u3a Stanway News

NEWSLETTER OF STANWAY u3a DECEMBER 2026

Registered Charity No. 1171008

WHAT'S ON

11th December – An afternoon with singer songwriter Danielle Barnett

2027

8th January - Kevin Brown talk Talking Newspapers

22nd January Social Xtra – our Annual Quiz of the Year (2026)

12th February - Katrina Myers the work of Colchester Owl Rescue

26th February – talk by Peter Hickling of Marks Hall Arboretum & Gardens

12th March – Talk Amanda Sutherland Costume designer for stage & screen

Day Trip Sunday 14th March 2027 Thriplow Daffodil Festival & Country Fair Booking opens today – see inside

'LIVE LIFE TO THE FULL'

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR LINDA ANDERSON

I always take great pleasure in wishing all our members best wishes for the Festive Season. This would be especially difficult for me to do individually after all the friends and acquaintances I have made since becoming a member of Stanway u3a and then Chair.

For me the Festive Season, particularly the new year, is a time of reflection. Quite literally, out with the old and in with the new, but learning from the challenges, obstacles and our mistakes as we do so. Reflecting upon my tenure as Chair, as I said in my inaugural Chair item, I was looking forward to my tenure as it would be interesting, exciting and more than likely challenging. But that is what I signed up for!! It certainly has lived up to my expectations and some. But a lot of it has been behind the scenes stuff and members haven't necessarily known and to me that's the way things should be.

As our AGM is now done and dusted, I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who took the time to cast their vote. As has been said often times before, this is your u3a and without the input of our members, Stanway u3a would not exist. We have such diverse activities available at reasonable cost (or often at no cost) to our members, it would be difficult to find anything comparable locally.

I would also like to thank our committee members, for all their hard work in getting the AGM organised, but especially Tom Malcolm, as our Business Secretary. He has done a sterling job especially as it is his first year in the role. Well, done Tom and thank you.

It is only five weeks to the 'big' day, and time is marching on relentlessly. It only seems like five minutes since I was writing a similar article last year, is it because we are getting older that times seems to be moving faster, or is it because we are so busy with our u3a activities we don't realise that the time is passing so quickly? I am rather hoping it is the latter.

We have a couple of festive presentations for your entertainment coming up. For our Social Xtra meeting on November 27th we have the 'Rock Choir' (a choir made up from local people from in and around the Colchester area) and then for the last monthly meeting of 2026 on December 11th we have invited Danielle Barnett to join us. Amongst other things, Danielle was formally the lead singer for the world-famous No.1 chart act 'Urban Cookie Collective' who had a big hit with "The Key The Secret" in 1993 – and fronted the act for 23 years. She is now the lead singer for the incredible number 1 act, The Temperer who had a worldwide number one hit in 1998 with "Feel It". She is also an accomplished songwriter with 20 top 40 hits under her belt and 3 major publishing deals – as a singer herself she has had 4 major record deals (one with Mr Simon Cowell himself so she knows some secrets !).

Also, as usual we are going to hold our annual Members Charity Raffle at the December meeting, with proceeds going to the Motor Neurone Disease Research Charity.

Please attend if you can, this charity does amazing work for the benefit of their patients. Thank You.

I look forward to seeing you at our monthly meetings or our Social Xtras or preferably both.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy, Prosperous New Year to you all.

No act of kindness, no matter how small is ever wasted. (Anon)

You often meet your fate on the road you took to avoid it. (Goldie Horn)

AGM 2026 REPORT — Tom Malcolm, Hon. Business Secretary

There were 89 members of Stanway u3a in the Stanway Village Hall on November 13 to hear Chair Linda Anderson reveal the results of the AGM 2026 voting. Out of a total of 945 eligible members, 199 took the opportunity to cast their votes.

All the resolutions put to members were overwhelmingly accepted. Jean Futcher and John Staplehurst were re-elected for a further two years as Membership Secretary/Vice-Chair and Treasurer respectively. Doreen Willers and Gary Laughlin were welcomed on to the executive committee to serve for a two-year term.

The two committee members standing down, Heather Wragg and Pauline Draper, were presented with gifts of appreciation for their invaluable individual contributions to the work of the committee. In Heather's case, she has served on the committee on and off for around 17 years and her membership card proudly bears the number 1.

Before the proceedings were formally completed, member Audrey Cowie took the microphone to say how much she appreciated receiving the Stanway u3a Newsletter which did a splendid job of keeping her in touch with all the activities of our organisation and the members. That brought a warm round of applause from the other members at the meeting, who clearly thought the same as Audrey.

It is a little disappointing that even though there were 945 members eligible to vote and received an AGM 2026 Report pack, only 199 participated by casting their votes. That leaves a whopping 746, who did not vote. Even allowing for any members who tried to vote after the closing date, that still leaves a lot of members who did not bother. It's difficult to understand why. As a committee we have tried to make it as simple as possible to cast your vote. If you receive your newsletter by email, you can vote electronically, if you receive your newsletter by post, you receive the information by post, which included a stamped addressed envelope.

Following the closing of the voting, we as a committee received feedback from some members who declined to support the special resolution to reduce the membership fees:

The special resolution to approve a reduction of membership fees from membership year 2027-2028. For: 180 Against 19 Approved by 90%

They considered that any such reduction may mean that funds would be diverted from other areas of activities within our u3a.

The fact is that due to our treasurer John's prudent handling of our finances, we have accrued a surplus of funds. The reduction in the membership fee is our way of giving back to our members.

At the close of the meeting Linda reassured those members present that this action will not have any detrimental effect on any other aspect of Stanway u3a. And hoped this clarified the situation?

The date for the next AGM has provisionally been set for Friday, November 12, 2027.

The meeting ended with Linda thanking all Stanway u3a members for their continued support of the executive committee.

A MESSAGE FROM VICE Chair & Membership Secretary — Jean Futcher

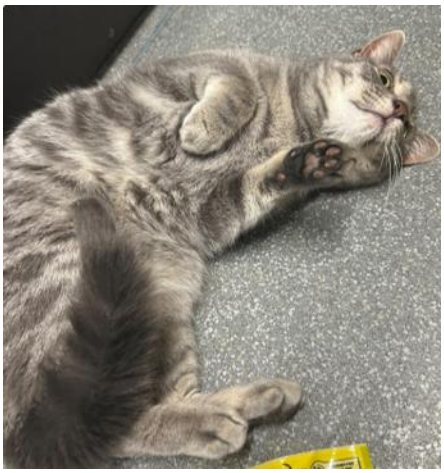
MY NEW HOUSE-MATE

Last month I shared with you the sad news that Meg had been very unwell and was put to sleep mid-September, ending the article …….. watch this space!



After spending four weeks without the company of a cat, it was time to resolve that. I felt my home was empty and I missed the companionship.

I had looked at one or two rehoming organisations locally and while there were several cats available not one of them was the right one for me, either a kitten which I didn't want, an elderly cat, or one with health issues which would probably cost me a small fortune at vets. I decided to look at the RSPCA website; this directed me to the Danaher Animal Welfare Centre at Wethersfield. Scrolling through the photos of cats looking for their forever home, I came across the most beautiful silver/light grey tabby, 2-year-old female cat called Clover. I immediately fell for her, but of course Wethersfield covers a massive area which meant competition for such a beautiful cat would probably be high. That evening I completed an Interest Form on their website giving my details and that of this beautiful cat. By 8.30 the next morning I had a reply asking me to contact them to make an appointment to meet Clover. To cut a story a little short, within 14 days Clover came to live with me at her forever home.



To say she is affectionate, a lap cat and has settled into her new home very quickly is an understatement. She has been with a cat foster carer for 5 months prior to coming to me which made me think she may take time to settle, how wrong was I?

So now you all know that although Meg was a very special cat in her way, and will never be forgotten, Clover has now taken over as Boss. Hopefully she will become the Honorary Membership Secretary's assistant cat in the very near future.

Best wishes

Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year.

from *Jean and Clover*

Message from the Editor — Doreen Willers

.This is our last newsletter for 2026 I would like to thank everyone who makes this publication possible each month and to our readers for the positive feedback we often receive. Please keep on sending your contributions, without your input, we would be issuing a boring newssheet each month. Thank you all.

Our next newsletter should reach your inbox early in the New Year, delayed while we wait for the hectic Christmas -New Year internet traffic to subside and ISPs return their security levels to normal.

In the meantime, I wish you all the happiest Christmas. *Doreen*

Monthly Meeting Report

Support Our Paras: Supporting the Airborne Family

At our monthly meeting on 13 November, members were treated to an engaging and informative presentation by Colonel (Retired) Andrew “Jacko” Jackson, Chief Executive of Support Our Paras, the charity dedicated to supporting the Parachute Regiment and the wider Airborne Forces community.

Jacko began by introducing the history and role of the Parachute Regiment, the British Army’s elite airborne infantry. Formed during the Second World War, the Regiment remains at the forefront of the UK’s rapid response capability, with paratroopers trained to deploy worldwide at short notice in support of military, humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

A key part of life in the Regiment is the famously demanding “P Company” selection process. Designed to test both physical endurance and mental resilience, it ensures that only those capable of operating in the most challenging conditions earn the right to wear the maroon beret. Jacko shared fascinating insights into the training, the esprit de corps that develops among paratroopers, and some of the unique challenges faced by those who serve.

The main focus of the afternoon, however, was the work of Support Our Paras, the only charity that exists solely to support serving soldiers, veterans and families within the Airborne community.

Three Core Objectives

Relief of Need, Hardship and Distress

The charity provides practical welfare support when it is needed most. Assistance ranges from travel costs for families dealing with medical emergencies, to household goods, hardship grants, funeral expenses, employment support and mental health assistance. The message was clear: once someone becomes part of the Airborne family, they are never alone.

Preserving Regimental Heritage

Support Our Paras plays a vital role in maintaining the rich history of the Parachute Regiment. The charity funds commemorative events, remembrance services and annual pilgrimages to Normandy and Arnhem, ensuring that the sacrifices of past generations are never forgotten. It also supports the Airborne Assault Museum at the Imperial War Museum Duxford, helping to preserve and share the Regiment’s remarkable story with future generations.

Supporting Today’s Paratroopers

The charity also invests in the development and wellbeing of current serving personnel. Grants support adventurous training, sporting activities, family days and professional development opportunities, helping soldiers grow both personally and professionally while strengthening the wider Airborne community.

A Hands-On Demonstration



Adding a practical element to the afternoon Jacko brought along examples of the equipment carried by paratroopers prior to an operational jump. **Pat Lean** kindly volunteered to model the kit, giving members a real appreciation of the weight and complexity of what soldiers carry into potentially hostile environments.

Jacko's presentation offered a fascinating glimpse into the world of Britain's airborne forces and highlighted the invaluable work undertaken by Support Our Paras. His passion for the Regiment and commitment to supporting its people was clear throughout.

We extend our sincere thanks to Jacko for a highly informative and entertaining afternoon and for helping us better understand the support available to serving personnel, veterans and their families.

News just - in we were pleased to pay a speaker's fee of £80 for the talk, but the end of the talk members further showed their appreciation and support for our brave Paras with donations into the bucket of £248.50. Jacko was delighted to receive a total of £328.50 from Stanway u3a members.

Friday 11th December at 2pm Stanway Village Hall (doors open 1.30pm)1

An afternoon with singer songwriter Danielle Barnett

Browse our book and puzzle stall.

Members Annual Charity Raffle in favour of MND Assoc.

Join us for Tea, Coffee, Biscuits & Mince Pies and chat to friends after the talk.

Admission & refreshments free!

For more details please about Danielle, please see Linda's Thoughts from the Chair.

A Fascinating Insight into the World of Bees



Our Social Xtra meeting on **23 October** welcomed **John Rosie** from the Braintree Beekeepers Association, who treated members to a captivating and highly informative talk on honeybees.

Speaking without notes and supported by a PowerPoint presentation, John shared a wealth of knowledge about the remarkable lives of bees. From their complex social structure to their extraordinary methods of communication and navigation, it was clear that these tiny insects are far more sophisticated than many of us realise.

We learned that a hive consists of three types of bee: the **queen**, **worker bees** and **drones**. Around 90% of the colony are female worker bees, while the drones are male and do not sting. Bees have an incredible sense of smell, estimated to be around 100 times stronger than that of humans, and can even detect electric fields around flowers to determine whether they have already been visited by another bee.

One of the most fascinating topics was how bees communicate. As well as using pheromones, touch and vibration, they perform the famous **"waggle dance"** to share information about food sources, potential nesting sites and even dangers to the colony. Decisions about relocating a hive are made collectively, demonstrating an impressive level of cooperation and organisation.

John also explained how bees survive the winter. Unlike many insects, honeybees do not hibernate. Instead, they cluster together to generate warmth, with the queen protected at the centre of the group.

Perhaps the most striking fact of the afternoon was the amount of work required to produce honey. A single bee makes only around **one-tenth of a teaspoon of honey in its lifetime**, and collectively bees must fly the equivalent of **twice around the world** to produce enough honey for one jar.

The talk concluded with practical suggestions on how we can all help bee populations thrive. Planting nectar-rich flowers such as lavender, crocuses and borage, reducing pesticide use, mowing lawns less often and allowing gardens to remain a little wilder can all make a significant difference.

This was a truly fascinating afternoon, and one that left many of us with a newfound appreciation for these extraordinary insects. Our sincere thanks to **John Rosie** for such an engaging and enlightening presentation. 🐝

Please remember there will not be a Social Xtra Afternoon in December. We are back on 22nd January with our popular Annual Quiz of the Year with Quiz Master Marilyn Summers.

More details in the next edition of u3a Stanway News

LOCAL VISITS REPORT

Visit to Essex and Herts Earls Colne Air Ambulance Base on 12th October 2026

By visit organiser John Hunt



Booking for this visit was very soon fully subscribed and everyone who attended left the base with a feeling of great admiration towards the people involved with such an outstanding organisation.

During our visit our two volunteer hosts, who displayed an enormous amount of enthusiasm, gave us a deep insight into the purpose of E&HAA, their operational systems, helicopters and crews, lifesaving equipment, backup systems, base staff and fund raisers.



We were also extremely fortunate to be able to view the operational helicopter, meet the crew and be given the opportunity to quiz the pilots and clinicians about their work and experiences.

Essex and Herts Air Ambulance, unlike other NHS emergency services, is a charity. The free lifesaving service is provided 24/7 by means of helicopters and/or rapid response vehicles and costs in excess of £1,000,000 a month to run.

During September 2026 the organisation attended 42 road traffic accidents, 116 medical emergencies, 27 accidental injuries and 51 other trauma incidents that included assaults, self-harm, exposure and sport/leisure/industrial accidents.



The aim of this charity is to save lives and reduce or prevent disability or suffering from critical illness and injury by delivering a first-class prehospital emergency medical service across Essex and Hertfordshire and surrounding areas.

Each Critical Care Team consists of a Pilot, Co-pilot, a Pre-hospital Care Doctor and a Critical care Paramedic. The helicopter is also often supported by a rapid response vehicle.

Everyone involved is highly skilled and works with state-of-the-art lifesaving equipment, often being pre-trialled before being issued to hospital emergency departments.

This proved to be an extremely interesting visit.

Thriplow Daffodil Festival & Country Fair Sunday 14th March 2027



Join us to celebrate the arrival of spring as we return to the picturesque Cambridgeshire village of Thriplow.

Each spring, the village comes alive with thousands of golden daffodils, open gardens and traditional countryside entertainment. Wander through the flower-filled lanes, browse craft, gift and food stalls, and enjoy live music and Morris dancing throughout the village.

There is plenty to discover during your visit, including:

- Beautiful daffodil displays and privately owned open gardens.
- Traditional attractions, including tractor rides, horse-drawn dray rides and a miniature railway.
- Vintage cars, engines and tractors, alongside demonstrations at the village smithy.
- Family entertainment, including traditional games, circus activities and a fun dog show.
- St George's Church flower festival, with bell ringing, organ recitals and local history.
- Homemade refreshments, street food, local beer and volunteer-run tearooms.

This annual event, which is run entirely by volunteers, and attracts thousands of visitors each year, raises funds for local charities and combines springtime colour with the warm atmosphere of a traditional English village fair. With so much to see, taste and enjoy, Thriplow Daffodil Weekend makes a memorable day out.

Tickets sell out quickly each year. Make sure you are not disappointed and book early.

N.B. May not be suitable for users of walking aids as there is a lot of walking on country roads and rough ground.

Depart Delta Hotel, Marks Tey at 9am prompt

Parking available at the hotel (cost £6 per vehicle) will be collected in cash on the day.

Parking to be reserved at time of booking please ensure you add Car Reg no. to booking form.

Cost: £29 each includes transport by Kings Coaches and admission to the festival. Full payment required with booking.

Excludes driver gratuity.

Turn to page 14 for booking form and link to online form and payment details for those who prefer to use bank transfer. Or pick-up a form at our December monthly meeting.

Open to members of Stanway and Colchester u3as

November scam roundup

1. Online Shopping scams

A timely reminder that members need to take care, especially when shopping online in the runup to the festive period.

According to Which? every year, millions of pounds are lost to online shopping scams in the UK, with losses peaking over the festive period.

Fake websites are increasingly looking just like the real thing, with help from AI (Artificial Intelligence). These lead to people buying something and getting nothing or something very different from the adverts.

Fraudsters use AI tools to create convincing websites, adverts and emails to disguise their scams, and a new example of this is a sneaky copycat Marks and Spencer website. In this instance a popup fake advert tempts viewers to purchase heavily discounted clothing. Investigations uncovered a bigger network of fake shopping sites.

Stick to well-known reputable retailers and don't trust popups, search separately for the shop if you are tempted. If you choose to buy from an unknown brand, follow Which? five top tips for spotting a scam website:

Be wary of offers which sound too good to be true, such as heavily discounted items or products which are otherwise sold out.

Look carefully at URLs (the website address) to check if you're on or being directed to the brand's official site or not.

Check if the company's listed address is in the UK and you can verify the location.

Copy and paste the URL into a domain checking website like https://who.is/ to see when it was registered. Newly created websites are a red flag.

Be suspicious of websites lacking basic information like 'about us' pages, privacy policies or terms and conditions.

More details about this scam and others can be seen on the Which? website here: https://www.which.co.uk/news/consumer-rights

2. Microsoft outage scams

On a slightly different note, you may have been affected by the recent outage to Microsoft systems, Teams, Outlook and Copilot.

People have reported phone calls claiming to be from Microsoft and asking for login details to restore access. It's also important to be wary of scam emails and texts impersonating Microsoft with phishing links designed to get your personal data.

Never respond to unsolicited calls to fix a computer issue. Nor should you give out your passwords to anyone, legitimate helpdesks will not ask this.

Report scam websites to https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/collection/phishing-scams/report-scam-website You can also report scams to https://www.reportfraud.police.uk/

If a scammer has stolen your money, contact your bank immediately using the number on the back of your card or on the special phone number 159.

Check our fraud webpage at https://stanway.u3asite.uk/fraud-alerts/ for more advice.

Stay safe everyone. *Alec*

Pétanque singles competitions November 2026

Our singles competitions took place a little later than usual for various reasons. The weather wasn't particularly supportive (understatement!} with our Tuesday session interrupted by sudden showers, leading us to take refuge in the café a couple of times before finally being able to complete the competition.

Wednesday's sessions brought a rather chilly wind to bear instead of rain, but the players soldiered on and we managed to successfully conclude our competitions.



Now that we have 3 thriving groups, we ran separate competitions with each group playing for separate trophies. Congratulations go to our deserved winners, and I was particularly pleased to see that some of our more recent members saw the old stagers off! The results are:



Tuesday 2pm session, 8 players.

1st Place Patti Machell with 19 points



2nd Place John O'Grady with 15 points

3rd Place Jackie Renn with 13 points



Wednesday 9.30 session, 12 players:

1st Place Lionel Bloomfield with 15 points

2nd Place Margaret Meen with 11 points

Joint 3rd Place Colin Will and Alison Ruffell with 7 points each



Wednesday 11.00 session, 9 players:

2 players achieved the same highest score, 13 points, so tension mounted during a quick playoff for first place.



1st Place Michelle Cross

2nd Place Gary Goodchild

3rd Place Bob Kimber with 11 points

Bob only joined the group that day and said he had never played before (allegedly !!!).

Very well done to all winners, and a big thank you to all players who turned up and played on despite the challenging weather conditions. We will continue to play until the end of November, weather permitting, and resume in January to work off the festive indulgences!

Alec

Alec Anderson, Group Leader

GROUP NEWS

NEW! *Sunday Lunch Group*

A new Dining Group has just been started. It meets for Sunday lunch on the 3rd Sunday of every month in and around Stanway for good food, good company and conversation. New members will be welcome.

Contact the group leader via the enquiry tab on the Groups page of our website

Our lunch groups are always popular and vacancies fill quickly. If you are interested in joining this new group, please contact James asap. .

Coming soon! MOTO Group

Many U3A organisations in other towns and cities have a MOTO group (and Stanway U3A once had one too) MOTO is an acronym for "Members On Their Own"

If you are on your own and would like be part of a group run by people on their own, for people on their own Visit the Groups page on our website and send name and contact details and we can have a meeting together with the others who also respond to discuss how such a group could be of benefit to us all. Or contact Group Support on **stanwaygroupsad@gmail.com**



NEW! GERMAN CONVERSATION GROUP

Announcing a new German group for Stanway U3A!

If you possess some knowledge of the German language and would like to meet regularly to use your skills and polish them up, then this group could be for you!

Group meetings will be held twice a month, on Monday mornings from 10.30 - 12.00, in Colchester. The first meeting will be an opportunity for each member to help decide on the format that the group will take. I hope that we will be able to start this group in January.

If you are interested and would like more information, please contact the group leader via the enquiry tab on the groups page on our website.

PROPOSED WELSH GROUP



.Sadly, none of our Welsh speaking members have offered to take up the gauntlet to co-ordinate a proposed group focusing on the Welsh language and heritage. However, there has been interest should the Welsh contingent including those with a Welsh heritage amongst our members get together to celebrate all things Welsh be it the language, history, culture and traditions. Wouldn't it be fun to be able to launch such a group on St Davids Day (1st March).

If you are interested and could help with this, please contact our Group Support Team member Doreen Willers on stanwaygroupsad@gmail.com with your contact details.

PROPOSED NEW GROUP PHOTOGRAPHY SKILLS

I am proposing a new Group - Photography Skills.

In order to consider this new group, I would like to hear from anyone interested.

The proposed format is:-

Monthly meetings to be held for 2 hours in a venue to be decided

Please advise preference for morning or afternoon in your response.

1. Learning about their own camera.
2. Photography skills to include, the principals of photography and settings
3. Composition
4. Other aspects to be identified.
5. Individual Project work

This group will be ideal for both beginners and those more experienced using cameras but also those who use their mobile phones for photography (not snapshots)

Please respond asap to determine the feasibility of forming this group.

Contact email: **stanwaygroupsad@gmail.com**

Ian Mathews

OVER TO YOU

This month we are pleased to feature the second of our runners-up from our Short Story Competition. Ladies & Gentlemen please meet Lucy.

LUCY IN THE SKY WITH DIAMONDS
BY Marilyn Summers

Tom was puffing as he reached the top of Brook Hill. Lucy, on the other hand, gamboled backwards and forwards, nose to the ground, tail wagging furiously. Tom leaned over, hands on knees, and sucked in great gulps of air.

Lucy made a soft snorting sound and he stroked her bony head and short, silky ears. She grinned up at him, a world of understanding in her golden eyes. Tom smiled back at her. His Lucy Diamond. Lucy had brought him back from the brink of despair. He knew he was a failure. He'd never achieved even one of his dreams. But Lucy didn't mind. She didn't mind that before he'd met her, he'd tried to end his own life several times. He couldn't even succeed at that.

His counsellor had suggested that he needed something to focus on and then, by one of those strange twists of fate, someone in his therapy group had announced he didn't want his dog anymore. From the day Tom

led Lucy home, nervously clutching her lead, she had become his friend and confidant. His only one. Three months later he started playing his guitar again. Six months later he stopped going to counseling.

“Why on earth am I doing this gig tomorrow?” he asked Lucy for the hundredth time. He must have been mad to say ‘yes ’but some vestige of long-forgotten pride had stopped him saying ‘no.’ It had happened when he was at the vets for Lucy’s flea treatment. A woman, Mrs Bonner, was there with her cat. She said she’d recently been looking at her mother’s photos from the sixties and, when the vet had called his name, she’d realized who he was. And she’d booked him, there and then, for Thursday. Tomorrow.

Next morning Tom woke early. He took Lucy for a walk and then he tuned up his guitar. His hands were shaking but only from nerves. He didn’t even smoke now. It would be bad for Lucy. All his “medication” was in the hazy past and all he had to remind him of those days was a damaged heart and liver.

He showered and combed his straggly, shoulder-length hair and thought ruefully of when he’d had to wear a headband to keep it out of his eyes. Then he dressed carefully, resisting the temptation to leave his shirt unbuttoned to his navel. A light lunch and he was ready to go, despite feeling increasingly sick.

He settled the guitar and Lucy in the back of the car and drove into town, following Mrs. Bonner’s directions. He now seriously regretted the light lunch and thought of driving off again, but Mrs Bonner was waiting in the car park and greeted him enthusiastically.

“I’m so glad you could make it. Do come in.”

“Can I use the bathroom,” he said shakily.

“Of course.” And she led Tom and Lucy to the visitor’s toilet. Tom tried desperately to compose himself and glanced at the window, estimating the practicalities of getting himself and Lucy out safely. Impossible. So, he opened the door and followed Mrs. Bonner along the corridor. Lucy padded behind, her claws making little clicking sounds on the floor. Without warning, Mrs Bonner suddenly flung open a door and announced dramatically, “Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Tommy Rave.”

For one mind-blowing moment Tom was blinded by lights, deafened by applause, hyped up on booze and pills. In reality he was standing, trembling and terrified, in front of twenty or so residents of the New Claydon Nursing Home. Fighting the panic, he tried to strike a chord and realized that the journey had untuned his guitar.

He felt a gentle pressure on his leg and knew that Lucy was leaning against him. He stared down at her and fought the dizziness that threatened to overwhelm him. Then, smiling stiffly, he managed to hesitantly play the first notes of his opening number. He went through his repertoire. Hits from the groups he’d backed all those years ago.

His audience applauded politely. Some were tapping their feet while others waved their hands, palms outwards, like slow-motion football fans. Tom paused for breath and announced his finale.

“And now, especially for you, Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds.”

He heard Lucy thump her tail next to him as he started the intro. By the end he thought he’d sent everyone into a trance, but Mrs. Bonner was ecstatic.

“Thank you so much, Mr. Rave. That was fantastic. Please stay for tea and biscuits.”

Tom could only nod at her. The twenty-minute gig had exhausted him. He saw that Lucy had left his side and was moving quietly between the rows of wheelchairs. She stood patiently as residents stroked her ears

and kissed her head. Some asked Tom about Lucy and he gradually managed to answer, albeit diffidently. Some told him about the pets they'd owned and loved.

Later, much later, when he and Lucy were at the top of Brook Hill again, he thought of Mrs. Bonner's parting words. She'd said, "I wonder if you could fit us in again next week? You made everyone's day. And do bring your dog with you. She's a star."

He smiled now and put his hand on Lucy's head. She was grinning up at him, and he could feel her tail fanning back and forth. Well, he was happy for her to be the star and for him to do the backing. Wasn't that the way it had always been? But now he, Tommy Rave the loser, had made everyone's day and owned a dog who was a star. He laughed out loud and threw back his head. Lucy looked at him in surprise and rolled on her back, kicking her legs in the air. He laughed until great healing tears rolled down his face. He gazed upwards through the darkness at the gleaming stars. They were beautiful and they were shining for him and for his Lucy Diamond.

STANWAY u3a DAY TRIPS BOOKING FORM

A Day at Thriplow Daffodil Festival & Country Fair

Sunday 14th March 2027

Name(s)……

Address:……

Email:…… Tel/mob……

Emergency contact:……

Car Reg:…… **If parking at the Delta Hotel Marks Tey**

Please reserve ……. member places @ £29 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, The Bays, Mill Lane, Birch, CO2 0NH

We have received several requests to pay by bank transfer. Payment details:

Sort Code 08-92-99 A/C 65691441 Payee: Stanway u3a – NO 3 ACC

Ref: Your Surname/Thriplow Please ensure you quote this so that we can properly identify your remittance

Please email **stanwayu3atrips@gmail.com** to confirm you have arranged remittance

Please complete the online booking form by following this link https://forms.gle/qG3dLy1vj2HVHmcj6

We can only confirm your booking once form and full payment received. Thank you

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 JANUARY newsletter to the editor at email: u3agen57@gmail.com by latest 15th DECEMBER (*earlier if possible).*

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

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