the proof-reader, failed to notice, in the vague distance, the old golden labrador cocking his leg over a topiaried box. Priceless confirmation, never work with children and animals.

I returned the book to its bookcase, there to languish for another fifty years, but returning the book I accidentally dislodged another. A book of poetry, a separate piece of paper protruding from its pages. It was a poem I had written and forgotten. I read it and thought to myself, it's OK Muriel you are still a genius. Maybe not in the garden though.

## BLUEWATER

He stopped to rest  
On a bench  
In a shopping mall

Stared in wonder  
At the Sushi bar  
On the floor below

This was no corner caf'  
Meat, two veg  
Apple pie

But bowls of fish  
Out of water  
Drifting by

Just like him  
In a mall  
Some ol' guy.



## June 2015

You've heard me mention Stella, haven't you? We are friends but we clash, seeing most things from a different angle. Yes, that Stella. Stella and I are the Marmite debate personified. Incidentally, when I was a little girl, my mother used to lubricate my trike with Marmite. We couldn't bear to eat the stuff but discovered it as a wonderful lubricant. So if you spot a jar of Marmite in a tradesman's tool box, you can rest assured of a job well done.

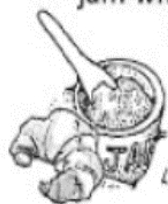
Well Stella knocked at my house recently, carrying fresh croissants from the bakers. It was her peace offering following our disagreement a little while ago. The problem is she is intolerant of people who do not see things her way. We disagreed on the benefits or failings of dishwashers and our opposite views collided on the merits or otherwise of recycling. I told her, all things considered, I'm inclined to bung everything into the same dustbin and wash up in a bowl of soapy water. She called me a Luddite, then went on about the planet, the environment, the Hadron Collider and beard lady Eurovision singer. She was on a rant, both personal and general, when I spotted the Daily Express protruding from her carrier bag. Then I knew it would be "foreigners and celebrities" next, and sure enough it was. Eventually, in a self induced temper, she stormed out and now, two weeks later, she was back avec fresh croissants.

She handed me the pastries then immediately ruined the gesture when she said "This doesn't mean that I was in the wrong, I'm not apologising, I —". At this point I interrupted her, I said "Thank you Stella I'll make us a nice cup of tea, but just let me show you my new art work project". I passed her the box containing items and instructions. She took it from me, gave the brushes and paper a cursory look then commenced to read the instructions aloud, in mocking, sarcastic tones. She asked me, had I created my masterpieces yet. I showed her my best effort. I didn't tell her, it was the only one worth keeping. I hadn't perfected the art, of the Jung period masters, of "heating the work to create a parchment like finish complementing the brushwork". It's a tricky procedure and the cause of some soot stains on the ceiling. I gingerly passed the A4 size paper to Stella. It was crumbling in my fingers, scorched jet black apart from a blue blob in the corner. "I call



this piece Serenity", I said. Stella took it from me and, as it disintegrated in her hands, she replied "And I call it rubbish". Then went on to laugh like a "Jack Tar" (early nautical reference to the triumphant seamen of Trafalgar. NB Source not Google but Uncle David over sixty years ago...).

I went into the kitchen to prepare tea, croissants and revenge. A simple plan to fill Stella's croissant with copious amounts of strawberry jam which did, according to plan, squirt a glorious stream of the thick sickly stuff over her top and trousers. She yelled at me "How much jam did you put in there? Muriel Rurial you are ridiculous. I try to be friends with you but sometimes it's hopeless. You either did that deliberately or you are plain stupid". At this point she took the art work box and stamped on it, breaking the pencils, brushes and box at the same time. And the huge blob of jam that was on her top, she scooped off and threw at the television, to briefly descend the screen like a snail. Her parting shot as she stormed out was "I'll have the clothes cleaned and send you the bill. If the stains don't come out, you can buy me a new lot. Goodbye"...



So later, after restoring order to the front room, relaxing with a cup of tea, I got to thinking how different Stella and I are and yet deep down the best of friends. Yes surely variety is the spice of life so "Viva Las Vegas", "Bonjour Paris", "Hello England", let us celebrate diversity. Hark at me I sound like a politician now. Cries from the house of "Answer the question", "Order, Order" and "Egg, bacon and chips and a fried slice" from that dotty old peer Lord Ponderous, who had wandered into the wrong chamber, thinking it was the canteen.

Well tomorrow I think I'll pop into the charity shop, see if I can pick up a couple of jigsaw puzzles, for the sheer fun of setting fire to them. Thousands of tiny, little, fiendishly interlocking cardboard. Can't stand 'em. Funny isn't it, some people love 'em. Y'see, we're all different.

## July 2015

I have had a brilliant idea. As you know, I am blessed as the recipient of these flashes of genius and I am eternally grateful to be the conduit in this mysterious process that ultimately enriches our lives. I do agree that not all new ideas are for the best. For the sake of balance let me give you an example. William Wordsworth wandered lonely as a cloud, when all at once he saw a crowd, a host of golden daffodils. Now in this day and age, ol' Bill Wordsworth would not wander about, lonely as a cloud. He would have had a SatNav and Daffodils would never have been written. So I do acknowledge that not all new ideas are the best but - but this latest one is a corker. So top up your tea, pull up a chair and allow me to explain...

Bearing in mind the fierce competition that exists between supermarkets, any initiative that puts their's ahead of the game, is priceless. A popular supermarket just off the A2 has a sign that tackles shoplifting. It reads "Shoplifters, first two items free if you are caught with over twelve items". The management's reasoning, it's harder to shoplift fourteen items but the "two free" will be too great a temptation. Hmmm? It could work and help to address the menace of theft, I hope it does, but my idea is different entirely.

"What is it" I hear you ask. Well I have created a role that is so sophisticated and essential that I am amazed that no one has thought of it before. I will see the boss man at Nisa, the top honcho, and offer my services as the country's first ever B.C.A. (Biscuit Choice Adviser). Now before you mock and cat call, let me tell you I have done my research. Oh yes, and I guarantee that one day it will be the norm for all supermarkets to have their very own B.C.A. The right biscuit for every occasion, even the stingy, lacklustre offering that is the "rich tea" has a role to play. A deterrent for mean, scrounging visitors. Rich tea, the "any spare change guv'ner" of the biscuit world. Ginger nuts and digestives, for tradesmen working in your home. Not expensive but still, not too cheap as you want a satisfactory job done. Don't risk upsetting them, inclining them to leave a wire a bit loose or a weeping pipe because you offered them a plate of Christmas tin remainders, oh no. And for all you romantics out there, remember the sure way to a woman's heart is with a four finger Kit Kat. Yes these are revelations, an insight into the wonderful world of biscuits. Knowledge, wisdom that I will impart and educate as to the power of biscuits.



But then the brainwave, the genius. I extrapolated from the humble supermarket aisle to the world. B.C.A.s to help to create peace and harmony worldwide. No more wars between nations, no more disputes at a domestic level. Someone nicks your parking space, don't rant and rave, offer them a custard cream. Keep a pack in your glove box in case of disputes. All differences resolved through that power of biscuits, not just any biscuit but, thanks to the B.C.A., the right biscuit. Peace on earth, goodwill to all. Blackcurrant tea and a Highland Shortie then watch the barriers disappear. Checkpoint Charlie replaced with Twinings breakfast tea and Hobnobs before a gentle stroll through, at one's leisure, with a smile and a bonhomie. Also, before every debate at the UN or the EU, Earl Grey and Penguins will be served and at long last there will be peace and harmony.

Wow, imagine all this achieved from the humble beginnings of a lone B.C.A.'s actions in a Borough Green (area of outstanding natural bla, blah, blah) supermarket. Putin and Obama dipping bourbons into each other's tea. A symbolic gesture of peace and harmony. Or Kim Jong-un, after speaking to the North Korea B.C.A., allowing his subjects to chose the biscuit with their tea, rather than be obliged to take the sickly Wagon Wheel, choice of their childish (short back and sides) leader all the time. Ahh I wonder will this dream I have, this vision, ever come to fruition or will I, like old Bill Wordsworth, forever wander lonely as a cloud. I ask you, what would be the point of that? Daffodils has already being written.



Is it me? Is it me? What? Is it me that can never find anything to watch on the television? Open the "What's On TV" guide to its middle pages. Five terrestrial channels, one hundred and twenty hours of television. What is worth watching that is genuine, that is original, that is not an insult to our intelligence? NUFFINK!.. Soaps? You're "avin' a larf aintyer? Reality television? No such thing. No one, absolutely no one, acts naturally in front of the cameras. That's why people are paid millions of pounds, dollars, to act, to create an illusion. People like Cumberbund Lumberbatch, borderline watchable as Sherlock Holmes. But I'm not talking about tongue in cheek fiction, I'm thinking of the done to death on all channels topics ... Antiques! Surely that's a miserly score on the funometer. Why don't they liven it up a bit if we must have to contend with such a proliferation of these show. Introduce half a dozen Rupert Fumblers. Clumsy porcelain and objet d'art experts who remark after dropping and smashing valuable antique pieces "Oops sorry, silly me. Still it was a hundred years old, had a good run didn't it?" Now that would be worth watching, that's entertainment.

Quiz shows! Nice little earner for the out of work actor/presenter but for the poor ol' viewer the quiz show is a paper hat consolation half hour that would have been less of a waste of time if they had spent it sandpapering elephants down to greyhounds. Next up, Animal, Gardening, Cookery. Far too much air time devoted to such inane topics. If we must have them then let's liven them up a bit. Bring some dodgy animals in with the gardening crew. Let a few loose canines bite one or two of the gardeners. Pretend they are the owners' dogs. The beauty of this idea is the gardeners could demonstrate to the viewer how it's still possible to work in the garden with your arm in a sling or bleeding profusely from a ravaged calf muscle. That's what I call public service broadcasting. Yes!...



Cookery! Taking a leaf out of the gardening book, to be more true to life there should be more injuries in the kitchen. Let's face it, there are some brilliant accidents, perfect television, when preparing food. And you will get presenters prepared to deliberately cut themselves, or let a fire get dangerously out of hand, if they think it will put the ratings up. Working title of programme, not "avant-garde cookery". But "avant got a cluc"... SPORT! Far too much of it on the television and is there anything that can numb our brains like Formula One does. I believe adults could have wisdom teeth removed whilst under the influence of F.1 racing. Of course a close second to racing cars, if not equal, it's got to be football and those pansy millionaire footballers. I think we should introduce dogs on the pitch, borrow them from the gardening programme. Let the dogs chase the ball and bite the players. That would up the ratings, especially if we put the pundits in the stocks too, every time they uttered drivel. That wouldn't take long. Ultimate well deserved insult, they are in the stocks but we can't even be bothered to throw rotten fruit at them. Just a thought,



re-wind to Formula One, why not introduce full sized, concrete based, lollipop lady mannequins put on the track at different times during the race.... Repeats! Or to apply the TV companies' euphemism "another chance to see". Phhhh!

A long sigh now as I lament the passing of the days when all television was live, broadcast to us via twelve inch black and white sets through out the land. Yes all live programmes. No crafty edits, real seat of the pants broadcasting. It was all there, the most spectacular cock ups and, at other times, moments of spontaneous genius. "They think it's all over, it is now". But as the soothsayers frequently remind us "Things go in cycles" and, to prove them right in this digital age, people are creating their own live programmes in a quest for that five minutes of fame. They are to be pitied rather than applauded, risking life or limb to emulate their C.G.I. heroes flying through the air, crushing cars and buildings, firing enormous weapons. I used to watch the Flowerpot Men. I could see the wires moving Bill and Ben, I didn't think the Lone Ranger's little mask successfully concealed his true identity either, but it didn't matter, we knew it wasn't real, neither was Parker or Lady Penelope. The programmes were designed to entertain not deceive. Our favourite characters had flaws, today's do not. Bill and Ben's tell-tale wires were endearing, in a strange way it made them vulnerable, real. The C.G.I.s' invincibility is their flaw. That is not the flaw of heroes.



## September 2015

Let's face it, we've all done it. Doesn't matter how careful, how thrifty we are, we've all done it. Totally out of character, blown money on what can only be described as an indulgence. Yes I can hear you now recalling the white elephant you purchased. A gadget, clothing, an ornament. Something you bought, impractical, unsuitable, unnecessary. The bread maker used once then never again. A skirt, a top, an electrical appliance. Every home has one or more of these hopeless purchases. We've paid too much for them to simply throw them or give them away, so we keep them, declaring we will use them, wear them, appreciate them. But deep down we know we won't and so we consign them to the bottom of the wardrobe, back of the cupboard. Not thrown away but out of sight, out of mind.

Of course, when our credit card statement comes in, we are reminded of our extravagant purchase as it is clearly displayed in pounds, shillings and pence. It opens up old sores. The day we bought it. The uncertainty when the assistant said "Press enter". But we were in too deep, can't back out now, big queue behind. The assistant, a little impatiently, repeats "press enter". And we do, setting the wheels in motion of the brainstorm purchase. We are condemned to take the thing home, to haunt us. "Please remove your card". I do as I am told. Remove the card and walk away from the till. I am thirty seconds away from the till when an assistant stops me and hands me the item I purchased but left at the till. His smile suggesting pity rather than customer service.

I am in the car now, the large John Lewis bag on the passenger seat. It is in defiant mood so I cover it with my cardigan. I'm losing it. My mind I mean. I start to berate it. "I paid too much for you. A hundred and thirty-nine pounds. I must be mad. Stone mad bonkers". "BEEEEEP". Loud blast from irate



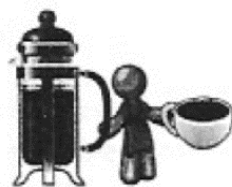
motorist overtaking me aggressively complete with obscene hand gestures. I blame the purchase "Now look what you've caused". I continue the journey in silence occasionally glaring at the item on the passenger's seat.

At home in Western Road I do not follow my usual ritual of putting the kettle on and taking a four finger KitKat from the chocolate and biscuit stash tin. Instead I go to the John Lewis bag. I take the box from the bag, then the item from the box. No turning back now. I bought the pods from the foodhall so I am ready to go. I should be excited but I am feeling guilty. It cost more than a week's pension. I glimpse the various charity appeal leaflets and letters in the letter rack. I meant to send a few donations but haven't for a while. I bought a cappuccino machine instead and now I fell slightly

ashamed. A quiet reflection and private promise to donate soon and I feel better, and more inclined to try out the coffee maker.

I read the instructions and feel confused but determined to master it. First attempt, too much milk, blew the lid off and flooded the worktop with milk. Second attempt, pressed the wrong button, panicked, couldn't stop the water running into the coffee cup. Another flood, then third effort forced pod in wrong way round. This time milk and water flood and jammed pod. It took me an hour but, at the end of hour, the worktop was clean, the pod was free and the machine was clean, dry, back in its box, and safely in the cupboard next to the bread maker, the other white elephant....

A couple of weeks later I wandered into the bakers and a familiar voice called "Hi Muriel". It was Judy and she was beckoning me over to her table. "I have to have my cappuccino fix" she said, then went on to say "I might treat myself to one of those machines one day. Arthur loves a cappuccino too. I think he likes the idea of being a Borough Green barista". Well you can probably guess, so I'll cut a long story short to say simply Judy did buy my machine for a price we were both happy with. Arthur has fulfilled his dream, and I made those donations and still had something left to put towards my impending John Lewis bill. So all's well that ends well.



## October 2015

I'm toying with the idea of writing a book. Oh I know what you're thinking; she sees herself as another J K Rowling, gonna be a millionaire celeb. Well no actually, because my book is not fantasy and goblins and broomstick flying, it's a guide to life. Real life, nitty gritty, survive and succeed, thanks to wisdom and experience. Wisdom passed on to me and from my own experiences. Let me give you a taster of a book that will be a veritable cornucopia of gold dust information. You decide if you are brave enough to follow my examples, or scoff if you wish, to heap opprobrium upon me. It is the lot of a genius.

Now first wisdom example. Never fall over with an egg in your pocket. Now I can guess that you are screaming "ridiculous" but allow me to explain. Eggs should never be cooked straight from the fridge, therefore cordon bleu chefs always carry an egg in their pocket. That way they are ready to start work immediately with a room temperature egg. Clumsy amateurs attempting to emulate their culinary heroes would not admit to it but are regular victims.

Higher wisdom now. "No man is a puncture outfit. Some men are the glue. Some are the patches, while others are the french chalk but no man is a complete puncture outfit". That, I think you'll agree, needs no explanation. In fact I sense I have whetted your appetite for more? Well it shall be yours. "In the heat of dilemma your ice cream cornet may slip from it's cone". Wonderful, succinct aphorism and now from my own scrapbook of life how to turn an awkward, unfortunate situation to your advantage. It's the winter period, you need quiet relaxation time. A knock at the door, it's the dreaded unwanted guests who turn up uninvited and fail to sense your displeasure. In cases such as these I pretend a party game and get them to lay at the foot of my draughty doors. My unwanted guests make excellent draught excluders. If they are still there when I'm ready for bed I let Joe's dog in and he licks their faces while they are laying there. That usually gets them filching for their car key. Genius!...

There is a railway arch on the busy Old Kent Road. The denizens of that area are often poor but worldly wise. In faded white paint on the wall of that arch is an enigmatic sentence. It has been there since before the Second World War. Repainted, refreshed many times, but the words remain the same. The beauty of it is, we all put our own interpretation to it. It gets us thinking and perhaps reflecting on periods of own lives, or higher things maybe. Those words on that railway arch are "My uncle is an electrician". Pithy, wise, that certainly sets you thinking, doesn't it?...

Hope you are still with me, on this cerebral ramble, and enjoying a taster of my book. It's exciting isn't it? Hope you feel part of it. NEXT a quiz. Quotes from great thinkers. The thoughts of Socrates, Rurial and Proust, but which quote is from Rurial?

- A) I know more, knowing I know nothing.
- B) She denied me the luxury of solitude, without affording me company.
- C) Happiness is a four finger KitKat.

Answer will be in the November "VOICE" and in the back of the book when it is

published. Or if you can't wait that long, contact Margaret, our editor, who will put you out of your misery...

Well I see the sundial of eternity has cast a shadow that beckons our leaving, so I'll sign off with a short masterpiece, a poem entitled "BIRD", also included in the book. Yes it's all there.

BIRD

I stood and admired  
a bird in flight

I tried it myself  
but couldn't quite...  
get off the ground.

MR

Note from the editor. Muriel is on a new prescription at the moment. Views expressed by her are not necessarily etc etc..



## November 2015

Due to the hopeless menu of television programmes I found myself listening to more radio shows. Radio Kent, L.B.C., Radio London, the airwaves are full of them, twenty-four seven. A down side to commercial radio, however, is a schedule of three minutes adverts to every quarter of an hour broadcasting. Sponsors rule, adverts are king. Prime Minister put on hold while we listen to a bloke championing an optician who gives him the option of free sunglasses if he buys his lenses there. Meanwhile Dave continues to hold while an out of work actor does the voice over for a Japanese car manufacturer. The make and model both incomprehensible and unpronounceable. I think it was a Quazimojo make, Ping pong too big model. Terms and conditions apply. Then a baffling list of those conditions that apply but you can't understand. Grrrr! And let's face it the words Ping pong too big don't set your heart racing like the sound of a car named the Mark one Cortina or Rover 2000, perhaps an M.G.B.G.T., Do they? Finally, as the three minutes of inane adverts end, the P.M. waiting in the wings so to speak, is at last allowed to do just that; but it's the usual politicians' speak. Crimes down, employment up. NHS waiting lists shorter and the little dog laughed to see such fun, the dish ran away with the spoon....

Now we have Ron on the line from Gillingham. "Go ahead Ron, what would you like to say to the Prime Minister?" "Hello Prime Minister, I'm a bit nervous, I'll try not to ramble, but in a nutshell, I was made redundant when the factory closed down. I can't seem to get another job. Recently I was burgled and I've been waiting eight months for a hernia operation. Also it's been so long since I saw a policeman in our area I recently mistook a bloke in a British Airways uniform for a copper and I started to tell him about my burglary". "Well I am sorry to hear that Ron but if you leave your name and contact details I can completely ignore you as soon as I leave the studio". Ron was followed by Pauline. Her true, personal story, empirical facts, disputes keenly the PM's version of the utopia we supposedly live in. Pauline and Ron are followed by other callers with similar tales and proof that the Westminster Chamber could so easily be an opium den, members there so far removed from reality, for the most part, while some know exactly what they are saying but arrogantly underestimate our ability to identify their duplicity ....

Three words that sum up politicians. Yes, no and obfuscation. They will never give a direct yes or no in response to a straight forward question. Instead they obfuscate with baffling statistics and gobbledygook eg "Order, order. Will the Right Honourable Gentlemen (RHG) for Utopia West in Wonderland, offer an apology and thereafter explain where the funding will come from to finance the pie in the sky, on a shoestring budget project. And has it been rigorously costed, if so is it affordable. Yes or no?". The RHG opens his mouth but no words are forthcoming. A deathly hush falls upon the house. A tumble weed moment. A direct Yes or No challenge. The silence, the suspense is agonising, at last the RHG takes a small glove puppet from his inside pocket. The Right Honourable Gentlemen speaks through the glove puppet. "I am speaking on behalf of the Right Honourable Gentlemen but let it be



known I am merely conveying his words owing to his temporary loss of voice and I do not necessarily endorse what I am saying and, furthermore, he does not necessarily endorse what the glove puppet is saying." Incidentally the puppet's name, for the record, is Timothy. Suddenly an emotional member stands up and calls out "Forgive him for he knows not what he is saying". A member has obviously watched Kirk Douglas in the classic Spartacus movie and drawn parallels. Either that or he had nodded off and suddenly called out as he woke up. "Order, order". The glove puppet continues "Yes there is ample funding and off street parking and I look forward to the commencement of the project". As the RHG and Timothy sit down the mood and opinion in the house was such as not seen since Tony Blair played the George Bush glove puppet ruse over Iraq, nor had the house seen such dastardly tactics employed. Later the day's events were reported on the news channels but then other matters stole the headlines..

I did say that I started listening to more radio shows, but that didn't last. I found it confusing. Was I listening to a real person, someone who could be held to account or was it a glove puppet? So instead of agonising over current affairs what I do is have a nice cup of tea and a four finger Kit Kat, and then set fire to a thousand piece jigsaw puzzle. I'm sure you will agree, that's entertainment while at the same time slowing the march of those fiendish interlocking bits of cardboard and their efforts to enervate the minds of decent, honest people so they can take us over and rule the world.

## December 2015

They're at it again. Who? Them out there in Brussels. The EU, introducing new legislation to be seen to be doing something that will justify their lucrative gravy train existence. This time it's Christmas for the treatment. Well thanks to a contact I have (long story, my lips are sealed, shtum), thanks to that mole I can reveal some of the unbelievable, unworkable edicts to be imposed, chiefly in the name of health and safety, with a smattering of human rights, the right to a family life, six numbers and the bonus ball, roll over still applies. So here we go. Householders should not leave glasses of alcoholic beverage out for Father Christmas. As from 2015 Father Christmas could be liable to be breathalysed and face arrest if found to be over the legal limit and drunk in charge of a sledge. The sledge to be impounded along with Christmas gifts, leaving millions of tiny tots, and bigger tots, heartbroken as a result having to make do with bits of rag and knobs of coal for presents, just like the Victorian workhouse children did.



Well if you think that's bad enough, brace yourself then read on. Sledges are to be subject to random inspections by special E.U.S.I. (EU Sledge Inspectors) 60 euros per hour. All sledges failing the test will be destroyed by E.U.S.D.O. (EU Sledge Destruction Officers) same rate of pay as inspectors. Santa will only be allowed to land on flat roofs. For properties with the traditional apex roofs the sledge must hover adjacent to the chimney as they do in kiddie films and everyone goes "Ahhh", while Nan falls asleep in the armchair with her paper hat askew and gravy stains on the blouse she bought for Christmas...



More from Brussels. It will be strictly illegal to descend into a property via the chimney. Presents can be lowered via chimney access but Santa must obey health and safety regulations, calling aloud in a traditional way so as not to suggest a break-in, "Yo ho ho, presents down below". Furthermore Father Christmases must have personal liability insurance as a precaution in respect of any claims made against him or her (we suggest Johnson, Johnson and Crowbar of Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2, Father Christmas Liability Insurance specialists since yore). Now then, since the successful animal rights protest, when activists chained themselves to David Dimbleby during a BBC Question Time programme, the EU has brought in new laws governing all aspects of the reindeers' role at Christmas. Reindeers new to the profession must be not given soppy names like Prancer, Dancer or Rudolph. This could affect the reindeer's confidence and undermine its self respect. Incidentally, a tip for all new Santas. Be on your guard against the "two blokes in a skin" scam. They pose as reindeers and make off with the sledge full of presents. This happens when Santa



is doing a ground level drop. Oldest trick in the book. So be vigilant new Santas. With regard to the food treats left out for Father Christmas, the EU has ruled, from 2015, it will be illegal to accept such treats. Some greedy Santas have died as a result of overindulging on treats, and their partners/relatives have become embroiled in lengthy, costly litigation against the EU in its role of the guardians of the tradition that is Santa Claus and Christmas in general. (This does not include hollow chocolate Father Christmases, corny Christmas cracker jokes or repeats on the television. Except the original black and white film "A Christmas Carol").

But I can reveal, thanks to my mole, there are some benefits for the Santas. There will be a phony beard and leather riding boot allowance introduced. And in the case of a yo ho ho merry Christmas, big fat face Santa, he or she will be able to wear two or three beards at once and claim allowance for all three providing a receipt is produced. However the most profound and, we believe, welcome change to working conditions for Father Christmas is the dispensing of the services of elves. A senior Santa spokesperson for the profession said "Elves are not Santa's hoppity, poppity little helpers, they are a mischievous nuisance and Walt Disney has a lot to answer for".



Well that's the inside information regarding Father Christmas and the EU from me and mole. And this is me saying Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to the six people who read these monthly scribblings. I thought it was eight people but Margaret (top editor) assures me it is six.