

Yet more of our favourite things

An anthology
by the
Creative Writing Group

to celebrate the
25th birthday of
Hillingdon u3a
June 2026



Introduction

Each member of the Creative Writing Group has written
one piece for
Hillingdon's 25th Birthday Anthology.

This is our fourth anthology; the last one was in 2022.

My thanks go to each writer for making the meetings such fun.

If you would be interested in joining us - please do get in touch.
The group is full, but I can add you to the waiting list

Adele Franklin, Group Leader.

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We had met on a blind date

By Adele

We had met on a blind date
He was thirty, me sixteen, jailbait?
He looked at me, I could see him calculate
He was tall and scrawny, flyweight
I was fleshy, Rubenesque, overweight
He plied me with cider, hydrate
He took me for a Chinese meal, translate
We split the bill, cheap skate?

Traditional church service, lychgate
A quick honeymoon, Margate
We bought a house, real estate
Our names above the entrance, door-plate
Fancy china wedding gifts, ornate
No more nights at the disco, gyrate

Year one is paper and a fresh blank slate
Breakfast in bed for him, caffeinate
All too keen to consummate, copulate

Early days of sex, fellate
Keep myself nice, epilate
Immediately pregnant, gestate
Making friends with other mums, school-gate

He played on-line chess, checkmate
Spent hours scrolling on-line, clickbait
What happened to the man I married, soulmate?

My clothes all came from Oxfam, cut rate
Running out of money, cheque postdate
He told me what to think, dictate
Isolated me from my friends, school mate
I tried to stay positive, fabricate

Second pregnancy, dilate
So many arguments, irate
Moving to a bigger house, Southgate

Tenth anniversary, tin plate
What was there to celebrate?

He dragged me down, dead weight
Told me I was stupid, denigrate
Lock myself in the bathroom, mutilate
Footnote in my own life, notate

Trying to mend the marriage, Relate
We needed them to arbitrate
Could it get any worse, exacerbate
We no longer talked, stagnate
Did I ever love him, adulate

Heaven help me, now I'm fifty-eight
Kids leave home, graduate

Twenty-five years, silver plate

He lost his hair, bald pate
His erections softened, deflate
False teeth, masticate
Time passes, passions drop, frustrate
Finger up the bum, prostate
More and more pills, medicate
Cognition going, fluctuate, defecate
Stuck in a chair, salivate, urinate, ulcerate
Deteriorate, disorientate
I could kill him, terminate, annihilate

Move him into a home, can hardly wait, escape
Downsize and move, emigrate?
Or do up the house, renovate
Decisions decisions, vacillate

Drowning in house contents, suffocate, donate

The end lingers but then, commemorate, commiserate, celebrate,

Sort the will, probate
Me now, emancipate
Recuperate, reactivate, rejuvenate.



The owl and the fox – A fable

By Anna

In the heart of the twenty-five-year-old forest, so called because it was planted exactly twenty-five years to the day, lived an owl and a fox.

The owl, named Olivia, had watched the first green shoots push through the peaty soil. From the highest oak, she had counted the seasons: twenty-five springs of blossoms, twenty-five summers of buzzing bees, twenty-five autumns of copper leaves, and twenty-five winters of silver frost.

The fox, named Fredrick, had been a cub when the first saplings were no taller than mushrooms. He had grown lean and clever alongside the forest, learning every burrow, brook, and bramble patch as they matured.

On the morning of the forest's twenty-fifth birthday, Olivia cleared her throat and hooted an announcement to the trees.

"Friends of root and feather, fur and fern! Today we celebrate twenty-five years of standing, growing, learning and belonging!"

Fredrick flicked his tail. "Celebrate? Trees don't count years or learn. They simply grow."

"Exactly," said Olivia. "And so do we, and we learn"

The animals gathered in a sunlit clearing. The deer brought garlands of ivy. The badgers polished smooth stones from the stream. Even the shy hedgehogs arrived, carrying bright red berries.

But as the celebration began, a quarrel sparked.

"We made this forest what it is," boasted the woodpecker. "Without us, the trees would be full of grubs."

"Nonsense," said the rabbits. "Our tunnels turn the soil and help roots breathe!"

The squirrels chattered. The frogs croaked. Each creature claimed the forest's success.

Fredrick watched with narrowed eyes. "They sound like crows fighting over a shiny coin," he muttered.

Olivia lifted her wings but did not speak. Instead, she asked Fredrick, "What do you see?"

Fredrick glanced around and saw how the tall oaks filtered sunlight for the ferns below. The stream fed the moss. The moss softened the earth. The earth nourished the trees.

"I see..." he then started replying slowly in amazement, "...that nothing here grows alone."

Olivia nodded saying. "Then perhaps you should tell them."

Fredrick leapt onto a fallen log in the middle of a grassy area "You argue over who made the forest," he called, "but I remember when it was empty covered by wasteland, none of us did it alone. The trees gave shade. The insects fed the birds. The rain fed the roots. Even the wind carried seeds from far away." He paused; everyone was mumbling...

Olivia was observing others with her big amber eyes.

"If you want to celebrate," she hissed, "celebrate that we grew together and helped each other"

At that moment clearing fell quiet. The woodpecker tucked in his beak. The rabbits twitched their noses thoughtfully.

Then Olivia spread her great wings and hooted, "To twenty-five years of growing together!"

And so they feasted—not in pride, but in gratitude. As twilight settled over the Twenty-Five Year Forest, the owl and the fox sat side by side.

"Do you suppose," Fredrick asked softly, "we will see fifty?"

Olivia blinked her golden eyes. "If we care for it as it has cared for us, we might"

And from that year on, whenever the animals spoke of forest's birthdays, they remembered their 25th anniversary the most and the wise owl's words too.

The forest, at twenty-five years old, understood something it had not known at five or ten or twenty years old.

The forest does not grow by one root alone, and neither does a community.



Twenty-Five Years – Silver Anniversary

By Audrey

It was their twenty fifth anniversary, not of their wedding, that would follow in a couple of years with a big family party, no this was far more important to Jess, this was to celebrate twenty-five years since their first date, when their lives changed forever. In two days time they were going to re-create 'the magic'.

Jess worked in her mum's hair salon and twenty-five years ago, on a Monday in early June, her dad had forgotten his sandwiches. Glad of a short walk in the sunshine, she strolled round to his garage. Jess enjoyed going there; all the young mechanics and apprentices joked and teased her under the ever-watchful eye of the owner, Big Jim, her dad. On that particular day, her dad was out testing a vehicle, one mechanic was under a car and Matt was alone in the oily garage. She was happy, he was her favourite. Collar length, unruly black hair and soulful puppy dog, brown eyes you could drown in. He was tall with a six-pack stomach, oh God, pass me a fan. But best of all, his grin filled his entire face.

Matt wasted no time in asking her out, he had to be quick, before Big Jim got back or another grease monkey tried to muscle in. They agreed he would pick her up by the shop around the corner from her home on Wednesday evening, so that Matt didn't have to go through the 'don't drink, drive carefully, get her home by 9pm and behave!' routine with her dad.

For the re-creation, they borrowed their son's car, the one Matt had owned on his first date with Jess. Both remembered clearly what they had worn, in fact Matt still had the very baggy jeans and the candy-striped Ben Sherman shirt in the back of his wardrobe. The Vans trainers had long gone but Jess told him she would find something similar.

The day before their first date, Jess remembered spending hours and hours with her best friend holed up in her bedroom putting on every combination of clothing she owned. They decided the gypsy dress would be trying too hard, a mini skirt might send out the wrong message, so she settled on bootcut trousers with a sort of mini skirt attached, strange, I know but that was the fashion back then. She was encased in flattering black, thigh-whittling Lycra. Adding a metallic boob tube to show her lovely shoulders and a very flat stomach, she wasn't going to allow something as trifling as hypothermia prevent her from looking her best. She accessorised by tying her long hair in a high pony tail with a heavy fringe and added huge gold hoop earrings and copious amount of blue eyeliner. A final spritz of Impulse and she was ready.

Matt had taken her to a bistro pub a few miles away, as they didn't want to risk seeing people they knew locally on their first date. Jess had ordered chicken with some fancy potatoes and a glass of white wine; Matt had a burger and chips with a pint of lager shandy. They shared a dessert but neither really noticed what they were eating, they only had eyes for each other; it was true love even before the food arrived.

On re-creation night, they arrived at the Bistro pub just a bit late, hoping the same table they had reserved was still available. It was because the place was deserted. The pub smelled of stale alcohol and weed, the cologne of 21st century. Ordering food was now done via QR code menus and the place was so brightly lit, it could have served as a landing beacon for extra-terrestrial life forms. None of this mattered; they were re-creating the happiest day of their lives. Matt looked like he'd need to be ID'd to buy Red Bull in Tesco. Jess felt like she'd escaped from a very early episode of East Enders, sponsored by Maybelline.

The Bistro had been turned into a sports bar with massive TV screens everywhere, so big they could have been seen from the Isle of Wight. They didn't recognise any of the music, partly because it was obscured by the ping-ping of slot machines. Twenty-five years ago they were listening to Electric Avenue by Eddie Grant.

Not only had the pub changed beyond all recognition, so had the landlord. Their food was served by a grumpy man with a charisma bypass who hardly looked at them as they told him they were re-creating their first date. They could have told him they both had corns for all the notice he took. Slowly, other customers arrived. Jess became aware of people staring. Realising it was their strange appearance, loudly, she told a woman nearby that they were going to a fancy-dress party and they left before ordering dessert. If the rest of the food was anything to go by, they were missing nothing.

At home, Matt made them a cuppa and sat with his arm around Jess's shoulder. 'Don't be down just because our re-creation didn't quite work out, love.'

Jess eased off her pointy high heels.

'Did you turn Alexa off? You know she listens in.' Matt shook his head negatively.

'Do your feet hurt in those shoes?'

'Nah, I lost all feeling in them an hour ago,' she laughed. Rubbing her toes, she said, 'I realise now, we didn't need to re-create our date. We certainly didn't need that horrible pub with the dreadful food.' She smiled, 'all we needed to remember was twenty-five years of happiness and love.'

'I wouldn't have missed a minute of it,' said Matt as he leaned in to kiss her.

'Oh, yuck, stop that, you two. Get a room!' Their daughter and son stood in the door way, giggling.

'Cool shirt, dad!' added Jake.

They looked at each other, laughing – who needs a re-creation? Just then, from the darkness, Alexa calmly announced, 'I've added a snorkel set to your shopping list.'



The red coat

By David

Has it really been 25 years since I sat in the cinema, overwhelmed by the only colour in the entire film, a young girl wearing a bright red coat. later only the coat among a pile of discarded clothing? Instinctively, you knew its owner was no longer alive. No dialogue was needed, just the sight of a red coat among many others, the only one in colour. Even now, I feel tears welling up at the thought of her fate: so young, so innocent, yet her faith seemed to offend an intolerant regime. During a tour of Auschwitz-Birkenau, I noticed two suitcases bearing the names Katarzyna Nowakowska and Magdalena Kowalska. The display indicated they were two deportees from Krakow, Poland, both around 11 years old.

I found myself recalling the words of Zager and Evans in their song 'In the Year 2525, *"but through eternal night, the twinkling of starlight, so very far away, maybe it's only yesterday"* Katarzyna, come on, you'll be late, the train won't wait for you. Don't forget your sandwiches; they're on the kitchen table. Oh, I've made some for Magdalena too. Oh, do hurry — you can be so tiresome sometimes, young lady.

Sorry, Mum, I couldn't find my coat. I had forgotten you'd washed it. I really wanted to wear this one; it's a lovely, warm coat. Well, it will definitely make you stand out; Maria added, "It's hard to hide in a bright red one like that." "Yes, Mum," Katarzyna giggled, "I've thought that can make it so sweet as long as you wear something that makes them notice you." Maria Nowakowska stopped mid-step, stunned by her daughter's sudden revelation.

Hey, just a minute, young lady, what exactly is that supposed to mean? If I understood you correctly, you're going dressed up to attract boys? You're not twelve until next week. What can boys possibly be doing in your life yet? Oh Mum, get real, will you? I'm not going husband-seeking, am I? Just want to get to know some, maybe get them to help me with my studies, carry my lunch, carry my books, they can be so heavy for a girl, you know. Having some strapping big boy could be useful, don't you think?

Seeing the horrified look on her mother's face triggered another fit of hysterical giggles. Mum, Katarzyna, laughed, "You're SO easy to wind up, aren't you? Since when have boys been attending St Michael's? It's an all-girls school!" Feigning a slap around the back of her daughter's head, Maria laughed, "Okay, you nearly had me there, young lady. Now, off to the station, and be quick about it."

The station was an hour's walk along quiet countryside lanes until they reached the main highway leading into the town. Stepping aside to let several military vehicles pass, Katarzyna squeezed her mother's hand in fear. Don't worry, Maria said, they're probably going to the port in Gdansk; there have been a few over the last month or so. Expect their troops who have finished their time here and are going home. There's nothing to be troubled over, Katarzyna, not from them, but if you miss your train, you can be very concerned about what I will do, that I promise.

Arriving at the station, they saw the platform filled with anxious people. A train hauling cattle trucks was waiting, its occupants noisily protesting their confinement. Mum, that's so wrong, those poor creatures suffering like that, little light, no water, no food. So many squeezed into such a small space.

Yes, Maria agreed, but you must remember it's not people; it's animals being sent to slaughter. It's okay to treat them like that. As you said, it's wrong, but it's accepted; people may not like it, but they ignore it. "There's Magdalena," shouted Katarzyna. "Look, mum, over by the sign, in the blue coat." They get so excited, Hellene, whenever they get together, don't they?" Maria said to Magdalena's mother. "Oh, yes, it's so good to see. They are such good friends; it's so heartwarming to see how they come alive whenever they're together. I recall two other girls waiting at this station to go to school together, a long time ago now." Hellene sighed. "Yes, there was a war then; those cattle cars were used for a very different reason back then." "Yes," Maria replied, "they carried people. I don't know why, but I think Katarzyna sensed that just now." She got really scared when we arrived and saw the train here. "I can't get the sight out of my mind, even after all this time," Hellene added. Truck after truck discharging their pitiful cargo of wounded soldiers. Others waiting to board and return to the front. I thank God our girls will be spared any of that.

The blast of a steam whistle broke the calm of the morning. Come on, you two, your carriage is number 4. Magdalena, her mother shouted as she boarded the train, no more fighting, you understand! Turning to Maria, she explained that Magdalena had got into trouble last term with a bully she had 'sorted out'. The bully was picking on another girl, and Magdalena sorted it out, but she nearly got expelled.

Maria looked at her, " Do you know who the other girl is? she enquired. No, the school wouldn't say, just that the bully won't be going there again. Taking Hellene's hands in hers, Maria spoke softly, it was Katarzyna! I think that's why she's been so reluctant to go back this term; maybe she doesn't know the bully isn't there to trouble her again.

Walking away together, two mothers comforted in the knowledge that their daughters, one in her faded blue coat and the other in a vivid red, were safe and about to bloom into the wonder of womanhood

If only it had been yesterday, a young life would have gone untroubled.

IF ONLY!!



Silver Futures

By Doreen

Silver tresses or silver traces
Sit atop well-worn faces.
Life now playing a different tune,
Fellow players a happy boon.

Left behind the daily grind,
Hours to fill perhaps we find.
Freedom now to make own choices
Pleasure found with other voices.

Life a slower pace - no way.
New activities fill the day.
Hone a skill or learn another.
A whole new world still to discover.

Ignore the crew that say we're through
They don't know the half of you.
To some become invisible,
To you and me that's risible.

Silver tresses or silver traces
We've a smile upon our faces.
What we have we'll make the most
Together raise a well-earned toast.



UPS AND DOWNS

By Gowan

“Annie who?” puzzled James.

“Tweet” explained Damian, the newly appointed pirates pantomime parrot, who was a budgie in civilian life.

James had daily conversations with his brainy bird, whose replies confirmed ideas wafting inside his bonce.

Both preparing for brunch at the pub with Tommy and Polly, before another writing session for this year’s pantomime. But today would be different.

A dawn restrained breakfast followed by a physical training flight round the village with Jim Lad struggling to keep up, meant two hearty appetites mid-morning.

They arrived early at their favourite corner table in the pub, regularly reserved by Polly. James got his favourite brew and a small water bowl for Damian with a separate seed thimble.

“Shiver me timbers!”

The roar echoed round the room as Tommy, the panto pirate captain, stomped towards James & Damian. They both braced for the inevitable “Arr Jim lad!” and were not disappointed, though it was delivered by Polly, seemingly skipping with a spring in her steps.

She had her usual cantaloupe smile, and plonked a massive trophy on the table.

Raised eyebrows from the boys and a curious Damian “Tweet”, Polly just pointed to the plaque.

“Desperate Dan Pie R Cubed award.”

“We ate the pub’s prodigious pie, first trio in 25 years to leave a clean dish and no doggie takeaway.”

“Chirp” complained Damian.

“Sorry, budgie bag.”

“Don’t know where you put it all, Polly lass” admired Tommy. “Maybe their Fish ‘n’ Chips today? Damian likes a good nibble.”

A confirming whistle agreed.

Food and drink were ordered, with some sides for good measure, then our heroes settled back. Polly had a question.

“Don’t you get tired of people saying ‘Arr Jim lad’? Pirates panto finished months ago and still I hear it almost every day.”

James gentle smile reassured. “Not at all. It’s like a musician being asked for a favourite song, or comedian for a sketch everyone knows. It’s a joyous shout, cheers up all ‘n’ sundry. Been good for my electrical business too. Puts cautious clients at ease. I know what I’m doing, and explain things carefully. No hidden charges or nasty surprises. Working with Tommy’s carpentry calling a big bonus.”

Damian nuzzled James’ chin, then returned to eating seeds.

As they waited for the freshly prepared food and quadruple cooked chips, no half measures at their pub, James asked the nagging question.

“Who’s Annie?”

Two voices started, then Polly deferred to Tommy.

“This year is the 25th anniversary of the village pantomime. Thought we’d just reminisce over the quarter century. Polly has her phone recording our cogitations, for anything we can use in this year’s show. She is our panto director now, but do you remember the first show?”

Polly had researched the productions, along with Tommy and James, asking villagers and dramatic society members for their memories.

She looked at her copious notes and began.

“It all started with another silver celebration. Fifty years ago Ye Olde Village Hall was the worse for wear, no one really in charge but used most days. The Young Farmers had their Saturday disco, lights ‘n’ all. Then a loose wire, water leak that no one ever fixed, an almighty bang, and a smell that made even seasoned rural workers gag. Best thing that could have happened. Everyone rallied round, called in favours with local builders and businesses, and the village hall had a major reset. Our motto “Make do and mend” on steroids. This time with a rotating enthusiastic committee, overseeing its use and gradual long-term improvements. Women’s Institute, Scouts and Guides, Cubs and Brownies, regular plays, Bingo, you name it. And of course the Young Farmers with their weekly boogieing, contributing to the community. And then, on its silver anniversary, the Not-so New Village Hall had its first pantomime. And every year since.”

“What a quarter century” enthused James with a warbling whistle from Damian.

“Went to first panto with Tommy when we were in short trousers. Such fun. ‘He’s behind you’ and ‘Oh no you can’t’. And now we are on stage.”

“A real bouncy castle of ups and downs” said Tommy, waiting for the expected chirp from Damian, reliably delivered.

“Remember when the performance was snowed in a few years ago? Farmers brought tractors and trailers, made sure everyone got home, plus supplies and wood for those off the beaten track.”

“How about Bobby?” asked Polly.

James looked at Damian, who gave a long squawk, then closed his eyes for a well-known story.

Arr Jim Lad smiled and set forth.

“The Village Bobby was held in great fear by the local children. Maybe just as well given the light fingers of some, but it’s somewhat demoralising when even the youngest run crying to their parents just at the merest hint of him. So he asked for a part in that year’s panto. ‘Hello hello hello’ was his catchphrase, twanging his braces. Joyous merriment every show. However the boo-hiss area police commander heard and told him to lose his suspenders.”

“What happened?” fed Polly.

“His trousers fell down.”

Damian joined in the laughter with warbling chirps and trills.

The food arrived and our four hungry heroes got stuck in. Despite scoffing a packed thimble of bird seed, Damian’s conversation contributions had left him ready for replenishment.

Further discussion was paused while noshing, Yum Yum and chip chirping filled their table. The pub had a single remaining cupcake they ordered to share.

Polly, Tommy and James settled back, while Damian managed a silent but safe burp.

Polly said “Twenty-five pantomimes, each more ambitious, bigger and better sets, dance routines that even Strictly might boggle at, and then...”

“Last year’s Pirates Pantomime” completed Tommy. “Myself as the pirate captain, you Polly the director, and James here as...”

“Arr Jim lad” said everyone, with an exultant chirrup from Damian.

They celebrated their anniversary, with a piece of cake.

Each had a silver sliver.



Thank goodness for the U3A

By Helen

Out with the old and in with the new -
easier said than done.

A prune of his clothes
a sort through the books
a change of the 'we' to the 'I'.

Now I'm finding myself again,
no longer his Carer,
I'm back to my groups
to laughter and chat
to stretching my life. And my learning.

Searching for remnants of the Me
for silver, for gold
the best of my history.
To help me move forward
and learn to love life again.



TORVILL

By Judy

I realised the other day that Torvill and I had been together now for twenty-five years. I well remember the day we first met; it was the same day Dean, my husband of thirty years, left. I had stood in the doorway and watched Dean load his car with the last of his suitcases, plus Bertie, our Labrador, and drive off without a backward glance. I then did what I always do in times of stress; I went out into my garden to do some weeding and it was there I found Torvill. He was just sitting there in the sun nibbling on some dandelion leaves.

I had never seen him before, and I wondered if I should do something about his unexpected appearance. Then reckoned, if I just left him alone, he would toddle off back to where he came from, so I left him there. But when I went out to the garden the following day, he was still there. He had moved on a few feet and was now nibbling the lettuce leaves I had carefully planted the previous week. I did not appreciate this too much, so decided I needed to find out where he came from and return him there as soon as possible. I called on several neighbours and asked if he belonged to any of them, but no one claimed ownership. Several people said they thought he belonged to a family in number sixty-two but they had moved away a few weeks ago, and no one had their forwarding address so I was unable to contact them. This put me in a bit of a quandary!

During my married life, during which I had brought up four children, all of whom had now fled the nest, but who had, whilst they lived at home, owned a variety of pets, including cats, dogs, hamsters, mice, and both tropical and cold-water fish. Most of these animals they have loved and cared for briefly, but eventually lost interest as homework, new schools, new hobbies etc., got in the way and the job of looking after them fell on my shoulders. For this reason, I had not been too sorry at the departure of our Labrador and determined to never have another animal in the house. I went out to the garden to discuss the situation with Torvill and explain that he could not stay with me.

“Now look here,” I told him “I’m very sorry that your previous owners have abandoned you, but you can’t stay here. I don’t want the responsibility of having any more pets so I’m afraid, you’ll have to move on.” He lifted up his sad little face and looked at me with such a plaintive expression, that I suddenly realised, that he, like me, had been abandoned; there was no one else in the world to look after him. We had a lot in common, Torvill and me; so I reluctantly decided to let him remain in my garden.

His name, of course, was my idea. As Dean had moved out, I thought Torvill was a suitable name for him. A friend of mine suggested that swapping Dean for Torvill was a fair exchange, but I am not quite sure how you compare a man with a tortoise.

I did not actually know that he was male, I had no idea how to check the sex of a tortoise, but it did not really matter, so I decided that he was a he and we never argued about it. In fact, Torvill and I never argued about anything, unlike Dean who had argued and complained about almost everything. I would however, have to have words with Torvill about eating all my carefully cultivated lettuce, which I had planted for my own consumption, but instead, I

fenced off a small area at the far end of the garden to keep him where he could only eat what I gave him.

Never having had a tortoise previously, I realised I had a lot to learn and soon discovered that the enclosure I had built was not nearly good enough for him. I had to add a covered house so he could shade from the hot sun or shelter from the rain according to the season. I had to give up a little more of the garden for this. I also had a shallow pond dug out so he could have a bit of a dip if he felt like it. This meant enlarging his home even more. I was then advised to include a few rocks and other structures so he had something to climb over and keep him occupied. His estate gradually grew larger and larger until it eventually took up over fifty per cent of the garden. But at least he did not need me to take him out for walks and he never entered the house with dirty paws or scratch the furniture or do any of the other things past pets had done to annoy me.

No, Torvill just stayed within his own little realm, never complaining, or being anything but a lovely little presence who I went out and spoke to every day. In twenty-five years, we never had an argument about anything. Yesterday, to show my appreciation, I bought him a silver water dish. He smiled up at me in thanks. We get on very well, Torvill and me.



Silver Wedding surprise in Jamaica

By Kay

Alan was feeling quite chuffed with himself, he had just made all the arrangements for Christmas in Jamaica for himself and Sally for their 25th wedding anniversary. She knew he was planning something and just left him to it, no spoilers wanted, just a lovely surprise.

Sally noticed that her husband had adopted an unusual habit in the summer months, prior to their holiday. After daily house chores and garden maintenance, Alan would disappear to their partially covered patio area with a large cup of tea and his crossword puzzle, naked! She was shocked the first time she saw him, but he shrugged it off, and said "I am getting tan ready for our trip, you should do the same". This made sense to her but there was more to this than she needed to know at the time.

Alan had planned luxury for the whole trip. First class seats on Virgin, champagne and flowers in their room and renewal of their wedding vows in the hotel chapel. He wanted everything to be perfect.

Departure day arrived; Sally watched as Alan handed over the tickets as the cases were checked on and saw the destination as Jamaica on the luggage tag. How lovely, she thought. Alan was keeping everything quiet, he would let her know more once the plane was in mid taxi. Seat belts on, champagne in hand, Sally asked, "What is the plan then"? Alan handed over the itinerary, he was nervous and trying not to show it, waiting for her reaction. The plane was mid-air as Sally was reading the information. Alan was waiting for her reaction, as she was taking more time than he had hoped to reply. Sally looked at Alan, she could barely speak. "Why are we going to a swingers resort, is there something wrong with our marriage"? She burst in to tears. "As soon as we land, I am on the first flight back, I thought you loved me"! "It's only for three days, we are in another hotel from Christmas Eve from the rest of the break, and yes I do love you, I was trying to add extra amour to our special time," said Alan feeling slightly defeated.

A passenger opposite Sally had observed the couples tiff. A message appeared on her seat screen. "Meet me in the bar area, I hope I can help you". She looked across to a woman waving at her, and left her seat to meet her.

"Hi I am Sue, I couldn't help notice your disagreement, are you staying at Club Linger? "Yes, it sounds awful," said Sally. "I thought so too at first" said Sue, "but I've been back five times, it's not a hotel keys in a bowl scenario, guests come for a stay that is quite laid back and a bit adventurous. You don't have to wander around naked all the time, I'm staying there, and I can help you find your way".

Sally returned to Alan, he hugged her saying "just think of it as part of our adventure, on the next part of our trip, I have arranged for us to renew our wedding vows". "What will my mother say when she finds out". "She put money towards our trip hoping that she could come with us," said Alan. "She wants to save up for next year and bring her bingo buddies Elsie and Enid for a longer stay".

As promised, Sue met Alan and Sally and inducted them in the etiquette required in some of the hotel areas. Alan was quite content walking around in the nude. Sally felt she had no choice but to follow, only too glad that meal times in the restaurant required guests to be clothed and be able to secure her serviette. She also felt that she wasn't being stared down by anyone by the end of day one and began to relax. They were on their second honeymoon, things could only get better. There was no censure on having pleasure on the pool or beach sunbeds, they both found it quite liberating.

They moved to their second hotel on Christmas Eve. Their accommodation was a Bungalow with a private pool and patio. The food, drink and entertainment over two days seemed endless. Two days later they renewed their wedding vows and chilled quietly away from the general activities for the remaining time they were there.



Silver wedding anniversary

By Kouser

Geeta, was sitting by the lake, it was twilight and the moon was reflecting on the water. It looked magical. She could not believe it was 25yrs ago that she had got married to Eric. It was their silver wedding anniversary.

She was wearing a favourite Asian outfit, a long pistachio coloured dress, with beautiful silver embroidery on it. She loved it, felt very lady like and special in it. Eric loved it and paid her a compliment. The look on his face sent shivers down her spine, a special exchange between them. She also had on a silver bracelet which Eric had bought for her 16th birthday.

They were reminiscing about things they used to do. Their special memory was seeing Bob Marley in concert and their favourite song was 'One Love'. They had music playing in the background and decided to get up and dance. Eric had packed a picnic basket, and he had put sparklers, silver shiny hats and tinsel in it. They had fun dancing around, their special time.

They fell in love whilst at school, they were childhood sweethearts. It was a difficult relationship because of cultural differences. But here they were, 25yrs married, no matter what ups and downs they had faced together, they were celebrating their Silver Wedding Anniversary. They had gone through a lot of difficulties as a young couple at school and also as adults, due to a mixed-race relationship. Not everyone had understood the situation.

At school, Geeta had enjoyed sports, and was in the girl's cricket team. Her parents were not happy with that, as she should 'be lady like', for future introductions 'to suitors'. Eric was also in the boy's cricket team, which meant they saw each other often. They enjoyed the away matches, as none of her cousins played cricket, therefore had some private time for themselves.

However, there were a couple of Geeta's cousins, in Eric's class, so it was not always 'safe' to be seen in each other's company. They would always tell their parents what Geeta was up to. Geeta, knew she could trust a couple of girlfriends in her class, who would be her alibi if she was sneaking out to meet Eric.

She was remembering how excited she used to get when they had arranged to meet up. She had to tell her parents she was meeting her female friends and dress conservatively because of culture. However, her friends had different ideas. They put make up on her, and altered her clothes, which were more 'flamboyant and risky'.

They had managed to keep their relationship a secret for a few years. She hated to keep this from her parents, but knew what their reaction would be. She had seen it, too often in her extended family. Geeta and Eric agreed that they would tell their parents, after they had taken their exams.

Her parents were shocked and told her to end the relationship. She stood her ground and refused. She saw Eric and told him her parents wanted her to end the relationship. He decided that he would meet her parents, officially, with his parents. They had been aware that he was seeing someone but not from an Asian culture. They found it hard to understand the situation

and meeting Geeta's family was a positive move. Both sets of parents agreed that there would need to be some boundaries and honesty in order for all of them to feel comfortable about this new scenario they were faced with. The meeting had been very positive. Everyone had accepted there would be changes and trust from all sides.

Geeta and Eric were very happy with how they had managed all the challenges they had faced as kids and wanted to ensure, their 2 kids would be open and honest with them.

They were now coming to terms that their special trip away for their anniversary was coming to an end. With a heavy heart they started packing and preparing themselves to return to their normal routines.

They reflected on what had been important for them over the years. Communication and trust had been on top of their list, as the openness allowed for situations to be resolved.

Well, they were all packed, and as they were leaving the hotel, the staff surprised them, by presenting them a special photo, of them sitting by the lake, in the silver moonlight. Apparently, a member of staff had been on their break and took it. As they were boarding the plane, Geeta received a text from a friend stating they would be picking them up at the airport. This was a surprise as they had expected their kids.

When they had landed, and got their luggage, they walked out to the waiting area. Their friends were there with balloons and started shouting, 'here's the happy couple, 25yrs married, and celebrating their silver wedding anniversary'. They were then told that they were not going straight home but out for a special lunch. When they got to the restaurant, their kids were waiting at the door for them with balloons. What a lovely surprise said Geeta and Eric whilst they hugged each other. They all had a lovely lunch, reminiscing about the past and what they all had achieved, no matter what the ups and downs. They left the restaurant feeling really happy and blessed.

Finally, they arrived home, waiting to sit down with a cup of tea and catching up with what had happened whilst they were away.

However, when they opened the front door, there was a big cheer, poppers went off, silver tinsel and balloons were everywhere and banners wishing them 'A Happy 25th Wedding Anniversary'.

There were so many faces, some were from where they did voluntary work and some from groups they attended since joining U3A. And believe it or not, it was U3A's, 25th Silver Anniversary. Congratulations to everyone.!!!



HI HO SILVER LINING....

By Maddy

'Happy Anniversary, Darling' Bob surprised me on the morning of our special day. In fact I am not sure if it wasn't more of a shock than a surprise. Whilst we acknowledged the special dates in the calendar, we rarely celebrated them nowadays. I had only just woken up and wasn't sure if this was the remnants of a dream, or if his greeting had been for real,

'Lots of surprises for you today!' he grinned.

'Thanks love' I responded, feeling guilty that I had made absolutely no effort for the day. We had agreed long ago not to go overboard on birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas. As for Valentine's Day - well we long ago decided that was just a money-making enterprise, from which florists and card companies gained. We would not be buying into that one for sure. Every day was important, not just 14th February!

I was just dozing off again, when the doorbell rang.

'I'll get that' Bob shouted as he ran down the stairs to open the front door. Then he reappeared with tea and toast on a tray. Breakfast in bed! I was always up for a cuppa with my early morning read.

About a quarter of an hour later he reappeared with the most beautiful bouquet. I was really being spoilt. I ditched my book and vowed to find extra time later in the week to continue it. I was struggling to enjoy it, but was determined to finish it as it was a book club read and I wanted to join in the conversation with the other members of the group.

I smiled, thanked him and started wondering if I could quickly pop out whilst he was in the shower to purchase a card and perhaps a small gift for him. Or perhaps among my stock of cards, I had something suitable to scribble on. I had to show that I had been bothered, especially after all of his efforts. The flowers were beautiful and no doubt quite expensive.

I searched through my stock of cards and there was just one card, left blank for the sender's own message. The picture was of a lake, with a few blossom heavy trees on then the edge of the water and few brightly coloured boats in it.

Luckily it suited pretty much any occasion.

I had just finished writing in it, when he appeared from the bathroom.

'I think it would be nice if you wore that new blue dress today, you know, the one you bought when you went shopping with your sister.'

'Maybe' I responded. I thought it was an odd, if not unusual, request. I mean Bob never took any notice of what I wore. That was one of the joys of our marriage. I had bought several

new items of clothing in our years together. If he ever noticed that something was new, which was as rare as hen's teeth, I told him I'd had it for ages. He never queried my responses.

'I thought we could go out to lunch to celebrate' he explained.

'That'd be nice, make a change from deciding what to cook later' I replied. I decided to wear a nicer dress than the one that he suggested, and spent a lot of time that morning making myself look presentable.

So it was, we drove to a country pub a few miles out of town. I had often wanted to visit, but it was a little out of our usual price range. I am glad that I made the effort with my appearance. My usual jeans and jumper or tee shirt would have looked well out of place.

As we arrived, I noticed a bright yellow mini in the bay next to ours.

'Isn't that Cheryl's car?'

'I doubt it' Bob answered. If he obscured the number plate, I did not notice. As we walked through the glazed inner door, I noticed what looked like the unmistakable silhouette of Cheryl's husband standing at the bar.

I was about to say something, but Bob looked a bit perturbed.

'Hang on' I must just check my phone; I am sure it pinged. We stood in the lobby while he did just that.

'False alarm' he looked relieved. As we tried to enter for the second time, the bar area was clear.

So, we proceeded, not towards the smiling barman who looked ready to take our orders, but into a small dining room to the left.

I will never forget the sight that I saw. So many balloons, silver ribbons and pennants and a poster with the words 'Happy Silver Wedding Anniversary Bob and Jean'

Below those adorned words were Cheryl, her larger-than-life husband Kev and so many other friends and relatives. There must have been almost forty people awaiting my entrance.

I felt so special at that moment and it was all thanks to my lovely husband who had gone to so much trouble.

The lunch was delicious and how I enjoyed socialising with so many people, all of whom really mattered to me.

At last, I caught Cheryl's eye.

'Did you help him organise this?' I asked.

'No, well not really. I just put him in touch with the landlord of the pub and assume he used your address book in order to contact friends; I verified the addresses of family. Everything seems to have come together so well.'

'Oh Cheryl' I exclaimed 'What am I going to do?'

She looked at me with a puzzled expression on her face.

'I thought you would love it. He worked so hard to keep it a secret from you.'

'Exactly! So much thought, energy and love went into this. How can I tell him that our silver anniversary isn't until next year?'

'Oh heck!' was all that Cheryl could offer by way of response.



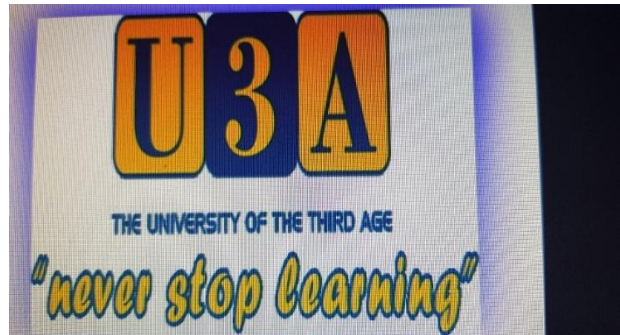
**CELEBRATING U3A
25TH GLORIOUS YEARS
JUNE 2026**

By Ranjini

Time has passed so quickly and gracefully since I joined the U3A in 2020. It was a period when the Covid pandemic was close to be succumbed with the new discovered vaccine. Many of us voluntarily went for this vaccination, in desperate hope, to get some immunity against this disease. Thus many lives were saved.

Despite this troubled months U3A has been progressing with vigour- introducing more activities and attracting members. I have for one found the U3A very inspirational meeting and mixing with talented retirees.

My 1st impression of the U3A was expressed on her 21st Anniversary with a poem. I considered myself fortunate to be able to contribute a simple poem then.



Now, 4 years on, celebrating this special year, I have a short story, instead, to commemorate the Silver Anniversary - THE 25 DAYS.

THE 25 DAYS

Taking my usual walk towards the woods, the turn of the lane brought me to a high stone wall, with a faded blue door. Somehow, I sensed that today, something was different. Then I realised. The doors was wide open. It had always been tightly shut, a source of wonder and imagination over the many years I had lived here.

I could not help myself; my feet drew me through closer to that courtyard door.

Various thoughts came flooding through my mind as I treaded on my toes towards that opening-not knowing what would be unfolding before my watery eyes. I was trying to stay positive and hoping that no awful, or eerie event had occurred in the house, during my 2 days absence. Recollecting, I was confident that the place was secured and functional security cameras were in place, before I left on that Friday evening. Alas! The sounds of bells. Without any hesitation my feet took control, and I ended up behind a nearest adjacent bushy plant.

By then, I chucked away my green back pack, crouched and curled myself into a tight ball. Hoping that my grey overcoat would camouflage me with the surroundings, I stood motionless in that position, for a while. My eyes were in the direction of the green door and were on a look out. It was a gloomy, cold, late afternoon, in December. The smell of the dampness of the air was abruptly filled with strong fragrance of flowers, Jasmynes, Lavender and Roses. Within seconds, pitter patter of feet were heard together with sounds of bells and chanting. These were getting more pronounced approaching towards me. My eyes caught sight of an elderly orange clad bald man slowly emerging. He was wearing a pair of yellow slippers and on his hands was a gong and a mallet. He moved so gracefully, sounding the circular metal disk, in tune with his every step.

More monks followed, in a single file, with the same rhythmic steps and they were chanting. In their hands were bells, trays of flowers, food, incense sticks with smoke arising from them. I counted, just like a toddler counting with his/her forefinger pointing to each figure as they marched out from the courtyard-25 of them! I could not comprehend the language and their faces displayed intense concentration and solemnity. Gosh! More appeared. This 2nd batch of 8 monks was carrying a body laid on the canvass bed. By then my fear simply vanished and I stood up. I was frightened out of my wits, when I saw myself lying there. 'Hey there! what's happening ', I exclaimed. No responds from the troupe and they continued their trek and their rituals. I pinched myself. 'I am fully awake and alive! Anyhow, why the Buddhist ritual? I am a Hindu- a fully pledged Hindu,' I shouted.

I watched myself, in distress, watching them!

A gentle voice, broke the silence within me and I looked up. 'Mrs Jothiraj, how long did you say that you were experiencing these lucid dreams?', Dr Smith enquired. 'For the past 25 days', I replied. Noticing his scribbling notes, I leaned over. 'What are you writing, Dr?' I enquired. A prescription,' came his reply. 'Am I ill to warrant medication?' I queried. He showed me his notes of 25 lines.



Silver Celebration Story

by Stephanie

'Welcome to our Fabulous Silver Celebration'. Mavis flung her arms wide as she announced this to the empty hall.

She frowned and tried again: 'Welcome to our Silver Celebration'. She turned and looked at Malcolm. 'What do you think?' she asked.

Malcolm was preoccupied with picking a minute speck of fluff off his jacket sleeve. He looked up. 'What about' he said.

'I'm working out how to announce our Silver Jubilee special next year.' Mavis said impatiently. 'Which version did you like best?'

Malcolm hesitated. 'Well ... maybe we should know what we're going to present before we worry about how to introduce it.' He looked around the hall. 'Are you thinking of holding it here?' he wondered, although he already knew now why he had been brought to this rather unimpressive community hall.

'It's not great, I know,' Mavis admitted. 'But a bit of scenery will make all the difference'. She glanced slyly at Malcolm. 'You're so good at organising that' she cajoled. 'And they've got the availability. I checked', Mavis was pleased that she had this crucial part of the planning jigsaw covered.

'I thought we could do a series of vignettes.' She paused so this exotic word could have the attention it deserved. 'Vignettes', she repeated. Twenty-five representing each year we have produced a play.'

Malcolm looked alarmed. 'Twenty-five!' he worried. 'That sounds a lot. How long will the show take? Will the actors be in costume? What about costume changes? And scenery. How will we'

Mavis clapped her hands. 'Enough' she said. 'We'll work out the details later'.

'We have a year to prepare. That's plenty of time. Today is just for the initial planning. 'I'll work out which scenes we can use later'.

'Silver Jubilee', Malcolm mused. 'Twenty-five years.' He was looking at his phone. 'What year do you think is our founding year?' he said slowly. 'The date Rex started the company ... because that was more like 35 years ago?'

'Of course not', Mavis said impatiently. 'It's the year I took over. Rex wasn't around anymore and I was the one who single-handedly saved the New Amateur Dramatic Society. I renamed it and gave it new life'. She paused dramatically. 'I was the founder of our current company. I am the one ...'

'Yes, well' Malcolm interrupted. 'Some of the others might not see it in the same way. More importantly, though, ...' he added quickly as Mavis opened her mouth to protest, 'what year do you think our company was founded?'

'It's ... Mavis paused and frowned. She opened her diary and started shuffling through the pages. 'I've got it written down at home' she said dismissively. 'I worked it out. It's 25 years ago anyway'.

'Yees', Malcolm said slowly. 'I've found it here'. He pointed to a document on his phone. 'It is this month 25 years ago and that makes our Silver Jubilee that makes our Jubilee right now. This week in fact and not next year'

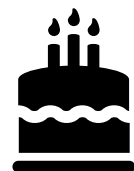
'That can't be right', Mavis wailed. She grabbed his phone and scrolled furiously through the information Malcolm had displayed. 'What about our grand celebration. We can't do it next year and call it our Silver Jubilee. It would be 26 years then'.

Malcolm looked at Mavis. He hated seeing her distressed. 'It can't be helped. Anyone could have made that mistake', he added magnanimously. 'Why don't we have our own celebration. We can go to the Coach and Horses. They've got a new menu starting today which I'm looking forward to trying. And I'm paying', he added dramatically.

Mavis looked forlorn. 'It's not the same', she sighed.

Malcolm tried again. 'We can post a big announcement on social media with photos from some of our productions. Bertie will put it all together. It's his job so he'll know how to do it quickly. Good publicity and cheaper than actually putting something on in the theatre'.

Mavis's face brightened. 'Yes, that will be better than nothing. And Bertie will make it look good. I just need to tell him to make sure I'm prominent in all the photos as I am the founder'. She picked up her coat. 'I'm looking forward to that meal now'. She smiled at Malcolm. 'Especially as you're paying'.



Love of Silver

By Vivien

Debbie enjoyed the Italian conversation class, almost as much as she enjoyed her silver collection, both started in her 60s. It was a beautiful language, and she longed to speak it, make herself understood when they went to Italy. How difficult could it be? She had learnt Latin, French and German in school, and remembered much of it. But maybe because she had begun to learn Italian so late, it was difficult. They spoke too quickly, and she certainly couldn't respond, the words just disappeared. The others were of varying abilities, but she was certainly one of the worst. Paul wasn't very good either. But they always spoke together when there was a break, and she got quite fond of him. One day Paul mentioned that his uncle had left him a collection of silver. He knew nothing about it, would probably sell it, but had no idea where to start or how he would know if he was getting a good price 'Maybe they'll make thousands' he laughed, his green eyes crinkling as he pushed his hair back from his face.

Actually, Debbie did know. There was a book called 'Jackson's Hallmarks', she told him, where you could find out what the silver marks meant, and it was easy then to look on Ebay and see prices. All you needed was a magnifying glass. It was absolutely fascinating, she told him. So now she had her pension, she had started off buying small silver things at antique fairs – a milk jug here, a bonbon dish there, a vinaigrette and a snuff box, even some jewellery, and it hadn't taken long before she knew the various good makers and her favourite antique styles and periods. She and David her husband would go together and he would buy her the occasional piece of silver or jewellery. Then she realized that what she really liked was guilloche, this was when coloured enamel was laid on top of the silver, and now she was collecting beautiful cigarette cases, compacts, thimbles and butterflies in all the colours of the rainbow. She kept them in a glass case in the dining room.

She often wondered whether this love of silver was inherited, for her great grandfather had been a very successful silversmith in Lindenstrasse in Berlin long before the war and her mother would often speak of his shop and the little silver objects he would make – tables and chairs and coaches and horses.

How apposite that she was now a collector of silver, and that her knowledge and love of silver had grown – something she had never even thought of while working.

There was something else she knew. Something about the way they had laughed together. Had something happened then? . She would tell Paul all about her silver, and maybe he could come round with a few things and she could show him her collection. She chose a day when David was out at one of his classes. She laughed at herself. How silly!

'Bring round some of your favourite stuff, and you can look in my book, see what all the hallmarks mean and work out if you want to keep it or sell it.

He came round on the dot at ten o'clock, with his bag of his uncle's silver.

‘What do you think?’ He pulled out some elegant candlesticks, a large silver sugar caster, some heavy wine goblets, an exquisite tiger, an elephant, a horse. He laid them on the dining room table. The sun made them glow and reflect the light. It was almost like being in the Silver Vaults in Chancery Lane, where the shining silver in the various windows made your eyes ache. ‘Oh I remember going to the Silver Vaults when I first started collecting, and someone tried to sell me a rectangular box with a tiny hole in it. We just held it up the light and you could see it. He pretended he knew nothing about silver, and was just minding the shop for a friend.’ She laughed at the memory. ‘You have to be careful. But of course, you’re not buying, only selling. Would you like a cup of coffee? Have a look at my stuff while you’re waiting.’ She had allowed herself to go on too long. A nervous, delicious expectant feeling.

She went into the kitchen, and was just reaching for the chocolate biscuits, when he came in behind her and she felt the very slightest kiss on her neck. Well, she thought it was a kiss, it gave her a tiny whisper of a shiver. She turned round.

‘They’re lovely, your silver things,’ Paul said. He took his cup and the biscuits and they sat down at the dining room table as the silver glimmered around them. A particularly beautiful silver horse looked up at her expectantly. He was ready for his race, but was she?

They drank their coffee and ate their biscuits.

‘So what comes next?’ Paul said.

Debbie examined the animals. She felt her hands trembling, but knew she had to do something with them.

‘These are beautiful’, she said. She picked up her magnifying glass and showed him the hallmarks. See, these are by William Comyns, the lion rampant, the shield for Birmingham, the William Comyns hallmarks. I would keep them, maybe and sell the candlesticks and big goblets. They’re a bit old-fashioned. Maybe try the next fair at Ally Pally. I’ll come with you if you like.’ The words were out of her mouth before she knew it.

His head was next to hers. She looked straight ahead as she said them. She put the little horse down.

‘That sounds like a great idea,’ said Paul. As if by accident, his hand brushed hers as he picked up his coffee cup.

