

July 2020

Abbeyfield
Making time for older people

One Abbeyfield Family

Reflections on the theme of
togetherness from the residents,
staff, volunteers and friends of
The Abbeyfield Society



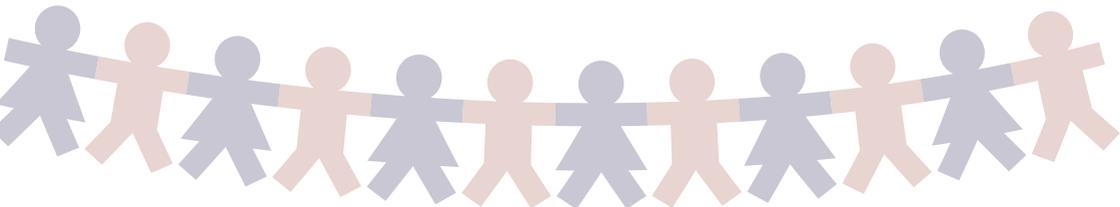
Introduction

This compilation features the poems, stories, letters and other thoughts of The Abbeyfield Society's residents, staff, volunteers and friends from around the community.

They were written as part of the creative writing initiative launched to celebrate Abbeyfield Week in June 2020. In a time of lockdown and the coronavirus pandemic, we asked for reflections on our theme for the week, **togetherness**.

We were overwhelmed by the pieces that were sent in, many of them moving and humorous, demonstrating how our entire Abbeyfield Family is united by the values of community, friendship and positivity that are so important at this time. We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we did.

The pieces are laid out in alphabetical order by house/home.



In the Byre with Dad

By Linda Bird (Chair of Trustees)

Abbeyfield Barnard Castle Society

Early morning sun hits grubby windows
Inside the cattle shuffle in their stalls
Familiar smells of sweet grassy breath
High notes of meadow hay and cow dung
Mingle in the warmth from their bodies
Soft pulsating sounds of the milking machines
Dad, his shirt sleeves rolled up, tends the cows
There he is at one with the animals
Listening to their sounds and movements
An old battered radio stands high on the windowsill
Its sounds mingle and blend in the air
"Puff the Magic Dragon", "Catch a Falling Star",
"Que Sera Sera"
We children stood watching, listening, learning, feeling
Little knowing that these moments would live on
Through us when you are gone.

Quietude

By Jessica Kellond (resident)

Burttons House, Plymstock

To just sit and listen

This I do enjoy, so much to hear

Take time to watch, look around

Bird song can be so really clear

With the time I have found

I recognise the singers.

Quiet, relaxing music is a pleasure –

I sometimes can be miles away

Maybe on a sunny beach

Just imagine, you're at leisure

Your dreams are within your reach

If you just sit and listen.

Lockdown Life

By Kathryn MacColl (staff)

Abbeyfield Darlington Society

Most days I wake up with my
head in a spin

I try hard to work out which
day I'm in

It's been nearly 15 long weeks

And at times it's been very
bleak

We've had many highs and
some lows

It's a miracle we haven't yet
come to blows

But the staff have helped us to
smile

For they've always gone the
extra mile

We've had fun watching
them bake

All sorts they've had to make

From pastries to bread and
creamy buns

Carbohydrates – well we've
had tons!

The homemade lemonade
was just fab

Every fish from crispy cod to
crab

Sudoku, puzzles and a hard
crossword

No wonder our vision is so
blurred

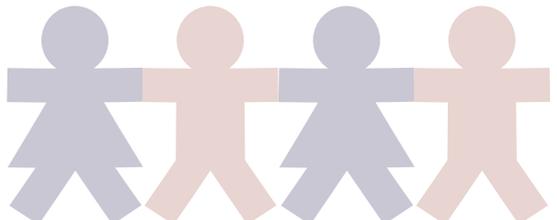
Lockdown Life

By Kathryn MacColl (staff)

Abbeyfield Darlington Society

Wicksy got us jumping high
We've looked online for things
to buy
We're older, wiser and fitter
And we've covered everything
in glitter

Lockdown is our new world
We watched the TV as it
unfurled
We're hoping we all stay safe
and sound
At least until the vaccine is
found.



The Abbeyfield Sponsored Walk

By Kathryn MacColl (staff)

Abbeyfield Darlington Society

We watched Captain Tom with
pride

“We salute you, sir!” we cried

His bravery was to be admired

His determination was so
inspired

And so it was we started our
walk

It was all the dinner table talk

We would do lap after lap

We would miss our afternoon
nap

Kath set us up on Virgin Money

The cash dripped in like
golden honey

Everyone had their part to play

In making such an historic day

We practised first with the staff

For them it was a great laugh

Wheelchairs, sticks and
strollers

One lady said she’d do it in
rollers

The Abbeyfield Sponsored Walk

By Kathryn MacColl (staff)

Abbeyfield Darlington Society

So we prepared for our big
day

Families queued online to pay

The sponsored walk was our
great plan

Kind nurses for every woman
and man

The NHS it means so much

They're truly a brilliant bunch

At Abbeyfield we'll do our bit

Full of Northern pride and grit

The big day dawned bright
and clear

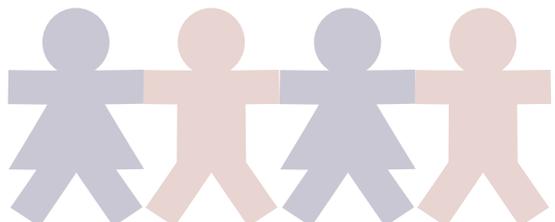
Our NHS mission now so near

Together we did over 100 laps

All the men wore baseball caps

25 kilometres in just one day

An absolute triumph in hot
May



The Caribbean Came to Darlington

By Kathryn MacColl (staff)

Abbeyfield Darlington Society

We set sail for balmier shores
Determined to leave behind our
chores

The Caribbean was our first
choice
"It'll be sunnier there", said
Joyce

First came the pineapple and
the rum

We didn't expect it to come in a
drum

Then the barbecue, it started to
sizzle

Never mind the fact it was in the
drizzle

Next the sound of reggae began
Just as the flames started to fan

Jamaica, St Lucia and Branson's
Necker

Look at Ann, our elderly trekker

Bright sun, blue sea and soft
sand

Bob Marley our favourite band
The residents just love to party

A good tonic for the hale and
the hearty

The sausages turned out just
grand

And George got on his old
Ray-Bans

Then grass skirts started to sway

It was another fine Abbeyfield
day!



Cornucopia

By J. Luxton (resident)

Girton Green, Cambridge

ROSES are red, violets blue,
the goodies delumptious – my
thanks are to you.

CABBAGE: good for you, or so
my mum said. It's time I took
notice. Gain pat on the head?

GREEN BEANS: now we're
talking, a taste so divine.

Enhanced, some might say,
with a mouthful of wine.

BEETROOT in a salad, now,
there's a nice thought. Grated
with apple it hits the right spot.

RHUBARB's so tasty. I'll simmer
it down to a couli with orange.
Cordon Bleu does that sound?

POTATOES perplex me, the red
or the white? Problems beset
me by day and by night.

MANNA from heaven? Well,
yes and, well, no. With no help
from heaven nothing would
grow.

BUT who does the hard work
from start to the end? The
digging, the planting, the
weeding? A friend.

THE ANSWER is clear and,
what's more, since you cared,
a harvest was gathered and
generously shared.

Cornucopia

By J. Luxton (resident)

Girton Green, Cambridge

REMAINS there one problem,
without any ham,

No chop and no chicken, no
half leg of lamb...

You've failed me, young
William, what am I to do?

A cow in the corner? Just think
of that stew.

Suggestions from me, now
there's a mistake.

How dare I? I'm hopeless, the
birds have my cake!

YOU'RE TOP OF THE CLASS,
no one else could compete.

My thanks to you, William –
you've joined the elite.

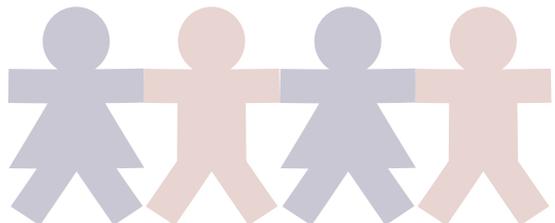
Togetherness

By Muriel Bradley (resident)

Girton Green, Cambridge

Do I want togetherness?
To be locked in with you?
To be entrapped within these
walls?
To see no one, and rue
The day when Covid 19
struck?
The day we can't ignore,
When independent living
changed
For how long, are we sure?

The mutant version which
holds sway
Dictates the way we live.
We all must keep our distance,
Be alert and never give
A hug, a friendly handshake
and,
God forbid, a kiss.
And we will hold together,
Together we shall win.
It will not last forever
And then we all can sin.



Togetherness

By Chloe Hill (staff)

Girton Green, Cambridge

I believe that in Abbeyfield everything happens for a reason and nothing ever happens by chance, or of good or bad luck.

My heart has been amazed at Abbeyfield by the way things are done by all. It's just amazing and makes it all very special for me.

Without the staff that we have at Abbeyfield Girton Green it wouldn't be the same.

The staff and residents make Girton Green a very special place, the amount of hard work that they put in to make sure everyone is OK and helping them with the things they need.

We at Girton Green are very lucky to have the staff we do, as we are all in this together and that's the main thing that makes a team the best.

Togetherhness

By Tanya Hill (staff)

Girton Green, Cambridge

'TOGETHERNESS' is a word
rarely used

Just like its meaning, it's often
abused

Friends, foes and family called
for their needs

Then fade from the light
without even a please

But now that's all changed with
Covid-19

Jobs are all done and the
house is now clean

We've discovered our feelings
and those that we've missed

Just hearing their voice is
simply pure bliss

Thinking of those who all do
their best

Let's thank the Lord for the
NHS

For without their care, help and
support

Things would be worse so let's
give them a thought

We look at those who crave the
best

Working all hours with barely
a rest

Once this is over and Covid-19
has gone

We hope to rejoice and take
flight like the swan

We'll take long walks in the
great open air

And shake hands with
strangers without a care

Togetherness

By Tanya Hill (staff)

Girton Green, Cambridge

So here's to the future, changes
for the best

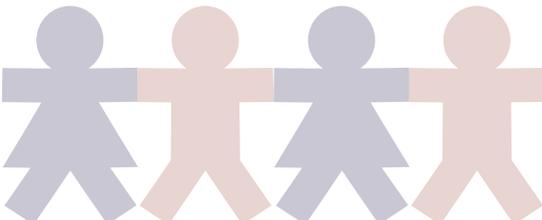
We'll party all evening with a
house full of guests

We're not just a number or a
face on the street

People have feelings so let's
make our world sweet

It doesn't take much to make
us all smile

Just a word called
'TOGETHERNESS' which
should last for a while.



Abbeyfield

By Liz Woodham (resident)

Abbeyfield Gloucestershire Society

Abbeyfield is a home from home,

We have no complaints, not even a moan.

The food is top class, I'd say,
With a different menu for us each day.

We have a lovely garden to sit in the sun

When all our little chores are done.

We are a happy, friendly lot
No worries or cares have we – not a jot.

We look after each other all the time

And feel so pleased when we're all well and fine.

Our friends and family see us too

There are so many things to do:

Reading, colouring, knitting and TV.

Wordsearch, crosswords, then it's time for tea.

You can go for a walk, though not too far

Our friends and family may be here in their car

There is nowhere else I'd like to be

Abbeyfield is just right for me!

Abbeyfield

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Elizabeth Woodham

Abbeyfield Cirencester House

Coronavirus 2020

By Judy (resident)

Hale Court, Tunbridge Wells

We're locked in and dare not
go out
Scared and helpless – there's a
virus about!
Life stands still, schools are
shut
Jobs furloughed, travel banned
– but

Outside the sun is shining
The sky is so blue
Birds are singing
And life starts anew.
We once ruled the world
We thought we were clever.
Now we're confused
Lack will or endeavour.
But will we listen?
Will we be told?
Can we be trusted
With this beautiful world?



COVID-19

By Diedre (resident)

Hale Court, Tunbridge Wells

Crystal clear skies

The odd fluffy cloud

Passing by

Birds chirping loudly, enjoying
their new-found peace

No noise. No traffic. No
pollution. What has caused this
confusion?

A virus you say, has brought
the nation to its knees

What can we do to make the
pain ease?

Is it to teach us the meaning
of kindness, togetherness and
compassion?

All we can do now is show us
the path to pray, and save the
day



Lockdown

By Yvonne (resident)

Hale Court, Tunbridge Wells

Abbeyfield in isolation
Loneliness and dire frustration
No more fun and visitation
Coughs and sneezes spread infection
Two metres distance regulation
Washing hands for sanitation
Wear a mask on transportation
And in caring situations
Virtual hugs – poor imitation
We must fulfil our obligation
And soon return to normalisation
Hallelujah, jubilation!



Things to Do!

By Joyce (resident)

Hale Court, Tunbridge Wells

What day is it today?

I never get it right.

I suppose it could be Monday

As I changed the sheets last
night.

If it's Wednesday I shall have to

Write my usual shopping list

And hope that this week there
is

Nothing I have missed.

Of course today is Friday

Fish and chips are on the way

And thanks to Karen's 'What's
on'

It isn't Groundhog Day!



Untitled

By Carole (resident)

Hale Court, Tunbridge Wells

The clunk of the trolley
It's lunchtime again
But what's on the menu?
I really must see –
But up here in our look
There's always a book
And 'Anne of Green Gables'
(an old friend from the past)
Comes to see me again
Meanwhile Philip works on his
jigsaw each day
Or code words or crosswords
make us both think

And we try to keep going
And remember the date, and
the day and the time.
At night the sky's amazing
The clouds and the colours can
change
Until the light has gone
And now morning is here
I start again
A chat with Lindsay, or with Tim
New life, a cup of tea – or
bring some cheer
Here we go, another day is
here.

Untitled

By Margaret (resident)

Hale Court, Tunbridge Wells

Every morning my mother used
to say

Look on the bright side, make
your day

You can wear that dress one
more time

No one can notice all that dirt
and grime

You can guess what will be
served for lunch

With no companions and
conversation all is munch

And those fellow residents who
dine at your table

I am beginning to like them
more than I thought able

Afternoon passes in reading,
crosswords, colouring and telly

Then bed, being thankful for
comfort and full belly

Was this an unusual day?

No, many more like the same
on the way.

Untitled

By Peter (resident)

Hale Court, Tunbridge Wells

Safe sheltered from the virus

How fortunate we are.

Yet still new worries plague us:

Historic statues threatened

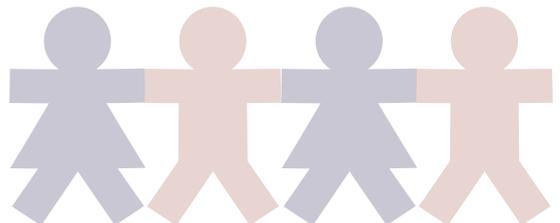
And economic woe.

But we shall meet again at
lunch

And chatter as before.

Today we'll greet The Queen's
birthday

As proudly as of yore!



A Letter

By Kevin (resident)

Norbreck House, Blackpool

Hello Friends at Abbeyfield,

It is great to be a resident of Abbeyfield in Blackpool. I feel so blessed to be a part of this organisation. I would recommend it to anyone, for it gives security, good food, warm rooms, and very experienced staff to consult in times of need. Yes, looking at the rest of this world, and where I could have ended up, I am so blessed to be a resident here.

This lockdown is a pest, and some of us are feeling a bit low. But I was flicking through the TV. channels recently and came across TWR: Trans World Radio. It sure did make a change from the usual stuff (adverts, etc.). If you would like your life to change for the better I recommend this TV-radio channel. It is on channel TWR, 733.

Yours,
Kevin

Once Upon a Time

By Joanne Painter (staff)

Abbeyfield Norbreck House, Blackpool

ONCE UPON A TIME – for that is how all fairy-tales should begin – there was a house where sadness, loneliness and age were forgotten.

The house was a place of sharing, of caring and of friendship.

The people who lived in the house felt happy and lucky to have found it and to have become a part of it.

They instinctively felt an integral part of the house and they took great joy in creating such a beautiful place to live.

The people who helped at the house felt proud and fulfilled in helping to make the people who lived there feel so happy and lucky.

The house was filled with laughter, companionship and kindness and no one ever felt alone again.

The people ate the most amazing meals each day, yet never had to cook, and the house was pristine, yet they never had to clean.

Parties were thrown, as if by magic, for birthdays, Easters, Christmases and other special days.

People were welcomed to the house regardless of sex, religion, race or creed and differences were embraced and celebrated.

Once Upon a Time

By Joanne Painter (staff)

Abbeyfield Norbreck House, Blackpool

The people felt safe within the house and took comfort in knowing they had each other to turn to if they needed to.

The house seemed to take care of itself, repairing itself, and renewing itself and this took worry away from the people.

There were lovely gardens at the house that the people could help to tend or simply enjoy.

The people took pleasure in having family and friends to the house and everyone who came said what a lovely place the house was to live in.

The people who helped at the house also often helped the families and friends of the people at the house and great bonds were forged.

When the people needed help there was always someone to do this and day to day worries seemed to fade away.

Life was good at the house and life did indeed seem like a fairytale... but all is not as it seems. This is not a story of a make-believe magical house with elves helping to run it, this the real life story of the magic of Abbeyfield. The people in this story are our residents and the helpers are our staff and volunteers.

Once Upon a Time

By Joanne Painter (staff)

Abbeyfield Norbreck House, Blackpool

Abbeyfield have been providing this 'magic' for over 60 years and have been side by side with you through some of life's most difficult times such as wars, acts of terrorism and riots, the miners' strike, the death of Princess Diana, and most recently the Coronavirus pandemic. We've also celebrated the good times with you such as England winning the World Cup, the Beatles phenomenon, Concorde's maiden flight, the first female Prime Minister, and we saw in a new millennium with you.

We have enjoyed each one of our 60 years with you and look forward to the next 60.

Cheers to you and to Abbeyfield, it's never THE END.



A Short Poem of Togetherness

By Betty P (resident)

Speedwell Court, Southampton

A member of staff gave me
a great big hug! Then I was
offered a cup of tea,
I thought to myself, this must
be the place for me!
It is filled with kindness and
glee,
To participate in activities, and
with good company.



A Short Story

By Doreen M (resident)

Speedwell Court, Southampton

Day by day we open the shops. Those who open the shops are considerate of the poor, who look for food and money to feed their families. Looking to get some help from the wealthy, but nothing in sight. The rich then realised there was no food for the poor, as time passed they became needy. One day a local lad put all of his money together so he could help feed everyone and share his food with the poor. This small offering helped them to survive. We all need some kindness from time to time.



David

By Gillian A (resident)

Speedwell Court, Southampton

Quiet thoughtful kind

Brothers of Maggie and Tom

Loved football, theatre and
song

Passionate about books

Never did anything wrong

Loving children and all good
things

Had trouble with water
creatures and creepy crawlies

Also known as Dave.



Diary Entry

By Edward T (resident)

Speedwell Court, Southampton

Whenever I think about my 'situation' and have a bad spell I think about the song 'Keep Right On to the End of the Road'.

"When all you love, will be dreaming of, will be there at the end of the road!" It reminds one that words fade quite often. One minute you are down, the next you are feeling more positive.

It should be remembered that most, if not all, people have someone who likes seeing them around, and usually those who do not have exceptionally large egos and are quite capable of continuing in spite of anything that can happen.

You will always find someone who really does have a problem. Don't just shut yourself off, pick yourself up and start all again.

New Beginnings

By Sheila H (resident)

Speedwell Court, Southampton

I closed the door and locked it for the last time. My car has been written off so no more driving for me, so goodbye to my independence. I am stuck unless my daughter decides to take me out with the children. It was to be 10 months before we tried five of us in the car and found it was actually possible and not too uncomfortable; quite reasonable really, and didn't feel as though we were likely to die at any moment.

I could see why my daughter had been against my driving in Southampton; too complicated and too busy. I would have got lost in no time at all. Driving in London or Birmingham was a lot easier and more simple, and I did not have the constant feeling we were about to sink through the ground.

Back to the present, we had some lunch and I felt better for it; except for the fact the fruit trees, which were all doing better than ever, were going to have to be left to the new people and we could take nothing with us. Even the greenery was doing well for the first time ever. Various boxes were carefully packed with fruit and loaded into the car.

We reached my future home, Abbeyfield, a brand new home. The only other resident was a lady of 102 years. She was very chatty and full of things to say, a delight to have as company.

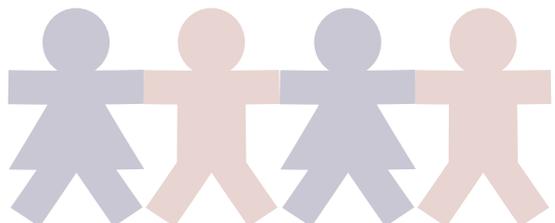
New Beginnings

By Sheila H (resident)

Speedwell Court, Southampton

When we arrived the whole of the staff team came out to meet us, which I found was very welcoming and quite amazing – thank you all of you.

Everybody seemed so friendly, more than we could have possibly expected or even hoped for. Having a very shy nature myself, I found it very difficult to appear equally open and friendly, but I did my best and I found as time passed it got a lot easier. As thing went on I became friends with one of the leaders and she helped me out a lot by finding a lot of what I said quite funny, much to my delight.



My Lovely Home

By Anonymous (resident)

Abbeyfield House, Stafford

Taps are dripping, bumps and
creaks

Outside my room, people
speak

In the dining room, tables laid

At 12:30 in we parade

Knives and forks on plates do
clatter

The room is filled with noise
and natter

Strangers come but friends
have gone

Remember that one... you
know... John

But now we are both old and
frail

They have put us up for sale

They bid for you, and bid for me
I do hope we get a nice family

On the drive I view the house
Pigeons, squirrels and even that
mouse

And as my eyes with tears do
swell

I bid you now, my last farewell

As we go I turn and wave
Regretfully nobody came to save

My lovely home... a splendid
view

To pastures green and ventures
new

Good bye Abbeyfield.

My Teddy Bear

By Liz Wickens (staff)

Westall House, Horsted Keynes

My teddy bear

My best friend

My companion day and night

We snuggle up tight and shut the world out, really tight

Together we sleep at night, our togetherness is really tight

The Smile Disease

By Sasha White (volunteer's relative)

Westall House, Horsted Keynes

Yesterday on the 5th of May
I caught the smile disease
The lady said that it had
spread
Across the seven seas.

A smile can spread like a
popular song
When the days are rough
And the nights too long
Catch a smile, smile back
Put it in your smile sack
You'll feel better straight away
That smile will brighten up your
day.

Smiles can reach all sorts of
places
Across the world
Across all faces
Across the sea
Across the river
Over mountains
And on forever.

They are like a spreading
disease
They jump from person to
person just like fleas
They'll make you smile all day
long
They'll make you sing a happy
song
They'll make you jolly quick as
pie

The Smile Disease

By Sasha White (volunteer's relative)

Westall House, Horsted Keynes

You'll feel as if you could fly

They'll send you skipping
down the lane

You'll jump up, then down
And up again

There is not a happier place

Than to live with a smile
seemingly stuck to your face

Know that when you smile to
just one

Your smile has spread to
everyone

So spend your days spreading
joy

Smile to every girl and boy

Don't pull faces

Do not frown

Just smile and smile all
through town

So here is my speech to
conclude

I hope you're all in the mood

If you found this terribly dire
And you think that I'm a liar

Try spreading a smile

Try your luck

You'll find you like it very
much!

Threadbear

By Suzi Rose (resident's relative)

Westall House, Horsted Keynes

Old and tatty he sits on my bed,

with a blue tie and trousers in a bright colour red.

With one ear missing and a new black nose, I take my teddy
wherever I go.

At night when I'm sleeping I cuddled him tight, he keeps me
safe throughout the night.

Threadbear is his name and I love him a lot, I think you could
say he's the best toy I've got!

To Mummy and Daddy

By Suzi Rose (resident's relative)

Westall House, Horsted Keynes

The 20th of February, in
Brighton by the sea,
Is the day Mummy and Daddy
became parents to me.

Sixteen weeks early, I know,
that's a lot!

So I continued life in my clear
plastic cot.

The odds were against me, I
know this to be true,

But the doctors and nurses were
there to bring me through.

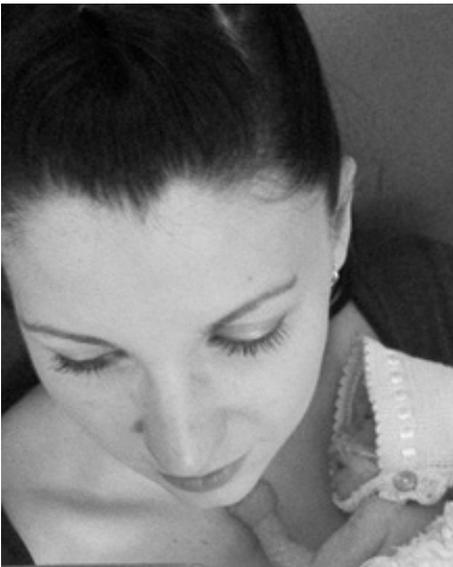
My budgie blaket kept out the
light,

As you patiently watched over
me, never out of my sight!

The first day you held me, I
looked up at you,

You overwhelmed me, as it
came flooding through:

"I knew I would make it
because I had you!"



To Mummy and Daddy

By Suzi Rose (resident's relative)

Westall House, Horsted Keynes

All big and strong now, I've
grown quite a lot!

I wanted to tell you, "I love you
a lot!"

My Mummy and Daddy are so
special to me

And next year, Mummy, Daddy
and me

Will become "The Harrington
Three"

I love you,

Mia xx

Togethereness

By Marco Giovannetti (resident's relative)

Westall House, Horsted Keynes

17 letters all lined up next to each other.

3 'e's, 2 't's, 2 's's, 1 'g', 1 'h', 1 'n', 1 'o', 1 'r'

A diverse mix but comfortably aligned

All are friends and none are lonely

Each has its place where it fits at ease

With out one another meaning would be lost

One leans on the next to ensure a proper order

After a busy day what's better than togetherness?

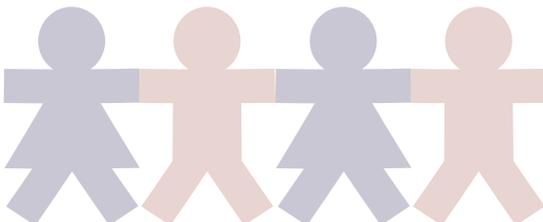
Togetherhness

By Lynn Mayfield (staff)

Westall House, Horsted Keynes

There is no 'I' in 'us'
I can't see 'me' in 'we'
A job done all alone
Is better done together, you'll
see
A nod hello is OK
But a kiss will brighten your
day
A wave goodbye may suffice
But a hug as well is nice
A bubble around us may feel
safe

When the whole world has
gone mad
But alone is dark and empty
And everything feels sad
So reach out and feel the love
that's still there
Never failing to bring us
together
Kindness, a smile, a word of
good cheer
Togetherhness is what we need
to hear.



Ode to MacPherson House Staff

By Brenda Thurston (resident)

Abbeyfield Weymouth Society

As you come through the door, you step on the floor
It has to be hoovered and polished –
Like the tables and chairs, the kitchen and loos –
Cleaning really should be abolished.
But no! You scrub and you wash, you dust and you spray,
And if there's a germ you kill it!
There's so much to do, you work hard and say,
"If it doesn't move, then gel it!"
You keep social distancing (the residents too),
The visitors come one by one.
You sanitise your hands, obey the commands,

Ode to MacPherson House Staff

By Brenda Thurston (resident)

Abbeyfield Weymouth Society

You protect us, when all's said and done.

You study the menu. You order the food,

You chop it, and stir it, and fry it.

You bake and you stew, cut a sandwich or two

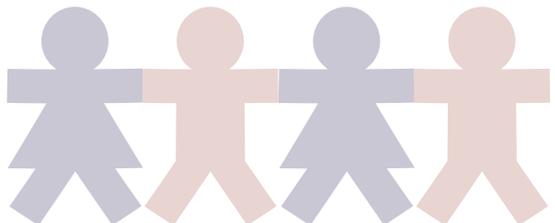
And when all is prepared we try it.

We really are grateful for all that you do,

We appreciate your friendship and care.

So keep up the good work, and smiling through,

You'll beat this old virus – so there!



Alone Together

Anonymous

We oldest ones have seen so much
but we've never seen anything like this.
We banged our pots and pans on Thursdays
and called goodnight over the hedge.

The sun shone, spring arrived,
and flowers pushed through the earth.
We banged our pots and pans on Thursdays
and called goodnight over the hedge.

We found new things to do, evenings
of whist, bridge, and rummikub.
We banged our pots and pans on Thursdays
and called goodnight over the hedge.

Alone Together

Anonymous

Phone calls meant so much, small words
of care told us the world's still out there.
We banged our pots and pans on Thursdays
and called goodnight over the hedge.

We all pulled together, hoped we could see an end,
and have grown to know each other a little better.
While we banged our pots and pans on Thursdays
and called goodnight over the hedge.



Wyn's Story

Anonymous

I had worked for family friends for about 15 years, since Sian and Dafydd were small, and I had needed something to fit in with their needs. I always enjoyed visiting residents in Abbeyfield, it was so homely and friendly. One particular man sticks in my mind: Wyn Williams. I had known him for years, of course, we all had, as he was the Manager of Wyn Williams a'i fab (Wyn Williams and son), builders' merchants who had served the community on the island for as long as anyone could remember.

On this particular morning there had been heavy snow, unusual in itself as it rarely snows on Anglesey, and the agency had phoned to say that they had changed my rota so that I could stay local and that this meant I had fewer clients to see. When I arrived at Abbeyfield, Mr Williams had clearly been up for some time and was looking through old photograph albums, some of which were spread at his feet. I explained that I would have more time to spend this morning and suggested that we had a cup of tea and a chat. Wyn was a private man but liked to reminisce and in recent months had dwelt more and more on his past life and the characters of his childhood and early adulthood. As I sat down with our tea, Wyn pointed to a photograph of a very young man in army uniform from the album on his lap.

Wyn's Story

Anonymous

"That's me in 1917", he said. I was surprised as I had not known that Wyn had been in the army. "It was a big shock to me. One minute a boy at home, fussed over as the youngest and the only one still at home; and the next, stationed in Italy, as a sapper, mending rail-track and such like. I was barely 18 – Mam cried for a week when I signed up. I had wanted to go but having hardly having left the island, apart from the annual Sunday school trip to Llandudno, I didn't really know what to expect. The heat, the food, or lack of it, was a big shock. The lads were friendly enough but my English was poor and I was relieved when I was given the job of mending some track near a small village. This meant staying away from the camp and I was found lodging with a widow who, it seemed to me, had fallen on hard times. Each morning I would walk the mile or two to the next bit of track, returning before the heat of the day made it impossible to work. 'Maria' – I will call her, as I have long since forgotten her name – was probably no older than 50 but poverty and loneliness had aged her. She had very little, but what she had she shared with me, and despite having no common language we managed to get by.

I was there for about three weeks. The house was homely despite having any sort of luxury – almost the only item apart from a table and chair in the single downstairs room was a gilt cage, in which sat a small bird – a goldfinch I think, as it had a flash of red on its

Wyn's Story

Anonymous

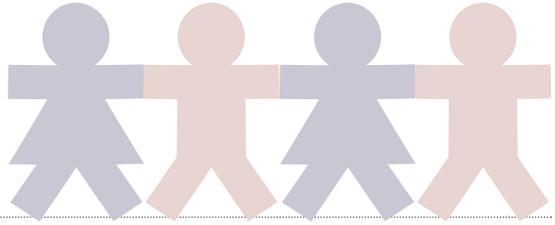
head. Maria fussed over this bird, whose liquid song brought life and happiness into the room, feeding it small titbits.

Although it was a country area, the land was poor. There were eggs from the neighbour's scrawny chickens, thin milk from Maria's bad tempered goat and a good supply of peaches from the tree at the front of the house. The army rations had not really agreed with me, so far were they from the home cooking I had enjoyed as a boy, and I had become extremely thin. Maria, fussed over me trying to get me to eat more, which was hard on such a plain diet. Working all day in the heat and with not much food inside me, I became ill with a terrible cough which kept me awake at night – and Maria no doubt! She was clearly worried about me, indicating through smiles and gestures that she thought me too thin. I spent a couple of days in bed but on the third felt well enough to resume my work on the railway.

Returning in the early afternoon, Maria met me as I trudged wearily down the dusty road to her cottage. She seemed excited, and as I entered the cool of the downstairs room a delicious aroma met me. Something struck me as different but, such was my hunger and anticipation, I hardly gave it a thought. A quick wash and I was at the table, set more formally than usual with a bright hedgerow flower in a jar. With a flourish Maria produced potatoes, broad

Wyn's Story

Anonymous



beans and a small piece of meat in a little gravy. I, of course, made short work of it, and many smiles and nods of pleasure and gratitude were exchanged.

It was not until I sat back in my chair, satisfied and reaching for the smokes in my back pocket, that I realised what was different. The room was completely silent. With an awful dawning realisation of the sacrifice that Maria had made, I glanced behind me with trepidation. It was as I feared. The small cage was empty.

Not long after this the army camp moved on and I left Maria's house. I have thought of her often over the years and I think of those three short weeks as the time when I stopped being a boy and became a man. The kindness and generosity of this lonely widow touched me deeply and I will never forget the time I spent in her company."

I sat with Mr Williams for a while in silence after he finished his story and we turned then to the more mundane matters of the day. He has now long since died but his story of loneliness, love and sacrifice, as told to me on that cold day in February, will stay with me.

The Gatekeeper

By Anne-Lousie Critchlow, Abbeyfield Chaplain

I am fully Welsh on one side of the family and fully Irish on the other side, which probably accounts for my contrariness and stubbornness. I'm also just under five feet tall, but you should never gauge people by their height, or you might be in for a surprise.

Normally the two worlds of my grandparents were completely apart. I had heard about the Irish side through one visit from my grandfather when I was small. My father rarely had the time or inclination to talk to us about his childhood, and we accepted Dadaí for the quiet person he was. I experienced the Welsh side when, every summer, my mother took us to the small mining town in Wales where she had been brought up. My father stayed as the park keeper in Liverpool but, for those six weeks of the school holidays, my mother caught up with all the gossip of her village where she had been brought up, and my sisters and I roamed the Welsh valleys with our cousins.

There wasn't much money in the early fifties. We were lucky if we had some bread and cheese for our lunch and we drank water from the clear mountain streams above the pits, but we were free. Occasionally, at the beginning of the holiday, we were teased as 'outsiders', but after a few weeks we were accepted as part of local life. And, of course, we were family, which made all the difference. In the early evenings when we came back to the two up and down

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By Anne-Lousie Critchlow, Abbeyfield Chaplain

terraced house where Nin, our Grandmother, lived next door to our cousins, we sat on the wall waiting for the train from the pit to pass by. Earlier in the day it had taken its full load of coal to Swansea and in the evening, it passed by the village houses again to return to the pit head.

One of our uncles worked as a stoker and every so often the train would stop near Nin's wall, and the two eldest cousins would carry as much leftover coal as they could manage. It was an extra 'perk' for the stoker. The same things happened for the families of the footplate men. No one resented it or saw it as stealing. There were always bits of coal left at the end of the day after the main delivery. Nin would store it all in the coal shed, ready for the winter months.

With our yearly visits to Wales, we felt almost as Welsh as we did Liverpoolian. The Irish part of us was a mystery which none of us talked about.

I was the eldest of three and always took responsibility for the others. One day in early summer, while I was still at school in Liverpool, my mother called me in before I went to bed. I had been playing in the ginnels outside our house rather later than the others.

"Marjorie, you're not going to Wales this summer" announced my mother.

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"What do you mean, not going? I always go. Why not? What have I done?"

That was my automatic reaction. If I was being punished like this, I must have done something terrible.

My mother understood my reaction immediately and sought to reassure me.

"No, no, Marjorie. You haven't done anything wrong."

"Well, why can't I go to Wales then? Are the others going?"

"Yes, they are. They're coming with me."

"You mean I'm staying in Liverpool by myself?"

"No. You're going to Ireland."

"Ireland? On my own?"

"Not quite. Your father's taking you. You'll both sail from Fishguard. But you're staying with your grandfather, Tom, over the summer."

"Why?"

"Because he's become very lame and he can't operate the gates."

The gates! We had heard all about the gates at the big park in Ireland. My grandfather lived at the gatekeeper's cottage on the

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estate. It was his job to open and close the gates when the horses and carts, and sometimes the cars, came to visit the nobleman who owned the park.

“But why can’t Grandfather Tom do it like he used to?”

“Because he’s been very ill and he’s not strong enough to do it now.”

“But why me? And what will happen when the summer is over? Will I have to stay there?”

I had just passed my 11 plus exam – the first one ever to do so in my family. My parents had promised me faithfully that I could go to the grammar school, even though they had to find the money for the uniform, which would not be easy for them. I knew that several girls from our streets had not been able to attend the grammar school because of that problem. My mother understood instinctively what I was worried about.

“No, Marjorie, I promise you. You’ll come back to your new school. But family comes first. We’re in this together and we have to look after Grandfather Tom.”

Of course. No argument about that. Was not my first job at home to look after my younger sister in the fights in the ginnels of Liverpool? If Grandfather Tom needed me, I would go. Besides, it

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would be an adventure.

My father accompanied me on the long train journey from Swansea, where we saw the rest of the family heading up the valley to Nin and the cousins, and then, after the boat crossing, we caught another train, stopping at smaller stations until we reached the estate. By the time we were on the train, it was dark. I had had enough of the adventure and I was half asleep.

Ten minutes before we arrived at our destination, my father had some surprising news.

“Marjorie, you’re old enough to do this last part of the journey yourself.”

“What do you mean, Dadai?” I was wide awake now and very scared.

“Marjorie, I can’t come on this part of the journey with you. I’m going back to Liverpool.”

“And leaving me here?”

“No. We’re changing at this next small station. I’m going to put you on the right train to the estate. The footman from the great house will meet you there and take you in the cart to the Gatehouse, where you’ll see Grandfather Tom.”

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By Anne-Lousie Critchlow, Abbeyfield Chaplain

“But why aren’t you coming?”

“I’ll explain when you’re older, but for now, please will you trust me and go and help your grandfather?”

How could I not trust my father and help my grandfather? That’s what you did in my family.

‘The footman’ sounded very grand. I expected him to be dressed in full livery but, in reality, the man who met me on the station platform wore baggy trousers and a soft brimmed hat.

“Miss Marjorie?”

I had never been addressed before in such terms of respect, but I nodded in confirmation. I was so tired and confused that I felt as though I was in a dream. I followed him, and he helped me place my small suitcase and bag onto the cart.

When we got to the gates, the footman helped me down and showed me how to open the big iron gates.

“Bejabbers, you’re very small!” He was amused but I was annoyed.

“But I’m strong and I can open and shut the gates by myself.”

“Indeed, you are now.” The footman immediately corrected himself, his eyes twinkling, but kind. After he had showed me how to shut the gates in the correct way, he gave me my bags off the cart.

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I opened the front door of the Gatehouse carefully.

“Grandfather Tom?”

No answer. I had only met him once before when I was a very little girl and he had come to spend Christmas with us. I only had the vaguest of impressions of how he would look.

He was half asleep by the fire and so disabled by his stroke that he was hardly able to speak, but he looked up at me when I came in and smiled. He pointed upstairs to the bedroom but that night I just curled up in one of the chairs near him and went to sleep.

The next morning my new life began. I looked after the Gatehouse and tended to the needs of my grandfather. With the help of a stick, he could just about get through to the outside privy. I cleaned the house, as my mother had trained me. The footman would bring us provisions from the big house and there were hens in the back, so we always had fresh eggs. Once a week at the Saturday market, I was allowed to go out with the housekeeper, while her youngest son minded the gates.

One Saturday after the market trip, the housekeeper said to me, “You’re to go to the big house to see the master.”

“Why?”

“I don’t ask. That’s what he wants. Finley will stay with your

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grandfather for a few hours.”

I wondered whether I had done the gate keeping job badly. Sometimes it was hard when my back was against the big iron gates, and the horses towered over me when as they went through.

Full of questions, I followed the housekeeper to the back of the great house and went to where the scullery maids worked. Soon the bell rang for the housekeeper to go upstairs.

“Come, Marjorie. You come up with me.” Then looking at my face, she added, “Don’t be afraid. The master’s a good man.”

I found myself going through rooms which were larger than any house I had ever entered in Wales or Liverpool. When we arrived at the library, I could not take my eyes off the hundreds of books in the tall bookcases. Imagine having those in your house every day! I was so absorbed in this thought, that I completely ignored the man sitting by the fire.

“So, you like books, do you?”

“Oh yes, sir. I do. I read all I can.”

Because he talked about my favourite subject, I forgot that he was a nobleman and my grandfather’s employer and no longer felt afraid.

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"If I told you that you could borrow books from this library whenever you wanted, what would you say?"

"I would say that I would like it very much."

"Very well. When I have finished talking to you, you may take two and read them."

"Thank you, sir."

The man continued looking at me.

"Come and sit here. Marjorie, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir." He indicated a footstool near him, and I sat down.

"Now tell me, Marjorie, how is your grandfather doing?"

"He's not well sir, after his stroke, but he's glad to have me there to help him."

"And you? How is the job of opening the gates going? You're very small, Marjorie. It must be difficult for you."

"Not really, sir. I can reach the lock and slip behind the gates when the horses come through."

"And are you frightened of them?"

"I was to begin with, sir. They seemed so big." I almost added, 'and full of a sense of their own importance as your horses,' but I

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decided not to. "But I'm used to them now and Grandfather and I understand each other."

"Your grandfather's very lucky to have you help him with his job. Did your father bring you?"

"Only as far as the station before this one, then he let me come on my own."

"That must have seemed strange to you."

"Oh no, sir," I lied. "I'm perfectly capable of looking after myself. I look after the younger ones at home."

He laughed at my air of independence.

"Still, most fathers would like to see their daughters settled into a new place before they left them. Did he tell you why he didn't come to the gate house?"

"No, sir."

"Well, Marjorie, I'm going to tell you a story to help you understand. Are you listening?"

"Yes, sir."

"Back in the twenties, when the troubles came to this part of Ireland, we had a problem round here. The problem was that I am descended from the English aristocracy and my family have

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always been Protestants, but most of the families who lived in the village were Catholics. Do you know that there is a difference?"

I thought hard. My parents had always taught me that differences in religion were not important. Unlike most children in our area, we weren't even sent to Sunday School. I envied them, their seaside outings, but not having to dress up and stay inside every Sunday afternoon.

"On the Whit walks in our town, the Catholics walk on a different day to the Protestants and the children aren't allowed to mix."

"That sounds about right. But here there was a war of independence going on and a war for Ireland to be separate from the North. Arguing about a march or a festival is a bit silly but here, it was a real war with people being killed.

Most of the folk in the village were happy as they were. Oh, they had a few grievances, but most of them were happy with us living in the big house, as long as we gave them jobs and helped them when they were in need."

"I thought that there was a famine in Ireland and that the English had watched them die?"

"You obviously know your history."

"I like reading."

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"Of course. I forgot that for a moment. But that was in the 1890's and even then, not all the English watched them die without doing anything. My family helped the local people whatever their religion and so years later, even 30 years ago, people knew that they could trust us.

But the Fenians didn't like that and in the twenties, when your father was young, they recruited young men to fight for them. They wanted your dad."

"Dadai? I don't think he would be much good at fighting. He likes plants, not guns. And he's always rescuing animals."

"Yes, you're right, Marjorie, and your grandfather knew that too."

"I gave your Dadai the means so that he could go to England and escape the war. The Fenians tried to threaten your grandfather but he gave them nothing. That's why your dad can't stay here."

"You mean he'd have to fight for them now?"

"I doubt it but the odd person who wants revenge might be capable of killing him because he ran away and, in their eyes, that makes him a traitor. Fenians have long memories and word gets around. That's why we've brought you over to do the job. We needed someone to open the gates, let your grandfather stay in his house and be looked after. I'd have let him stay anyway but

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Tom is proud. He said he wasn't staying if he couldn't do the job. And then he remembered you."

"He remembered me?"

"Yes, he said you were a rum little thing with a mind of your own. I reckon he got that one right."

"I don't mind doing the job and looking after him."

In truth I didn't. Playing in the valleys of Wales now seemed a very childish part of my life.

"Marjorie, you're a brave little girl. You look after your grandfather and I promised you books. You look now and find two and next week, after market, you can change them for two more."

Lord Parker kept his word. That summer I read two books a week, every week. Most of them were too hard for me, but I didn't let that stop me. I loved puzzling over the hard words and sometimes had time, on my visits to the library in the big house, to look up their meaning in the dictionary. But most of the time I just skipped over the hard words and kept on reading. I learnt about history and other countries and discovered some of the great classics. The job continued into the autumn. For a whole year I was gate-opener, carer for my grandfather, housekeeper, cook and self-educator.

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I was worried about my grammar school place, but I knew what my parents would say: "Family being together is more important than book work." I couldn't even write home. Lord Parker had warned me that it was too dangerous to post letters from the village to my home address.

My grandfather died quite peacefully besides the fire one night. I had curled up besides him each night in the last three months – partly because it was the warmest place in the house in the early spring and partly because we just felt comfortable together.

At the wake I was the only member of our family present. Lord Parker and all the household at the great house had become his new family. None of the Fenians in the village came near. As his Lordship said, "Fenians have long memories." I was glad because I was afraid that, if they came, they might try to get information out of me.

When I went to say goodbye to his Lordship, he thanked me for my work and told me to never stop reading.

When I got home to Liverpool, I had a surprise.

"Come and read this, Marjorie," said my mother, soon after my homecoming.

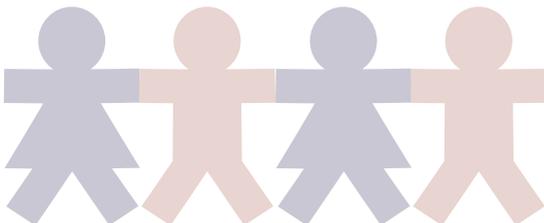
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“His Lordship’s written to the grammar school. We had told them that you couldn’t take up the place because of family problems, but he’s told them that they should take you on. He says that you continued your education in his library and that it would be a waste of your talents for you not to continue. He’s even sent money for the uniform.”

I could hardly believe my luck. I was so grateful to an aristocrat who had cared enough to rescue one peace-loving young man from terrible violence and who had made sure that one young girl continued her education. Because of the problem with letters, I could never write to thank him, but I always remembered.

But before that, I spent one more summer with the Welsh part of my family, carefree in the hills. Togetherness has always been a vital part of my family life, but sometimes other people play their part as family too.





Abbeyfield
Making time for older people