

WHAT'S ON

There will be no Social Xtra in July or August this year. And no Monthly Meeting in August

11th September - Christine Webber -Talk 'Positive Ageing'

19th September Mercury Theatre CO2 production 'We Will Rock You'

25th September Social Xtra Talk- Lucy Lewis 'The first female bomb disposal officer'

26th NOV Day Trip – 'A Day in Bury St Edmunds for the Cathedral Christmas Fair'
NOW BOOKING see inside

'LIVE LIFE TO THE FULL'

Why not enter Stanway u3a Summer short story Competition

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

LINDA ANDERSON

Alec and I have recently returned from visiting our son and his family in Toronto. We hadn't seen our youngest grandson since he was 3 months old and he's now a lively toddler of 19 months. He's like a whirling dervish, running hither and zither. We had a great time trying to keep up with him!!

His older sister, our youngest granddaughter, was also home as her school summer holidays start at the end of June through to the beginning of September. So, you can imagine the chaos of having two lively grandchildren whilst trying to help their parents pack for a house move next month!!

But it did give us the opportunity of getting out and about with the children and meeting some of the locals who were very friendly and even strangers on public transport were incredibly helpful and yes, they do say sorry almost as often as we Brits do.

Although the weather had been hot, it hadn't been as hot as it had been in Europe and more specifically the UK. So, when we were waiting in line to board our return flight, we were chatting about how hot we expected it to be when we landed. Immediately behind us were two American men, around about our age, who then joined in our conversation, which wasn't a problem, until I mentioned that from what I has seen in the media Paris had really suffered with the heat.

His response was that he had heard that they had been toasted, but then he went on the add that he was still waiting for them to thank them (USA). Although I was pretty sure I knew what his answer would be, I still asked him, for what?

It was as I suspected; his answer was the 2nd World War. I have a great deal of respect and admiration for the resistance movements across Europe during WWII. but especially in both France and the Netherlands. So, with a steading breath I replied, you mean the one that started in 1939? Fortunately, the line for boarding moved on before he could say anything further after huffing and puffing at my response.

The point I am trying to make, perhaps rather clumsily, is that everyone has their own perception of the world and how it works ... or not for them. Some people are more than happy to help a stranger find the right streetcar stop or explain how the subway works. Other people prefer to wait in anticipation for something that is not theirs to expect in the first place and get discombobulated when they are reminded of the fact.

It's a similar situation when it comes to volunteering and it is a global phenomenon; people are reluctant to volunteer for just about anything. Although I understand and appreciate that not everyone has the capacity

to volunteer, there are some who could but chose not to. They talk to family and friends, who happily point out the disadvantages, the time, the commitment etc. But they don't see or consider the advantages; the social interaction, the reduction of loneliness and the physical activity, all of which helps to keep us all young at heart and healthy.

So, please give serious consideration to volunteering to help in whatever way you can to help with the running of YOUR u3a.

Thank you.

"Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves"

J M Barrie.

SECRETARY'S SNIPPETS

Tom Malcolm – Business Secretary

Don't Be Shy

In the two or so years since I started penning a series of features in this newsletter under, initially, a 'Getting to Know You' title and now 'Tom Malcolm in Conversation With...', I have lost count of the number of fellow Stanway u3a members who have come up to me, having read one or more of them, and said "I didn't know so-and-so had led such an interesting and eventful life."

When newsletter editor Doreen Willers first approached me about writing these features, I was struck by her strong belief that just about every one of our 900 or so members would have an interesting and inspirational tale to tell of a life well lived (and being lived).

Inspired by her enthusiasm I soon found out that she was absolutely spot on. Some of us may have a bit more grey hair than before (or none at all), move a little more slowly and now can clearly pronounce the tongue-twisting names of a wide variety of medications which, when younger, we wouldn't have stood a chance of remembering far less pronouncing.

Running through the ranks of Stanway u3a members is a rich vein of work and personal achievement. Some continue to be active one way or another and put their experiences to good use helping others, but I sense there are probably quite a few more who feel that, while they still have much to offer, they haven't yet found the appropriate opportunity.

Stanway is one of the largest u3a organisations in Essex and playing its part in that success is a band of enthusiastic women and men who, as the executive committee, ensure it is run properly, legally and with a sharp focus on the needs of its members. None of them, myself included, joined Stanway u3a with a view to joining the executive committee. They were attracted by one or more of the special interest groups we offer – over 70 at the last count.

Today's executive committee numbers eight people and we come from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines. That rich mix of skills is what makes our work so interesting and rewarding. Believe me it is.

It is difficult to put into words just how satisfying it is to know that your individual contribution, no matter how seemingly insignificant, can make a huge difference to ensuring Stanway u3a continues to thrive and flourish.

At this time of year, with the Annual General Meeting approaching in November, thoughts turn to attracting new people to join those already on the executive committee and/or the sub-committees which operate at the level below the exec. Sometimes vacancies also occur when existing members may, for a variety of reasons, have to step down. There are no qualifications needed other than membership of Stanway u3a and an enthusiasm to ensure our u3a continues to deliver outstanding opportunities for all its members.

I speak from experience in saying that it is a very rewarding thing to do.

To learn more about what it takes to serve on the executive committee including shadowing existing officers, the different subjects we deal with and how to apply to join, please speak/email any of the current members. You can find our details on the last page of this newsletter.

Don't be shy. You can make a difference.

Tom



Unsolicited phone calls

Many of you will have received calls from unknown numbers. Most of these will be automated messages or a scammer hoping to trick you into giving away important information.

To add to the potential for harm another scam involves asking you questions that would lead to a simple “Yes” response from you. This is to record you so your voice can be used to authorise fraudulent charges or trick voice-based systems into thinking that it is you.

If you get a call from an unfamiliar number this is what you should do:

1. It is best to let the call go to voicemail or your answering machine. If it is important they will leave a message. An automated call will not leave a message and will hang up, so you can block and delete the number. Scammers will also usually hang up.
2. If you are tempted to pick up the phone, don't say anything first. If it is an automated call, they will hang up after a few seconds of silence.
3. If it is a person, they will speak first and it will be clear if it is someone you know.
4. If you don't know the caller don't be pressed into saying Yes to any questions. Ask them what they want. They typically start calls with simple questions like “Can you hear me?”, “Are you the homeowner?” and “Do you have a moment to talk?” These three enquiries are deliberately phrased to get you to say “Yes”. It's best to end such unsolicited calls, you aren't being rude, you're being smart.

5. Report the call

A scam reporting telephone number **159** has been set up by banks and phone companies. If you think you have received a scam call involving money or personal details, you can hang up and ring **159** to speak directly to your bank.

Be aware that scammers can keep your phone line open even after you've hung up. Use a different phone, call someone you know first to check the line is free, or wait at least 10 to 15 minutes between calls to make sure any scammers have hung up.

Stay safe.

Alec

Alec Anderson, Stanway u3a IT and Data Protection Officer

Visit our website fraud pages at <https://stanway.u3asite.uk/fraud-alerts/> for more advice.

Tom Malcolm in Conversation with....Dennis Newman

Dennis Newman's father Leslie was a signalman on the mainline railway network. When he wasn't at work in the signal box in Chelmsford, he could be found tending the vegetables he grew with a passion in the garden of his home in Colchester.

Often when he came home from work he would stand in the garden and admire how well his vegetables were doing since he had last cast his eyes over them. It really was his happy place.

None of this could prepare him however for the sight which greeted him on his return from work one day in the mid-1960s. Yes, the vegetables were there and doing well. But why was there now a golf course on his back lawn and who had built it?

Step forward son Dennis. "I was only about 14 or 15 years old and had recently discovered the joys of playing golf," he explains. "Paying to join a golf club or even rounds on a municipal course were beyond my means so I came up with an idea to build my own golf course in our back garden. Nothing grand of course. Just 18 sticks in the ground to represent the flags over the holes, with each one sitting at the head of a beautiful - if short - 'fairway' I had created by using my dad's lawnmower to trim the grass. I was very proud of it. My dad's only comment was 'you might have cut the rest of the grass while you were at it!'"

All these years later 75-year-old Dennis, a member of Stanway u3a for around eight years, still enjoys a round of golf, especially when he is in Canada visiting son Daniel and enjoying some father and son rivalry out on a Toronto course.

It was Dennis's paternal grandfather, Tom, who was a big influence in his life and, without realising it, set him on course to a life-long career working with a material which Dennis proudly admits he "absolutely loves" – wood.

"My grandfather was a butcher to trade who lost an arm when serving with the forces in the first world war. Although he survived the conflict, he was one of the many thousands of ex-servicemen who were discarded by society at the end of hostilities and the only occasional work he could get was as a night watchman.

"But his handicap didn't stop him striving to do the best for himself and his family. Before long he could tie his shoelaces with his one hand just as quickly as most people could do with two hands. His sister used to bring him scrap wooden boxes from her work and he turned these into all sorts of useful items for around the house. He even built his own shed in his back garden! Yes, single-handedly.

"I remember watching him in the shed and wishing that I too could make lovely things like he did out of wood. I thought then and still do today that wood is the loveliest of materials to work with. It looks and smells beautiful, is pliable and so versatile. You can make most things from it. My favourite is English oak."

When he left North Street Primary School for St. Helena Secondary School, Dennis had high expectations of what he could make in the woodwork classes that he knew his new school ran. But the school had other ideas and to his great disappointment he was shunted into the metalwork group 'under duress'. "While lots of my friends were making beautiful things in the school woodwork workshop I was having to make do with fashioning long-handled toasting forks which, frankly, didn't amuse me at all!"

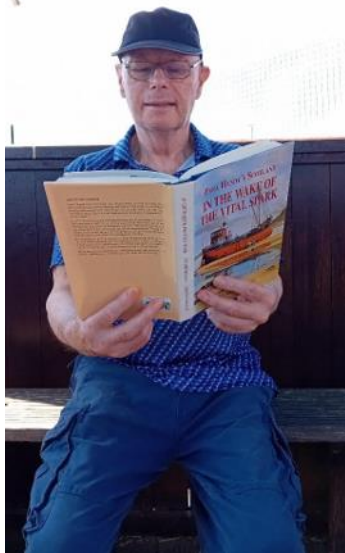
However, all that changed when he left school, enrolled at the Northeast Essex Technical College (now Colchester Institute) and took an apprenticeship with Groom and Daniels, a long-established Colchester timber company operating out of premises on Military Road (where Rose Kitchens is today). He was now making up for lost time!

Such was his passion for wood, Dennis and his late first wife Madelaine even spent their holidays one year in North Yorkshire so he could visit the premises of legendary woodworker, Robert Thompson, aka 'The Mouseman'.

A year after his apprenticeship ended Dennis moved on to another Colchester firm, Lucking Contracts in Magdalen Street. One of the reasons for moving there was because of the high-end work they did, often using exotic woods from far-flung corners of the world.

But all that came to an end when he and all his colleagues were made redundant and Dennis's career took a completely unexpected turn. "Suddenly, with my wife, son and daughter Jessica to support, I was without an income and the only job I could get was working in Maidstone prison in Kent teaching woodworking to the prisoners there. This meant living in digs from Monday to Friday each week, returning home to Colchester at

the weekends. The work was fascinating and it certainly opened my eyes to a side of life that was quite alien to me. At the end of the working day in the prison all the tools had to be accounted for by using a wall-mounted board onto which was painted the outline of the saw, chisel, screwdriver, etc., which should be there. It was a tried and tested method of checking that none of the prisoners left the workshop with something they shouldn't have. This job lasted a year until I got a position back at my own trade with TJ Evers in Tiptree and I remained there until my retirement.



There is nothing Dennis likes more than getting stuck into a good book

"They specialised in work for listed and protected buildings where repairs to and replacement of woodwork had to *exactly* match the original parts and materials. Before making a new component we usually had to carefully dismantle the often very fragile original part so that we could draw up plans and re-make it exactly as it was. When we were working on replacing shuttered windows at the historic Hylands House near Chelmsford, a lot of the very old originals had initials, drawings, even a noughts and crosses game, drawn on the sides of wood which couldn't be seen once the

shutters were installed!"

Working with TJ Evers brought Dennis into contact with a real character in Colchester. "Patrick Bartlett had been a successful banker who, in middle years, decided to pack it all in and devote himself to turning his woodworking hobby into a business. It was no hardship for me to go to Patrick's workshop in East Street and see the man at work. He too used all sorts of rare and exotic woods to create the most spectacularly beautiful pieces, and it was Patrick who inspired me to take up woodturning."

In the modest workshop, complete with lathe, Dennis set up in his own garden shed at home he supplemented his income by making small pieces for other companies.

"I made all sorts of things to order but the one item I made the most was pine knobs for furniture drawers and doors! There was a continual demand for them back then as they would always be the first thing to 'cop it' during house removals."

These days in retirement Dennis is very content to indulge himself in his twin passions of music and golf. He is also an avid reader. His instruments of choice are the classical guitar and ukulele although he considers himself lucky to be able to play either after some years ago carelessly bringing the middle finger of his left hand into contact with a saw blade! His is a familiar figure at the Thursday and Friday Stanway u3a ukulele groups and he is also a member of a jamming group which meets regularly in West Bergholt. His music heroes are Dickey Betts of the Allman Brothers, Mark Knopfler and Eric Clapton.



....unless it is indulging his other passion of music and playing his ukulele'

“Playing with my u3a music groups is a lovely way to relax and socialise with like-minded people and when the group session is over, there is nothing better than going home and working to improve your skills.”

After being asked if there is anything about him his u3a pals would find surprising, Dennis was quick to reply: “I am a reformed salsa dancer! I was never one for dancing and then I heard salsa music when I was in my 50s and I was hooked. I took lessons for four years but don’t do it anymore. That is the power of music and one of the reasons why I love it so much!”

Stanway u3a Summer Short Story Competition

Doreen Willers - Editor

There is still plenty of time to enter our Short Story Competition.

Full details were in last months newsletter, but just a brief reminder: There are no limits on theme, genre, or style — only that entries remain respectful and non-offensive. Beyond that, the page is yours.

The competition is open to all members of Stanway u3a. Entries must be your own original work and previously unpublished. Please submit your story — up to **1000 words**, typed, and saved as a Word document — by emailing it to u3agen57@gmail.com. Use **Short Story** and your **membership number** as the subject line and include your full name in the email. **Closing date: 31 August 2026** Every entry will be featured in future editions of *Stanway u3a News*. Judging will be carried out anonymously by volunteers from the Executive Committee and Social Squad. The story receiving the most votes will be awarded **First Place** — along with a **£10 Amazon Gift Voucher**. *Doreen*

SPEAKERS CORNER



As Speakers Secretary Linda was unable to attend the July meeting, our intrepid Tom (Roving Reporter) Malcolm kindly stepped up to pen this month's report.

Manningtree-based Karen Turnbull was the speaker at the July monthly members' meeting, and she delighted the numbers who turned out despite the very warm weather with a talk entitled '*Legacy not Landfill*'.

Although her background is in marketing and economic development, Karen took the opportunity during the Covid outbreak to develop new skills in designing, creating and repairing all manner of items made from leather.

She credits her late grandfather for inspiring her to take up the tools as he encouraged her when she was very young to help him in his creative endeavours in his shed at home. In a relatively short period of time, she has built up a reputation as a leathercrafter of distinction and can often be seen at the Repair Cafe in Manningtree repairing leather items brought in by members of the public.

In her talk Karen, who is also an accredited Celebrant for naming and welcoming ceremonies, spoke about the different grades of leather that are found on a hide and what can be made from each of them. She brought along quite a few examples of her handiwork (and a lovely photograph of her Grandad) to show the Stanway u3a members and the many questions she took from the audience was testimony to the high level of interest her talk generated. And the title of her talk? Working with skills passed down through generations, and with virtually every part of the hide of the animal used in creating a huge variety of things, there is nothing left to be thrown out.

Please don't forget, that there will be no Members Monthly Meeting or Social Xtra Afternoon in August.



June Social Xtra Summer Concert with Abbeygate Concert Band

Thank you to everyone who braved the new record high temperatures, traffic problems around much of Stanway, and the chaos in the car park when the school decided to close early and parents arrived to collect their offspring, just as members were arriving for our concert.

On Friday morning there was some doubt that the Concert would take place. At 11 am I was informed that the Band members had been told to conduct a personal risk assessment and decide whether in view of the heat and their health problems,

attending the concert was right for them. When the music director arrived, he did not know how many or which musicians would turn up. He rapidly made the decision to adjust and shorten the intended programme. A number of key instrumentalists and the vocalists were missing, as was the person who usually brought their portable sound system! All in all, they did a good job of entertaining us, despite the challenges, which could not have been foreseen by the band or us. One very elderly musician had travelled all the way from Frinton by bus, carrying her instruments, when her usual lift opted out of performing, but she was determined not to let us down.

Our special thanks go to our team of volunteers including Heather who dashed out to try and borrow an extension lead for the pa system and to our catering team who tried hard to chill sufficient water to serve cool soft drinks during the interval.

Doreen

GROUPS NEWS

From the Group Support Team

We have no new news from our groups this month, but just a reminder that the following groups have vacancies and welcome new members:

Writing from the Heart; Ukes4Fun; Badminton; Walking Rugby; Walking Cricket; Outdoor Bowls

For more information and to contact any of our Group Leaders please visit the Groups page on our website

[Groups - Stanway in Colchester](#)

If you have an idea for a new group and would like to help organise it, please contact a member of our Group Liaison & Support Team, their contact details can be found at the end of this newsletter.

Thursday 26th November**A Day in Bury St Edmunds for the Cathedral Christmas Fair**

It's been some time since I last arranged a day trip, but I was lobbied by several of our members to arrange a trip to Bury St Edmunds for the Cathedral Christmas Fair. How could I refuse, I will take care of the bookings and admin as usual, but Marion and Jean will again look after you all on the day.

Bury St Edmunds is said to be the jewel in Suffolk's Crown. Surrounded by beautiful countryside and steeped in over 1,000 years of history, Bury St Edmunds is the historic home of Saint Edmund, the original patron saint of England. In medieval times, the Abbey of St Edmund was one of the richest and

most powerful Benedictine monasteries in the country, attracting pilgrims from across Europe to visit St Edmund's shrine. Although the Abbey was dissolved in 1539, the mystery of Edmund's final resting place remains—many believe he still lies hidden within the Abbey ruins which you can stroll at your leisure.

It is known for its great mix of independent & High Street favourite shops and for being Suffolk's Foodie Capital with its fantastic eateries, and this town takes Christmas seriously!

The Cathedral Christmas Fair is held over just 3 days, with our trip taking place on the 1st day. Entrance to the Cathedral and Fair is £2 payable at the entrance. Visitors are welcome to look around this beautiful cathedral. Be sure to pick up an introductory leaflet.

Join us and your u3a friends for some unique festive shopping in a town which cherishes its history.

We depart from the Delta Hotel Marks Tey promptly at 9.00am and plan to start our journey home at 4pm.

Cost is £18 each which includes coach only. Please note that a tip for the driver is not included this time, you can tip him/her on the day if you wish. This trip is open to members of Stanway and Colchester u3as only.

If there are vacancies members will be offered the opportunity to bring 1 non-member guest (**price £20**)

Please send your completed booking form, together with full payment to: Doreen Willers, The Bays, Mill Lane, Birch CO2 0NH (or hand to me at a monthly meeting/Social Xtra event).

Cheques should be made payable to Stanway u3a No.3 Account. Parking is available at the hotel at an additional cost of £6 per vehicle payable in cash on the day.

Please do not include the parking charge with your payment for the trip, as this is administered by Kings on behalf of the Hotel.

Please ensure you include your car registration number on the form, as we must advise both Kings & the hotel 4 working days prior to the day of the trip.

If you do not include your car reg. or change it and not advise, you will have to pay the full day rate via the parking app when you arrive at the hotel. If you have any questions, please email: doreen.willers@btconnect.com call 01206 330300.

You will find the booking form on the next page

If you are unable to print the form, please write all the requested details on a sheet of paper to include with your cheque

A Day in Bury St Edmunds for the Cathedral Christmas Fair**Thursday 26th November 2026**

Name(s).....

Address:.....

Email:..... Tel/mob.....

Emergency contact:.....

Car Reg:..... If parking at the Delta Hotel Marks Tey

Please reserve member places @ £18 each (Bookings cannot be accepted without payment)Please make cheques payable to: **STANWAY U3A No. 3 Account**

Kindly return this form completed, with payment, as soon as possible to:

Doreen Willers,

SMAC COACH TRIPS**Heather Wragg**

Please note that this is not a u3a trip but organised by Heather for St Marys Angling Club (SMAC)

For all SMAC trips, please contact Heather Wragg, Secretary, SMAC - email smac.wragg@btinternet.com phone 01206 860084 / 07920 864160**Monday 23 November - CITY & VILLAGES - CRUISING INTO CHRISTMAS LONDON COST £70.00 each**

We will be parking at Delta Hotel Marks Tey (£6.00 parking fee payable on the day)

10.30 coach will depart and will drop you off at Greenwich at approximately 12.30 pm where you have time to have a look around and purchase a cuppa and something light to eat.**3.45pm** We meet the guide City & Villages guide at the Cutty Sark ready to walk over to the Pier as the sun sets, for a one-hour cruise to Westminster with a fun and informative Cockney skippers' commentary - leaving at 4.10pm.

We pass the Canary Wharf all lit up like a mini-Manhattan. We sail beneath a floodlit Tower Bridge and through the glistening City & West End.

5.15pm We meet up with the coach at Westminster Pier ready for the tour of Christmas London by night. We will see, not only some of the Christmas lights, but beautifully illuminated buildings and go off the beaten track to bring us up to date with what is new in the capital.

We end the day 7.00 pm at Kennedy's of Goswell Road (EC1V 7DT) where we sit down to a one course fish and chip supper with a hot drink. (There are alternative menu items – please ask so we can let you know what is available.

8.00 / 8.30pm depart for home.

The times are approximate, as those who attended this trip last time, will know of the changes that had to be made to the itinerary due to demonstrators along the embankment, being met with floods of people which altered the programme that resulted in having our fish & chip supper much later than planned.

LEAD ON THIS OCCASION WILL BE PAM BALDWIN (SMAC chair)

OVER TO YOU

The Bed Sitting Room by Jenny Millar-Robinson

London in the early Sixties

We were young, newly qualified nurses working at St George's Hospital , which in those days was at Hyde Park corner; Six of us lived in a large flat high above the roar of traffic on the Fulham Road.

Away from the bright lights of Swinging London, life carried on as it always had; the Rag and Bone man regularly drove his horse and cart through the traffic shouting the peculiar call of his trade.

Much further down Fulham .Road, the North End Road links through to Kensington High Street, close to Olympia and Earls court. On Fridays, the Fulham Road end is home to a street market selling everything you could think of. We bought the white satin for my friend's wedding dress there: I can still remember laying it out on a clean sheet on the floor of the flat and looking up just before making the first cut to see the circle of my flat mates' anxious faces waiting, watching wide eyed. The net for her long veil came from the market too, out of the following month's salary. At the other end of the scale, if you went down there late on the Saturday afternoon, you could buy a whole hand of bananas for next to nothing as the traders tried to sell off the goods that would not keep until the following week. I won't say that we lived on bananas, but they certainly helped to eke out the budget.

It was that wedding that caused my move. Once my friend had left, I just felt restless and wanted to move on. In fact, the wedding dress was very successful only she got married on a bitter day in January with a pair of yellow flannelette pyjama trousers underneath it to stop her freezing to death.

My decision to move out caused great consternation as no-one else had dreamed of living on their own, but I was determined and as luck would have it someone knew someone who had a bedsit that might be available and which a nurse's salary might stretch to without starvation setting in. It was available and I took it . It was at the opposite end of the Mile End Road to the market, only a couple of minutes' walk from South Kensington tube station and three stops from the hospital, so what could be better ? In fact, during that fine summer, it became my pleasure after a night shift to walk home in the early morning sun through Hyde Park along the Serpentine. The soldiers from the nearby Cavalry Barracks would be exercising their horses, the harness gleaming and jingling in the sun as they cantered along by the water. They were always very cheerful, and their cheery greetings made a happy end to the night's work. Then I would turn through the back streets of Kensington to my home.

I remember the area as a network of residential streets lined with terraced houses built in the late

1800s, all rather shabby and with the odd greyness that buildings used to get from years of smoky coal fires. It seemed to be a Polish area with a Polish Bakery , Polish Delicatessen, and even the estate agent was Polish. At first when I shopped there, I felt under suspicion as a stranger, but soon their natural hospitality came to the fore, and I was introduced to all sorts of foods that to my uneducated post war palate were exotic and delicious.

My room was in a house on the Mile End Road itself and had its ground floor taken up with offices. We residents still used the original front door, set in a very deep porch. I nearly punched my poor boyfriend in self-defence one gloomy evening when he turned into that porch behind me, having followed me from the station without realising it was me he was following. I thought I was being attacked. Alarming for both of us.

The short, narrow hall and steep stairs were scruffy and uncarpeted and led straight to the communal kitchen which was a good size with a central table and chairs. Next along the landing was the bathroom. There was nothing wrong with the huge cast iron bath, the enormous wash basin or toilet, but oh my the geyser! It hung over the bath like an ogre with a huge open mouth where the massive gas ring lurked . It lit with a 'loud whoomph' when the water was turned on, with the hefty gas ring crowned with dancing flames like blue teeth. Every time I had a bath it was an act of courage. My room next door was reputed to have been used by the notorious Christine Keeler, a fact I ignored until I turned on the light my first evening there and the whole room seemed to disappear in the gloom of a dark red light bulb, which made the rumours seem more likely to be true. In fact, the room was quite large, with a double bed, a table where I could put my sewing machine, and a very tall south facing window. When I arrived there was a very drab black curtain, which I replaced with a floor length curtain of varying shades of green made with fabric bought from the market. It gave the effect of waking underwater when the early morning sun streamed through.

There were three other residents. Two were students from the Royal College of Music. Carol, who was studying piano and French horn lived next door to me, and upstairs was Brian who was studying the trumpet.

The other resident was a mystery to me. He lived next door to Brian and I used to hear him shuffling past my room very early in the morning and sometimes I used to see him on his way home again creeping up the stairs with his twisted little body and a terrified expression on his face .He never spoke and I could only guess at what he did. I answered the phone on the landing once to a woman who wanted to speak to him, but when he eventually opened his door very slightly to my knocking, he was adamant he would not come and talk to her. In a torrent of broken English in which every other word was a 'nonono' he became so distressed I gave up and told him that I would tell her he said 'No' which seemed to pacify him. I always got the impression he was in hiding. I often puzzled about this damaged man, and the most likely story I could come up with, given that we were in a Polish enclave, is that he was Polish , had been in a concentration camp in the war and had suffered terribly. His early mornings might be because he worked in the Polish Bakery where the working day does start very early. As a teenager I once heard a college friend of my mother's talking about her experiences as one of the first party of Red Cross workers to enter Belsen. I can imagine the terrible and lasting effects that place might have on anyone.

He was not a total recluse, however. His room was above mine and once when I was off work with a dreadful cough, there was a knock on my door, and there he was offering a bottle of cough mixture and a medicine glass "Very good, very good "he said, thrust them into my hands and fled back upstairs. It was a shocker of a cough, and I must have been driving him mad for him to venture out like that.

The students were out most of the time, I assumed, at college. In fact, I did not meet them until they knocked on my door one day and asked if I would help them look for the engagement ring Carol had just thrown at Brian. I had known they were engaged, but it was pretty stormy and since we never found the ring, it seemed like the end. I never heard her story, and only once did I hear a few phrases on the French horn. Apparently, she gave up music and went back to live with her parents in Cromer.

When I decided to live on my own, it had been considered odd and friends used to call in, out of curiosity or concern I suppose. Sometimes these were the afternoons Brian decided to be at home. I loved the sound of the trumpet, in fact I still do, so hearing him practise was a pleasure. To my guests, however,

the sound of a flight of arpeggios was greeted by an "Oh my God. How can you stand it?" and a hasty exit.

Brian seemed unaffected by his loss of Carol. He was a cheerful, happy go lucky soul well into his thirties who had earned a reasonable living touring with various jazz bands, mainly in Wales. Now he had decided to widen his scope and applied to the Royal College of Music. Apparently, someone with influence had heard him play and encouraged him.

Having no official musical qualifications whatsoever, he was to be selected by audition. The way he told me the story was that he rolled up to the most prestigious music college in the world, casually dressed and carrying nothing but his trumpet. He said they looked at him a bit oddly and when his turn on the stage came, asked him where his music was. He hadn't realised he needed music. With his background in traditional jazz, he thought he was just going to play his trumpet. They rolled their eyes and said they supposed he could, so he got up on the stage and just played. He did not say as much, but I gathered he made quite an impression. By the time I met him he was in the group of students who were sent to fill gaps in established orchestras when they found they were short of players in the brass section. The orchestra would apply to the college, and the college would offer the experience to the students. When I came trudging in after a late shift, I would find him and his friends sitting round the kitchen table discussing the events of their evening. They always asked me to join them. Those evenings gave me a very different perspective on music and altered the way I listened to music for life. For instance, having been brought up on classical music, hearing a certain Beethoven symphony described as 'a jolly good blow' was quite a shock but the next time I was able to listen to any symphony in those pre-digital days I was much more aware. They were a cheerful crew and I loved those evenings.

I loved living there; it was my refuge in bad times, like the time when a man collapsed behind me in the bus queue. It was raining and the experience of doing cardiac massage to no purpose kneeling in a streaming gutter haunted me for a long time and the calm and privacy there of my room helped. I learned a lot else there. For instance, if you're too tired to walk home after a night shift, go straight to bed. Do not sit out in the sun on the flat roof at the back of the house. You will fall asleep and wake up with a face like an overripe tomato. When sandwiched between your starched white cap and your starched white collar on your next shift this has quite a startling effect and will be commented on all night long by all and sundry. It is also a good idea to check that you have changed shoes on both feet when coming off duty or you will provide amusement for half a tube train carriage full of passengers with your mismatched pair.

I left my beloved little room to start my midwifery training in Cambridge, which led to fresh adventures in Africa. Sadly, I have no idea of what happened to my good friend Brian and his companions. I hope they had long and satisfying careers.

Bed sit land is notorious for ships that pass in the night, and I suppose that is what we were. Just passing.

If you have something you think other members would enjoy, a poem, story or tell us about an interesting hobby or something you are passionate about please share it with us.

Please send contributions for inclusion in the SEPTEMBER newsletter to the editor at email: u3agen57@gmail.com by latest 15th AUGUST(earlier if possible).

Any contribution should be in Word and photos/illustrations sent as jpeg. THANK YOU

COOL CONVERSATIONS WITH CATS by Geoff Carder

They may be laying beside you,
Or sitting on your lap.
You blink a slow blink,
And they slow blink back.
That's when you know
You're in sync with your cat.
And that's a good time
To have a good chat.
Talk about whatever you like;
In any style, in any way.
They love to listen
To whatever you say.
It's all in the volume,
It's all in the tone;
And it usually works best
When you're both alone.
Tell them your secrets,
Sing nonsense lullabies;
But always sound sincere,
They'll see through any disguise.



Non-cat people may laugh,
Say you're soppy or a fool.
They'll say talking to a cat
Just isn't cool.
They don't understand,
It just isn't like that,
And no-one is as cool as a cat.
Who could go to sleep
With one leg in the air;
Who could balance so fine,
And walk along the back of a chair.
They're sleek and they're clean,
They're so refined,
And your furry friend
Is so well designed.
Your cool kitty
Is quick and fit and self-contained,
And can even walk in dry
After being out in the rain.
They can jump from the ground
With a standing start,
To the top of a six-foot fence,
(Now that's really smart!)



So, talk to your pussycat,
They'll lap it up like cream.
Say anything in your head,
They'll know what you mean.
They don't care about language or grammar,
Just sound sincere, that's the rule.
And remember that

to talk to your cat

IS COOL