

ISSUE 04

JANUARY 2023

EXPLORER

Events - Lifestyle - Community



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— Intro

New beginnings and adapting to change

The start of a year is a time we find ourselves looking to the future, what will this new year bring into my life? As we look to the future, we are faced with the reality that the world is constantly changing. Adapting to these changes and embracing new beginnings can be a challenge. This issue of the Mirthy Explorer seeks to explore the various ways that we can learn to cope with change and find the strength to start anew. Through a variety of perspectives and experiences, we hope to provide readers with insights to help them embrace the future with confidence and optimism.

Mahalia Connor

Editor of the Mirthy Explorer

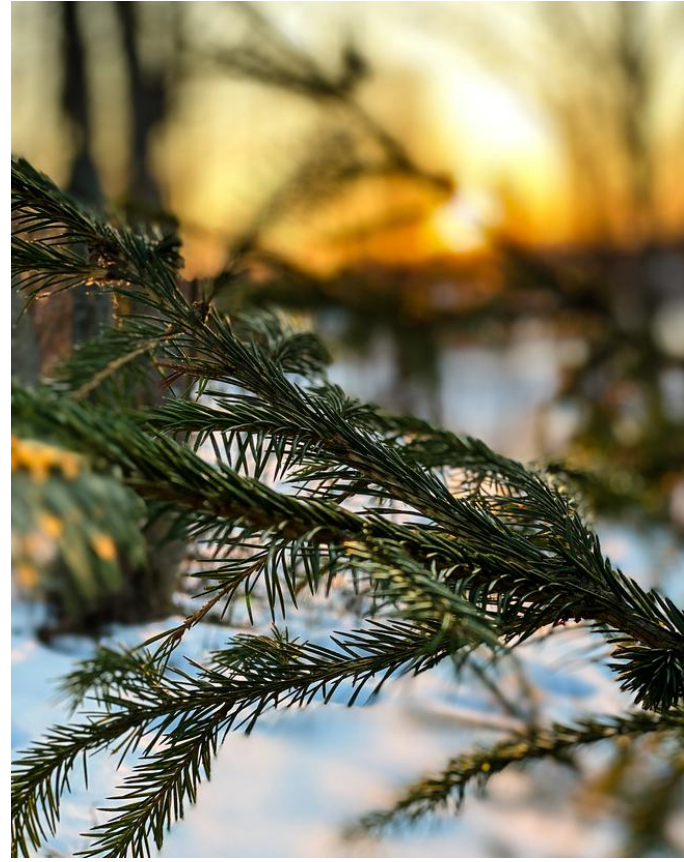


*The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new steps of change.*

MAYA ANGELOU

Table of Contents

In this issue, we will highlight a selection of upcoming events, showcase community submissions and spotlight the ways in which our online community is coming together to support each other through the wintery months. Whether you are new to the world of online events or a seasoned virtual attendee, this magazine has something for everyone. Join us as we embrace the power of technology to connect, learn, and grow together.



Featured Events

Dare to Be	04
Try something new	08

Lifestyle

Health and Wellbeing	13
Veganuary	16
Technology	18

Community Corner

The Poets	21
The Storytellers	24
Book Club	28
Alphabet Quiz	30





Dare to Be

If you were asked 'What would you like to be when you're older?', what would be your response?

Each speaker in this series proves that this is a question to ask yourself throughout life. And that it's never too late to choose a different answer!

Have you dreamed of taking up dance? Or becoming an athlete? Or writer? Or travelling? Or starting your own business? Or becoming a model? In this series of talks, hear from those who have followed their dreams to make them into reality, and find out more about the journey of daring to do so!



Suzanne Noble

Suzanne Noble, 61, has a portfolio career encompassing running Startup School for Seniors, performing jazz & blues in London's pubs and clubs and hosting a podcast and TikTok channel, Sex Advice for Seniors! While raising a family, she started and grew a PR agency with her husband from their home, eventually turning over £1.4m and with clients such as Warner Bros, Universal, SonyBMG and others. She has been featured in the Telegraph, the Times, and Saga magazine, amongst others.

Jacqui Furneaux

Jacqui Furneaux had no plans to see the world on a motorbike. When, at the age of forty-eight she took off for Asia because she concluded that life experiences were more valuable than money. Once there, she leapt into her new, aimless live with gusto!

Previously a woman who conformed to conventional life as a wife, mother and nurse, the world 'out there' eventually irresistibly beckoned her and she had to go and see what her seafaring father meant when he'd said, "Travel my dear."



Ella Orr

What happens when life's events leave you feeling disillusioned and in despair? Ella explains how a life change led to her leaving a long established career in teaching and retraining in social media marketing, which she had no previous knowledge of. She explains how she's discovered new attributes in her character which she never realised she had.



— Meet the speakers



*Plan? What Plan?
How to have fun
whilst going with the
flow*

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— Dare to Be

Meet Neil Pitts

From Long Covid to
Skiing the Length of
Norway

In 2022, with two friends, Neil attempted to ski the length of Norway. The journey took more than 3 months. This long distance route is known as the Norge på langs. The journey is a approximately 2,700km long and only one or two people complete it during winter each year.

Neil will speak not just about the trip though, but also about the obstacles he had to overcome to even get to the start line. Plagued the effects of Long Covid and injuries prior to the trip, he had also never been on Nordic skis!

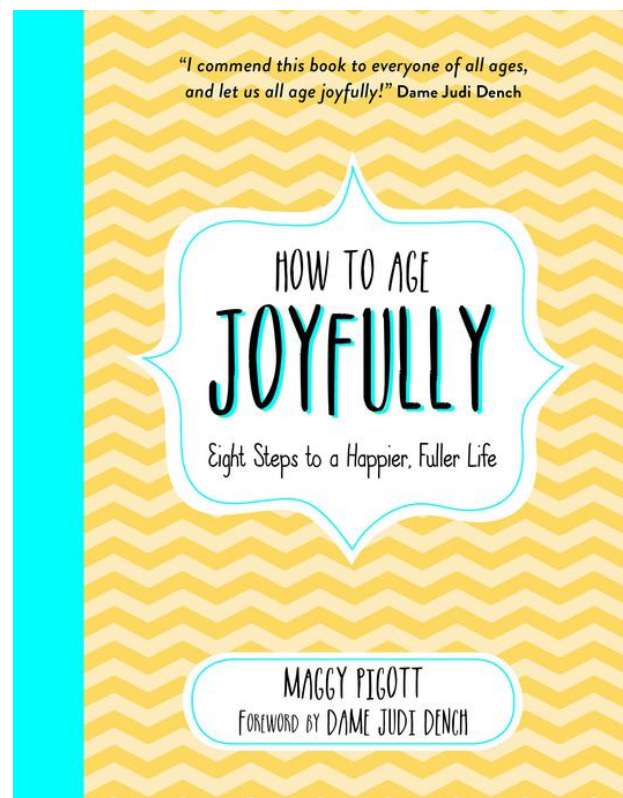


Meet Maggy Pigott



Maggy Pigott will be celebrating reaching 71 in June. Having qualified as a barrister, she enjoyed a 37-year career in the Civil Service, retiring in 2011 with a CBE.

Over the last decade she has developed passions for dancing, writing and helping others age better, including through her role as Vice Chair of the London charity, Open Age. This inspired her first book, 'How to age Joyfully' (with a Foreword by Dame Judi Dench) published at age 68.



"Ageing is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength"

Try something new

From Ukulele to Pilates, to Learning French, Writing and Publishing a Book, and Starting a Podcast - I wonder what would happen if you combined all those new skills?!



These three exciting events are designed to help you try something new and kick off the new year with a bang. Learn a new language, turn your writing dreams into a reality or become a viral podcast sensation! These events offer a variety of resources and expert guidance to help you take on a new challenge and achieve your goals.

Learn French!

This event is a language taster for everyone: no matter whether you're a complete beginner, you learned French in the past but have forgotten most of it, or you feel more confident and want to recap what you know.

Begin, Write & Publish Your Book

A fun, interactive, one-hour online workshop to help YOU begin, write and publish the book you've always dreamed of. By the end of the workshop you will feel empowered, motivated, excited and educated! Plus you will become clear on what steps to take next, particularly if you are wishing to explore the self-publishing arena.

How To Start a Podcast

Interested in starting a podcast, but not sure where to begin? This one-hour interactive workshop will walk you through the idea stage to recording and finally publication. By the end, you'll have a better understanding of how to refine your idea into a workable format, the basic equipment you'll need for production, and common pitfalls to avoid.



Beginners Course

Get playing the Ukulele

Have you ever wanted to learn a musical instrument? Have you got a dusty ukulele lying around in your home? If the answer is YES then come and join our beginner ukulele 6 week series. This will all be done through play and will include a number of songs from different decades and genres. Each week we will look at melody and chords and will build on what we have learnt the week before.



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ONLINE UKULELE PROJECT
combating loneliness together



Beginners Course

Pilates

Start the New Year with a positive plan to look after yourself and join Helen Tudge for this 4 week introduction to Pilates.

You will cover the main principles of Pilates slowly then gradually progress postural, strength , flexibility and balance exercises over the 4 weeks so you have an effective home regime.

Each session will be 45mins of Pilates class followed by 15mins Q & A in case any recaps are required.

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"You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream"

— C.S. LEWIS



Lifestyle

This section focuses on health and wellbeing, offering tips and advice on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle during times of transition and uncertainty. It also covers the trend of Veganuary, which involves adopting a vegan diet for the month of January. Additionally, the section includes features on technology and how it can be used to become a silver entrepreneur, or start a new business venture.

TIPS FROM THE COMMUNITY

➔ Plan things to look forward to

Lesley says, "We usually try to have something to look forward to in January. We're off to the theatre this coming January & I've got two catch-ups with different groups of friends (though that's mainly because we couldn't fit it in before Christmas!)"

➔ Have a gathering

Wendy says, "Have a Christmas dinner, or other gathering, in January because you can't fit them all in, in December anyway."

➔ Fill it with laughter

Laughter Yoga leader Sylvia says, "Laughter, of course"! Join Sylvia at Laughter Yoga on alternating Monday's at 10am.

➔ Do something different

Ryan says, "I am going to kick off the year by making January a bit of fun by going on walks and stopping off for a hot chocolate. When I get back to choir we will be learning a new song I have never heard, I feel like it's good to learn a song that you don't know."



How to beat the January blues

Get Moving: Exercise can help us beat the blues by boosting endorphins, helping us to feel better. Go for a run, do a yoga class, or just take a brisk walk around your block.

Get Outside: Fresh air and sunshine can help lift your mood and make you feel more energized. Visit a nearby park, take a walk around your neighbourhood, or just sit on your porch and take deep breaths of fresh air. As Jane says, "the Wildlife is very uplifting".

Reach Out: Talk to a friend, family member, or even your doctor and let them know how you're feeling. Knowing that someone is there to support you can help lift your spirits.

Eat Healthily: Eating a nourishing diet can give you the energy and nutrients to help combat the blues. Choose foods that are high in omega-3 fatty acids, B vitamins, and antioxidants.

Take Time for Yourself: Even if it's just for 10 minutes a day, make sure to take time for yourself. Read a book, listen to music, or do something creative.

Try Something New: Trying something different can help break up the monotony of winter and give you something to look forward to. Take an art class, try a new recipe, or learn a new language.



Finding the natural you in nature this year

Sarah Parker

Art Therapist

I always enjoy the beginning of a new year. It's a turning point where you can look back on the successes and difficulties of the past year and move forward with that knowledge into the new one before you.

Whilst many think of resolutions at this time, my mind always turns to 'The Paradoxical Theory of Change' by Arnold Beisser. He asserted that change does not come about by trying to be what we are not, but by being who we really are. Imagine that. Imagine being ok with who you are. Embracing your inspirations and joys and not apologising for them. Being open to your difficulties and the areas you need support and not feeling lesser for it. It's radical, isn't it?

Though, for me this journey of radical self-acceptance is easier when you have a context to explore and understand it in. I find that context when I look towards nature. Nature has so much to teach us about moving towards our strengths and seeing how these enrich us. It

shows us how working with the natural system around us supports us to grow. And it examples how we find ways to grow even after a big storm.

Moving to the North York Moors National Park has immersed me in nature in a wonderful way. I learn so much from witnessing the stories of the animals around me. Feeling the arrival of spring with the call of the curlew, and summer begins to unfold with the fiddlehead of the bracken.

Using relaxation techniques and nature visualisations allows me to connect more deeply with nature and with its vast knowledge. And expressing this with some simple art making helps me understand this further.

Here I find a place to relax and be just me. Unfolding into myself and my environment.



How to Keep Your New Year's Resolutions

The start of a new year is always filled with optimism and the hope of a better tomorrow. New Year's resolutions can be a great way to take control of your life and make positive changes. However, while setting New Year's resolutions is easy, keeping them can be a lot harder. Here are some tips to help you stay on track and keep your New Year's resolutions.

1. Set Realistic Goals: It's important to set realistic goals that you can actually achieve. If you set goals that are too ambitious, you'll be more likely to give up when it gets too hard.

2. Start Small: Don't try to take on too much at once. If your resolution is to start exercising more, don't commit to a daily hour-long workout. Start small, like going for a fifteen-minute walk a few times a week. This will help you get into the habit without overwhelming yourself.

3. Make a Plan: Once you've set a goal, make a plan for how you're going to reach it. Break it down into steps, and set deadlines for each one. This will help you stay on track and motivated.

4. Find a Support System: Having a support system can make a huge difference in whether or not you stick to your resolution. Whether it's a friend, family member, or even an online community, having someone to talk to and keep you accountable can make it easier to stay on track.

5. Monitor Your Progress: Monitoring your progress is one of the most important steps in sticking to your resolution. Set up a tracking system that allows you to see how you're doing and reminds you of what you've accomplished. This will help keep you motivated and on track.

6. Celebrate Small Wins: Celebrating small wins is a great way to stay motivated and remind yourself of how far you've come. Whether it's saving a certain amount of money, losing a certain amount of weight, or just taking a step in the right direction, recognize your successes and reward yourself.

7. Don't Beat Yourself Up: Don't be too hard on yourself if you fall off track. Life happens and it's ok to have setbacks. Just pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and keep going.

8. Don't Give Up: It's easy to get discouraged and give up when things get tough. But don't give up! Remember why you set this goal in the first place and keep going.



Keeping your New Year's resolutions is not easy, but it's not impossible either. With the right attitude and a plan of action, you can stay on track and reach your goals. So make a plan, keep track, and don't give up!

VEGANUARY

Another year and another Veganuary is here. Veganuary is a campaign to encourage people to go vegan for 31 days in January. Perhaps it's something that you're trying this year, as a challenge or maybe for health reasons? By trying a different style of eating for a month you may be inspired to continue for another 6 months, a year, or even a lifetime. It has never been so easy to go vegan – there is a vast range of ingredients and replacements available, so do Veganuary your way.

Top tips from Justina from V for Life:

- ➔ It can be helpful to start by replacing basic staples in your diet with vegan alternatives, such as spreads, milk, and meat alternatives.
- ➔ Don't let the challenges of a new diet discourage you – it takes time to adjust and gain knowledge, and it's okay to make mistakes.
- ➔ Start with pantry staples, you may find you have lots of vegan products already such as lentils, beans and chickpeas. Also, you may find you have some 'accidentally vegan' items in the cupboard.
- ➔ Try fortified nutritional yeast flakes to add a nutty, cheesy flavour to dishes: great for sprinkling on pasta or using to make a cheese sauce. They also have the added benefit of providing vitamin B12, an essential vitamin for vegans. This needs to be supplemented, or ensure that you include dietary sources daily.
- ➔ Experiment with tofu and new ingredients like jackfruit or banana blossom and make sure you have a good selection of herbs and spices to add flavour to your meals. If you'd like to know more about plant-based protein and calcium sources, have a look at V for Life's Vegan Rescue Pack or Nutrition Guide.
- ➔ Check labels on packaged goods to make sure they are vegan and take care in 'free-from' sections. You may find gluten-free or even dairy-free cakes but they may still contain egg.
- ➔ Don't be afraid to ask for help or advice from friends, family, or vegan support groups, there are plenty of Facebook groups for Veganuary. You can also find local vegan Facebook groups in your area. There's even a specific Facebook page for mature vegans and veggies in the UK.



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Benefits of Veganuary

1. Improved health: Plant-based diets are naturally low in saturated fat and cholesterol, and high in fibre, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, all of which are beneficial for overall health. Plant-based diets are also associated with a reduced risk of chronic diseases.
2. Sustainable: Vegan diets can also help reduce the environmental impact of food production, as animal products require much more energy and resources to produce than plants.
3. Animal welfare: Plant-based diets are more ethical and humane than other diets as they do not involve the suffering and exploitation of animals.

V for Life is a UK charity aimed at improving the quality of life of older vegetarians and vegans. Don't forget to take a look at the recipes and various publications on their website.

Happy Veganuary!

www.vforlife.org.uk

TECH RELIEF



Jude Kriwald

Age: 30

Favourite Technology Tip: If you accidentally close a tab whilst on the internet on your computer, simultaneously press Ctrl + Shift + Tab and it will reopen it!

Top passion right now: Learning to paraglide!

Go to person for help: Believe it or not, my co-founder, Nicola!

Nicola Twiston Davies

Age: 33

Favourite Technology Tip: Keyboard shortcuts on your phone, I really don't like typing any more than I have to!

Top passion right now: Colouring in - I find the screen break and 'me time' so valuable.

Go to person for help: Still my mum, even if she doesn't know the answer, having someone to speak these things through is something I never want to take for granted!

Technology

Founded by two Londoners, Tech Relief offers friendly, patient and jargon-free support for anyone stuck on their computer, smartphone or laptop. This month, they've sat down with Jan, one of their happy customers, to learn more about her experience of their new helpline.

Jan you got in touch about launching your new business idea, what has using Tech Relief meant for you?

It means that if there's anything I don't understand, I know I've got someone that I can go to. In the past, I would rely on my sons, and I think that can get tiresome. With family and friends, it's fine the first time but after the hundredth time, it's not great! With Tech Relief, I'm paying so I don't feel bad. I think it's a really good service. There must be hundreds of people like me who just didn't grow up with technology.

What's so unique about Tech Relief?

Well, you help with literally any question regarding computers or smartphones. I mean, you take it down to a very basic level of "press this button here". You also email me a summary of the steps after each call. The £15 each month gives me access to that kind of help multiple times. I think that's brilliant!

Who else could benefit from this?

I actually already told my parents. The phone number is really good, especially with the free call to start. Everyone likes a freebie!



Silver Entrepreneurship: Starting a Business in 'Retirement'

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Retirement may not be appealing to everyone, and for some, the thought of giving up work is unimaginable. If this sounds like you, entrepreneurship may be a viable option.

Silver entrepreneurship refers to older adults who utilize their experience and skills to start a business later in life. There are various types of business owners in this category, including part-time, freelancers, and founders. Motivations for starting a business in later life can include the desire for additional income, the excitement of running a business, and the opportunity to contribute to one's pension. According to research, the over-50s are starting businesses at a faster rate than any other age group and are now employing 10 million people.

There are several benefits to entrepreneurship in later life, including the excitement of starting a new venture, the challenge of overcoming initial obstacles and marketing one's product or service, the autonomy of being one's own boss, the sense of purpose and direction that comes with having a business, and the financial reward of creating one's own income stream. There are also various types of entrepreneurs, including freelancers, founders, and part-time business owners.

Starting a business in later life can be challenging, but there are also several resources available to help.

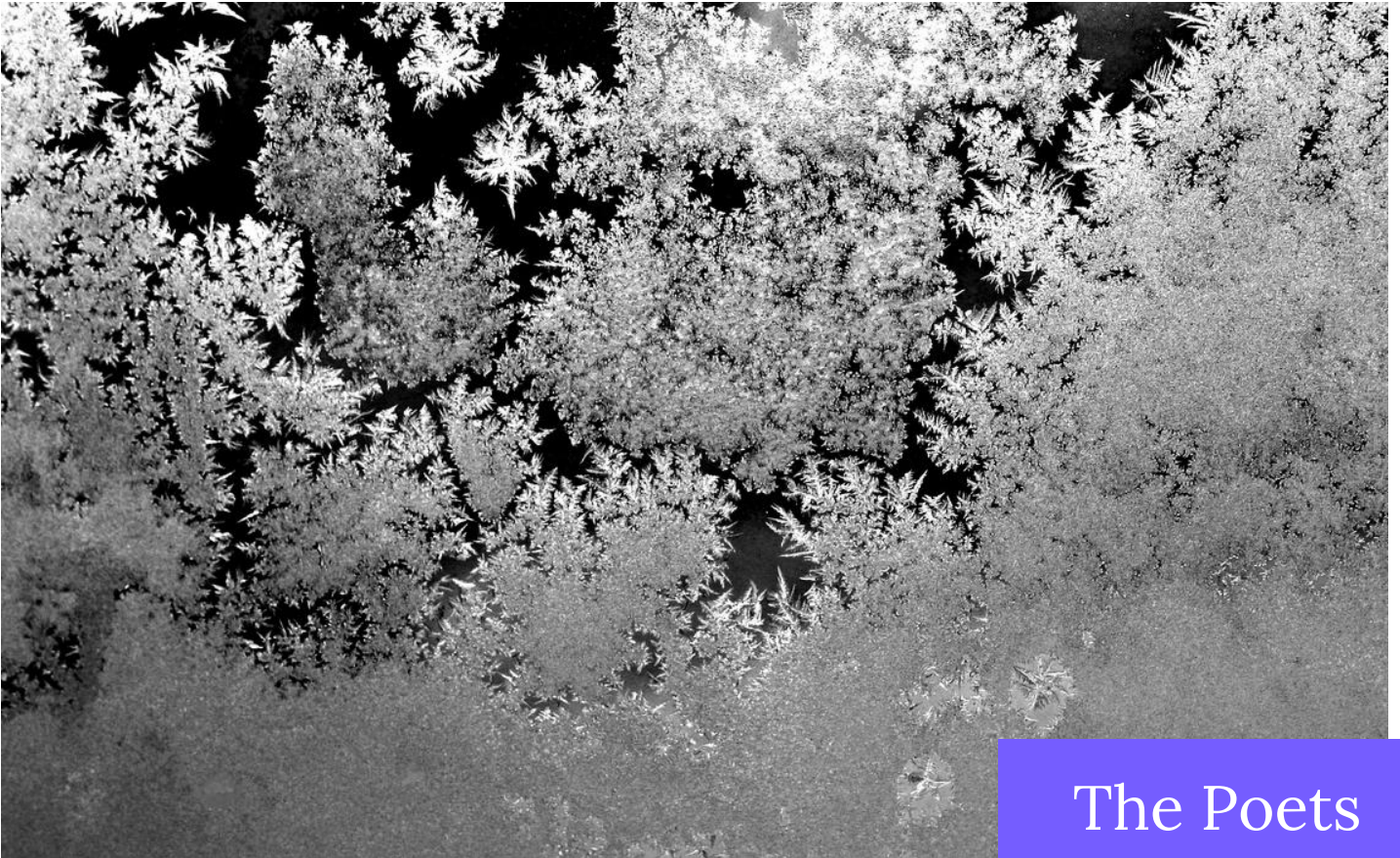
These include mentorship programs, business development centers, and online courses and tutorials. It's important to do thorough research and planning before starting a business, including understanding one's target market and having a solid business plan in place. Additionally, seeking the help of an attorney and financial advisor can be beneficial.

Entrepreneurship can be a rewarding and fulfilling option for those in later life who want to continue working and pursuing their passions. While it can be challenging, the benefits and sense of accomplishment can make it well worth the effort.



COMMUNITY CORNER





The Poets

JANUARY JACK

by Pamela K. Carter

From the darkness of December flew in January Jack
And with icy feather duster
Patterned every window cluster in his track.

Gliding swiftly through the keyhole, fingers poised to cast a spell,
Watch his magic ferns are spreading
Like the threading of a lacy wedding veil.

Chill crisp mornings, hot breath rising, wrapped against the cold,
Brittle leaves all glisten brightly
Bathe the gloom of winter while it still has hold.

A welcome sight as spirits rise, greeting January Jack,
The white wash grass and dancing trees
Sparkle, twinkle, shield the shades of Yuletide black.

PRE-DECIMAL IMPERIAL MISERY

by Stewart Clay

Before the Seventies a Pound didn't have one hundred Pence
Oh no! Two hundred and forty our Pound had
It had two Ten Bobs, eight Half-Crowns, ten Florins
and twenty Shillings to drive us all mad
Just to confuse us we also had a pound weight, or lbs for short
to distinguish it from a £ currency
Lb is Libra Pondo in Latin, says my Latino mate Miguel
but where the P went is a mystery
Liquid measure was worse with Gills, Pints and Gallons
Two Pins were a Firkin and four Pecks a Bushel I hear
Eight Bushels made a Quarter but a quarter of what
I have no Firkin idea





LAMENT OF A TEENIER SENIOR

by Laurence Copeland

They say we all, in our old age
Regress with years to our first stage
Of whining helpless sad dependence
And total wittering wandering irrelevance.

I'm sure that long before the end
I won't escape that doleful trend
But so far I can only say
I'm stuck three-quarters down the way.

No second childhood threatens me -
My problem's juvenile delinquency.
For me the years don't make me sager
Instead I'm a grey-haired teenager.

Objectively, yes, I'm obsolescent
But in my head I'm adolescent,
With daft ideas replete with danger,
To teenage urges I'm no stranger.

I know there is no road that's faster
Leading downhill to disaster.
The syndrome's familiar and well-known
To make millennial offspring groan.

It must be a kind of pre-dementia
This lust for ever more adventure,
Though I'm sure there must be a madder
senior
Somewhere out there, who's even teenier

However, note, I am not complaining.
My confession's aimed at entertaining.
But things could get a whole lot worse
If I succumb to a teenage curse,

One that fills my heart with dread
Would make me wish that I were dead.
I mean with courage I could not embrace
My fate, if acne covered all my face.

Hand Me Downs

by Debbie Millard

I am going to take a slightly different spin on the phrase 'New beginnings', but I fancy many of you reading this will associate yourselves with my spin in one way or another.

Let me introduce you to my family members in this story. Firstly, there is my eldest female cousin who is four years younger than me. She lived near to us, and we saw quite a bit of each other. She lived on a farm and spent much of her time outside and so I would imagine she was quite hard on her clothes. Then let me introduce you to my sister who is 6 years my junior. I am going to tell you the brief tale of the 'New beginnings' some of my clothes received. If I was to ask my sister to give me a title about hand me downs it probably would not be publishable!

We all grew up in the 1950's and 1960's and in those days our parents did not have Facebook etc, so when it came to our outgrown clothing what did they do? Well in my case they handed it down to my cousin who duly wore the items and if necessary, the hems would have been let down and buttons let out and when she had outgrown them, the items would be dutifully washed and repaired if necessary and returned to our home but to hang in my sister's wardrobe.

Recently I was in conversation with my sister, and I made the mistake of mentioning hand me downs! Well oh boy, did that light the fuse paper as my sister enlightened me as to the horrors of wearing hand me downs.



They had probably been mis-washed resulting in shrinkage and maybe colour fading and if not shrunk they might actually have stretched, they were not anything like the fashions of the year she was wearing them, she often hated the colour and worst of all often they were dresses! Being a tomboy my sister just wanted to wear her "trowsers" – and no that is not a spelling error, I was trying to phonetically spell the word in a true Essex accent. At least my sister should be grateful she never had to endure a hand me down knitted swimsuit which I have heard used to be paraded into the sea or pool fitting beautifully but then the horror that ensued as the wearer tried to leave the water and the item stretched in the most inconvenient places imaginable! Think what shape one of these would have been after several ownerships!

I personally would love to hear your memories of items of clothing that had New Beginnings - maybe you could add them to the Mirthy Facebook group!

WINDS OF CHANGE



by Lesley Robinson

An orphan at ten, Claire had been sent to live with her eccentric Great Aunt Grace on the Scottish borders in Dumfries. For a young child, the atmosphere at the austere Woodlea House had certainly not been welcoming. Now, twenty years later, Claire felt a shiver down her spine as her Great Aunt's formidable presence was still keenly felt.

The last of the few mourners took their leave. Some with a whisper to each other or with a brief glance towards Claire. Standing in the middle of the extremely outdated room she looked around her with a heavy heart. Over the years she had lost touch with Grace and the guilt she now felt was palpable.

Claire drifted slowly round the room, each piece of imposing furniture a reminder of the long, lonely eight or so years she had spent here before heading off to Durham University where she had remained since. Claire's attention was drawn to a small photograph on the wall. It was of her dressed smartly in the uniform of the local village school. She recalled one small, curly haired boy. Ross, that was his name, she thought, Ross McFarlane. Strange how these things suddenly come back to you! The few friends Claire had either loved or hated coming here. Grace, at times, had been quite fearsome. However, Ross enjoyed coming here after school for tea. All Grace's cherished artefacts had been of great fascination to him.

Claire began to realise the enormity of what was now all hers! She had made up her mind that she would sell the house and most of the contents at auction and use the proceeds to move up the property ladder, buy herself a cat and new car!

The large grandfather clock in the hall made her jump as it chimed four o'clock and Claire was reminded that an auctioneer from the local auction house was due to give her some advice on how the auction process would work. As if on cue, the huge bell at the front door was rung. Claire's footsteps

MIRTHY EXPLORER

reverberated as she walked the length of the tiled hall floor. She felt her heart thumping in her chest as she reached for the brass door handle. Face to face with her caller, Claire was speechless. He handed her his business card, 'Hello Miss Murray', he said smiling at her, 'Or can I call you Claire?' Claire looked at the name on the card and back up to the man standing in front of her. She couldn't believe it, here in front of her stood Ross McFarlane! Claire composed herself and finally spoke! 'This is very surreal; I was just thinking about you from when we were kids'. Ross gave a small laugh, stepped inside and glanced around him. 'The place hasn't changed a bit and nor have you!' he said with a wink. 'My condolences, by the way, on the passing of Grace, I have very fond memories of her.' How could this be happening, thought Claire. 'You know, you could turn this house into a quite a business!' Ross suggested. Claire looked at him and frowned. 'I don't need complications Ross'.

Ross continued, 'God, the Americans would love it'. Claire was now lost, she glared at him. 'The Americans! What are you talking about, I just want to sell it!'. Ross raised his eyebrows. 'But there are other options!'. Much to Claire's annoyance, he sat himself down at the round table. 'You could offer tours of the house; it has a great back story and then afternoon tea right here in this room'. Claire looked at Ross as though he'd gone mad – what was he thinking?! 'Visitors are always looking for novel experiences', he continued, 'You could even turn a couple of the bedrooms into Airbnb lets' Claire was finding it hard to process what she had just heard, but Ross had sparked her interest. She stared long and hard at Ross McFarlane, who after twenty years was, perhaps, influencing a next chapter in her life! Maybe the idea of preserving her great aunt's life held within this house rather than sweeping it all away at auction was something worth considering. Grace had been a loner but, perhaps in death, she and this imposing home could be brought to life and show that there was so much more to this remarkable lady and to make a positive impression on interested visitors.

A Beginning from an End.

*For anyone who has ever lost
someone dear.*



By Gillian Attack

Carla gazed through her bedroom window at the blanket of white which enveloped the garden and stretched to the oak tree in the far corner. Dazzling sunlight flickered between its bare branches adorned with snow, lighting up the remnants of last year's nasturtiums. In the summer, vivid orange flowers flourished, accompanied by an abundance of rich green leaves, life flowing through their veins. But the flowers had died, leaving behind a mass of decaying foliage, starved of chlorophyll and coated with a dusting of iciness.

Jacob had planted the nasturtiums several years ago after their neighbour gave him some seeds. That was before his teenage years made him strange and morose. She hoped her teenage years would not change her like they had Jacob.

A sudden gust of wind whipped the laying snow into a frenzy, lifting it into the air before sending it swirling towards the heavens.

Heaven.

She spat out the word in a bitter whisper. As if such a place existed.

On the radio, the presenter chatted about still having two boxes of chocolate left from Christmas despite it being the end of January. Christmas, Carla thought, used to be about Noddy Holder yelling Merry Christmas while she opened presents with Jacob underneath the Christmas tree, the smell of pine needles mingling with roast turkey, making her glow with happiness. But this year, a dullness extinguished any seasonal excitement. She had opened her presents without Jacob, her parents looking on trying to muster up some enthusiasm, but their smiles failing to reach their red-rimmed eyes.

Outside, a dove had landed near the nasturtium leaves. It paused and cocked its head to one side as if examining them. Then it ran its short, dark beak along a leaf and ripped it from its stem, dropping it into an old hanging basket Mum had left under the tree. After repeating the process several times, it fluttered its wings, turned a half-circle, and danced across the garden, punching tiny holes through the pristine snow until it stood under her window, staring upwards. Angry tears spilled from her eyes and splashed onto



the window ledge. How dare it disturb Jacob's nasturtiums? Jacob always insisted that seeing the leaves in winter reminded him of summer warmth and would not let his parents touch them until after Easter. With her palms open, she banged on the window. The dove glared at her, and flapping its wings indignantly, took flight.

She dashed downstairs, and out through the door into the garden. The bitter wind nipped at her face and stung her eyes, but she did not care. She slid across the garden to the tree, her heart sinking as she inspected the damage. Only yellowing stems, rigid from the unyielding cold, remained.

She picked one up, rubbing it between her fingers as if trying to restore life to it. 'No.' She cried the word over and over, her breath visible in the icy air. Then, glimpsing the dove perched in the tree, she held the stem close. Determined not to let the horrible bird destroy it, she thrust it behind her back and leaned against the tree. Her foot knocked against the hanging basket. A faint noise from inside made her inspect the contents. A gasp escaped from her mouth. She saw a nest made from Jacob's nasturtium

leaves. Three chicks covered in yellowish down inhabited it. Their eyes, not yet open, surrounded by large dark circles, gave them the appearance of tiny aliens. Overhead, the dove circled and cooed. Carla backed away, a seed of satisfaction taking root in the forest of grief which had grown inside her since they had lost her brother. It swooped down, its head disappearing into the hanging basket to tend to the new life within.

Carla felt something other than despair. If Jacob had not planted the seeds, and insisted nobody touched the decaying leaves, the dove would not have built the nest where three chicks, new to the world, now snuggled together. A beginning from an end. The dove resurfaced and flew in a low loop around the garden, cooing intermittently as if demanding her attention.

She noticed the pattern its earlier footprints had made, a smile touching her lips as she saw something resembling the letter J.

Perhaps, she thought, there is a heaven.

MIRTHY EXPLORER

BOOK CLUB EVENTS

16th January

Children's Literature Group

18th January

Book Club Chats

20th January

Sara Nisha Adams and 'The Reading List'



Welcome to the Mirthy Book Club! This is a friendly, welcoming group of bookworms spread across the globe who meet online every month to connect over a shared love of reading. Everyone is welcome and we love getting to meet new members. Together, we also attend Mirthy Book Club events with fantastic writers and scholars.

So if you are a bookworm and want to meet others who enjoy reading, this is the Mirthy group for you!

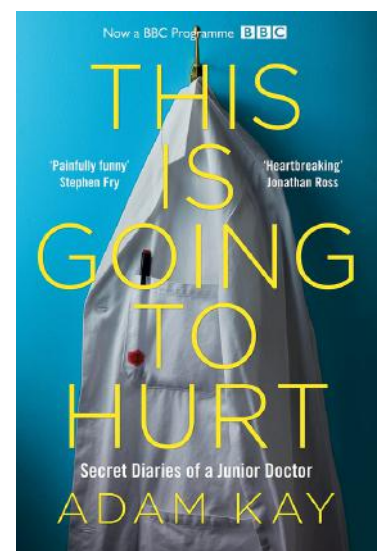
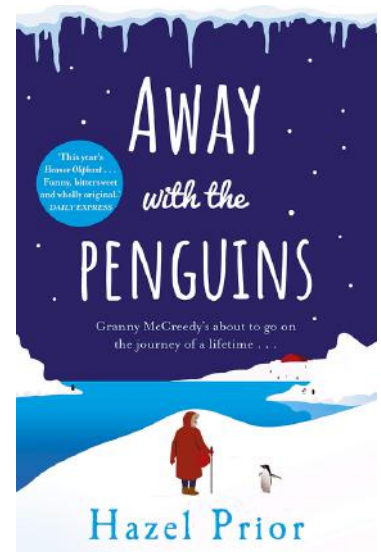
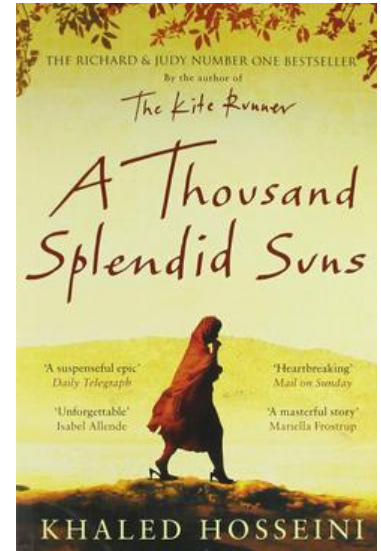
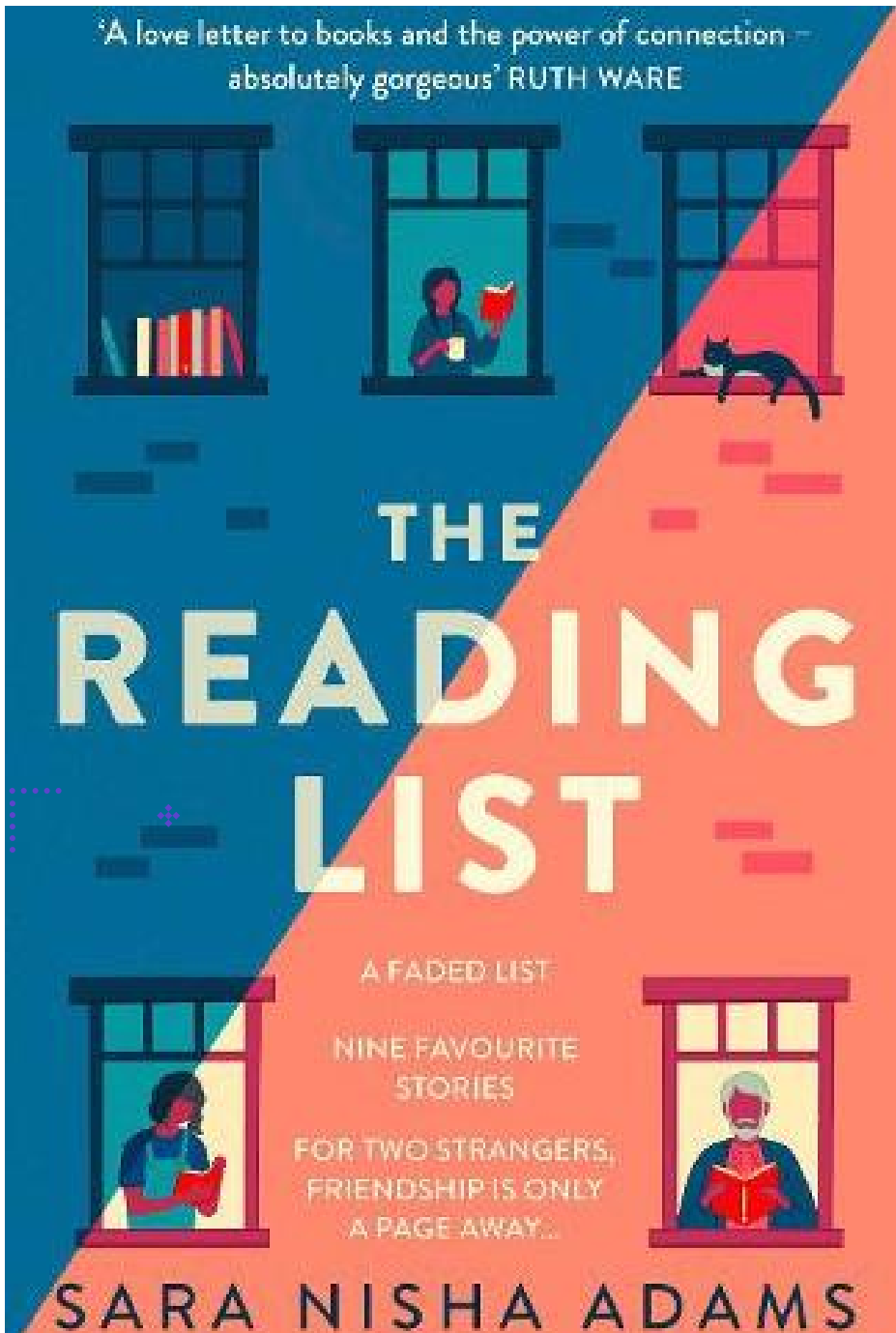
BOOK CLUB RECOMMENDS

Shortlist

The Catch by T.M. Logan • **The Satsuma Complex** By Bob Mortimer • **The Joys of Motherhood** by Buchi Emecheta • **The Snow Goose** by Paul Gallico • **The Goldfinch** by Donna Hart • **The Cazalet Chronicles** by Elizabeth Jane Howard • **The Salt Path** by Raynor Winn • **The Miniaturist** by Jessie Burton • **Hamnet** by Maggie O'Farrell • **The Island** by Victoria Hislop • **The Crystal Cave** by Mary Stewart • **The Colour Purple** by Alice Walker • **The Shepherd's Life** by James Rebanks • **The Midnight Library** by Matt Haig • **The Five** by Hallie Rubenhold • **The Authenticity Project** by Clare Pooley

Finalists

Winner



Alphabet Quiz

- A** An ingredient in Elizabethan make up and Victorian green wallpaper
- B** Invented at the request of their Landlord to protect part of the body of the game keepers
- C** This vegetable was overproduced in the Second World War and was even, unsuccessfully made into ice creams
- D** A famous Disney elephant with very unusual ears
- E** African and Indian
- F** This links to the letter P alphabetically also a famous mode of transport that leaves you approximately 9 feet above the ground and is named after money
- G** The tradition of “bumping” glasses started in this country - some of each wine spill into each other’s glass proving you not trying to poison each other
- H** This is included in rope making and more unusually is also in tea bags
- I** This shiny, waterproof, abrasive product was routinely found in workplaces, hospitals, school toilets and public conveniences, probably intending to discourage innocents from taking a break from work or lessons.
- J** In this country you can have a spa in wine
- K** In ancient Rome women were prohibited from drinking wine – their husband could do what if they caught their wives drinking?
- L** What is a phobia of rabbits called
- M** Two copies of what are in cathedrals and two in a London Museum - two word answer – second word starts with C

- N** When is Beaujolais Noveau wine released for sale
- O** What is the phobia of wine called
- P** Relates to letter F. This will give you the first word of the answer although alphabetically it is second! A famous mode of transport that leaves you approximately 9 feet above the ground and is named after money
- Q** Relating to Malaria this product helps to cure Malaria and is/was found in Tonic water giving it the bitter taste
- R** The Cutty Sark gets its name from the poem, 'Tam O'Shanter' by who?
- S** This question will earn you 100 extra points if you spell it correctly! – Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke are famed for singing this in the first of two famous films but not the second
- T** Where is the oldest wine cellar in the world and the bottles are all still in tact
- U** Which country's national anthem is actually based on a drinking song
- V** Which of Rudolph's compatriots is alphabetically the last
- W** Adam's Ale is better known as what?
- X** Our inner self is shown off via this
- Y** Both a diet, a game, and a biscuit
- Z** A delicious Italian dessert



MIRTHY EXPLORER

To submit content for future issues, email mahalia@mirthy.co.uk

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