

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME



THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

INTRODUCTION

“**The soup waved at me!**” is a unique book in many respects. It is a collection of amusing short stories aimed at making you smile, laugh, or knock your socks off – the choice is yours.

The book is unique in that it has been written slowly to help readers who cannot read fast. It also contains a generous portion of punctuations to enable readers to stop and take a rest in long sentences. I have also introduced the never used before double comma which looks like this ,, and allows you to stop reading a little longer and take a rest.

“**The soup waved at me!**” can be equally enjoyed whilst lying comfortably in a hot bubble bath listening to your favourite music, or standing in a warm shower holding your electronic tablet in your hand. Assuming of course that it is waterproof – the tablet, not your hand.

So sit back, or stand up, relax, and be prepared for an experience you’ve never imagined possible.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

Also by Victor S E Moubarak



“VISIONS” (ISBN 978 1 60477 032 2).

“VISIONS” is a fictional story of three children who see an apparition of the Lord Jesus on their way to church. They tell their priest, Father Ignatius, about it; and pretty soon news spreads throughout town.

People react to the news in different ways. Some readily believe; others mock and scoff in disbelief, whilst some react violently towards the children and their families.

Parishioners seek guidance from Father Ignatius whereas the Church seeks to hush the whole story in the hope that it goes away; whilst Jesus appears again and again.

“VISIONS” challenges readers to ask what they would do in a similar situation – as Christians, as parents or just as onlookers.

A vibrant tale of supernatural events, with a fast-paced storyline and strong believable characters, “VISIONS” is a challenging must-read Christian book for everyone ready for a reality check on what they actually believe.

“VISIONS” is available from all good bookstores and on the Internet. It is also available in Kindle, Nook and other electronic versions.

I pray that God blesses each one of you dear readers, old and new, and may He be with you and your families always.

Victor S E Moubarak

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MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

I have an Australian friend called Mel who told me once "We humans always over-complicate things. Life is made for Fosters and surfing! Simple as that."

I agreed with the former sentiment as I sipped my amber nectar but I doubt you'll ever find me out at sea standing on an old wooden board that came from a kitchen door.

I asked him on one occasion whether he was named after the Australian city of Melbourne.

"Nah mate," he replied, "... Sydney. My name is Sydney. But there was another fella in my class at school named Sydney. There was also one called Ade ... we called him Adelaide for short. Then they called me Mel."

"After the city?" I repeated, raising an eyebrow.

"Nah ... just Mel. Pure and simple. Just Mel."

It makes sense I suppose; which by some circuitous route brings us to Shakespeare.

I had to attend a Shakespeare recital the other evening. Not a play as such, but some tedious professor of sorts standing on a stage and spouting for ages about the old bard. The audience consisted mainly of female Shakespeare enthusiasts accompanied by their bored husbands who had been dragged there under duress or some other enticement - like watching the football on TV!

Anyway, this tedious man went on explaining how and why Shakespeare started writing and became famous.

Personally, I don't hold with the theory that Shakespeare wrote all these plays and sonnets. I think it was Francis Bacon. And I base my theory on the fact that I fancied a bacon sandwich at the time instead of listening to this tedious professor.

He went on to explain what Shakespeare meant when he said certain things in his plays, and what do various characters represent.

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I mean ... what does it matter? Why not just enjoy the plays instead of guessing what the author had in mind when he wrote it? He was probably just writing to earn a living, very much as authors, playwrights and film-makers do these days.

At one point the tedious professor asked his audience why Cleopatra in the play of that name put an asp to her bosoms.

I leant sideways and whispered "I didn't know she put a donkey to her breast. Why did she do this?"

I got one of those stares that meant "I'll sort you out later!"

The evening went on thus without even a break for a pint or three. I tried my best not to nod off and was rewarded at the end with tea and biscuits.

What a let down ... not a Fosters in sight!

Which brings me back again to Mel. He was right ... we humans tend to over-complicate things instead of making life pure and simple.

"Love one another. As I have loved you." John 13:34

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A NIGHT AT THE OPERA

I inadvertently mentioned at home that my boss had given me two tickets to the opera followed by a booked table at a great restaurant. I really shouldn't have done that. I really shouldn't ...

Next thing ... we were sitting in one of those private balcony seats watching a lot of people on stage shouting at each other in song and walking about as if they're constipated.

What was all that about?

I've never understood opera, and after that performance I understood it even less.

I smiled and feigned enjoyment. In order to educate myself in one easy lesson I quickly read the brochure we were given at the entrance to find out how many intervals there were, and whether this theater had a bar or not.

As there wasn't much else of interest to read I resigned myself to glancing at the summary of the plot of this play, or musical, or whatever it was that we were watching.

Apparently there's this fellow called Orlando. He's the one with tight trousers and a squeaky voice. He is a knight and he loves the lovely Princess Miranda. One day as Orlando was riding through the forest on his way to visit Miranda he bumps his head against a low lying branch from a tree and falls from his horse.

He is found dazed in the forest by a young and beautiful peasant girl called Amnesia, who takes him home to her lover Memorandum. She and her lover look after the handsome Orlando and nurse him back to health. But sadly, his forest experience has wiped his memory of the love of his life, Princess Miranda. He now has eyes only for Amnesia ... no wonder he's so forgetful.

Amnesia is confused and doesn't know who to love more. Her faithful Memorandum who stood by her all this time, or the forgetful Orlando who has declared undying love for her but doesn't even know who he is.

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Meanwhile, Princess Miranda back at her palace, not having seen Orlando for such a long time, presumes him dead, eaten by a vegetarian dragon, and she falls in love with a restaurant waiter called Risotto.

On the day she was to marry Risotto she invites the whole town to the palace and ... as it happens ... Orlando the forgetful Knight, Amnesia his girlfriend, and Memorandum who originally loved Amnesia, are all invited as guests.

Upon seeing Orlando, Princess Miranda recognises him and falls in love with him all over again, pushing her Risotto to one side. I don't blame her ... a risotto isn't much fun is it?

Anyway ... Orlando now regains his memory and declares his undying love for Princess Miranda. After all, better marry a rich Princess than a pauper like Amnesia ... what?

Amnesia is beside herself with indignation and embarrassment. She turns to her former lover Memorandum who now is himself rather annoyed and has turned his affections towards Risotto. Or was it Orlando? By now I was totally confused. Maybe it was Princess Miranda.

As you would expect in any good opera; an argument erupts between Miranda, Orlando, Amnesia, Memorandum and the side-lined Risotto. They all break out into song each out crying each other louder and louder. At one point a chorus of about thirty people turn up on stage and join in the screaming as if their lives depended on it. I'm not sure who the chorus represents, perhaps it's the other wedding guests, but it all added up to the noise.

"Do you love me?" screams Princess Miranda in Italian. "Mi ami?" she sings at the top of her voice.

"Mi ami?" responds the handsome Knight Orlando even louder.

"Mi ami? Mi ami? Mi ami?" Amnesia and Memorandum ask each other over and over again accompanied by the choir of thirty as well as Miranda and Orlando.

"Doesn't anybody love me?" screams the side-lined waiter Risotto who feels rejected like a half-eaten meal.

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WHAT PETS SEE ...

Strange thing happened when I was out for a walk the other day. I met my friend Phil who was taking his goldfish for a walk. Yes, his goldfish. He places the goldfish bowl in a pram and walks round the park to give the fish a change of scenery.

I suppose it's not as strange as me taking the dog for a walk. My dog is so lazy that he now stands on a skateboard and I have to pull him behind me with a rope. Every so often he gets off the skateboard, sniffs the aroma around a tree or lamp post and leaves his calling card before mounting the skateboard again.

Anyway, Phil and I got talking and he asked me the oddest question ever.

"Do you ever undress in front of your pets?"

What?

I must admit, I had never considered the question before; but Phil said that he noticed recently his goldfish acting most strangely and they became very agitated whenever he undressed.

I explained that looking through the goldfish bowl everything they see must be out of proportion with each other; so looking at him must be quite a shock. It's like looking at those concave and convex mirrors in fairgrounds when different parts of the body look out of proportion to each other.

(At this point my mind was doing summersaults, as I suspect yours is doing right now!)

He thought about it for a while and then said "I mean ... pets may be a different species to us humans but they still think, you know. Fish, dogs, cats, hamsters and the like ... they see you with nothing on and they may well think and wonder what is going on!"

I thought about this for a moment and I was about to say something when Phil continued:

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"Now whenever we take the goldfish bowl upstairs in the bedroom we cover it with a towel before we undress so as not to traumatize the fish!"

"You take the goldfish to the bedroom with you?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes of course, they are part of the family you know. We don't just leave them downstairs in the TV room. But you haven't answered my question. Do you undress in front of your dog?" he asked.

I looked at my dog enjoying another tree and said nothing. Perhaps I should conduct a survey about this I thought.

So, what do you think?

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MATHEMATICAL MATTERS

Mathematics is all about numbers and the relationships of numbers to one another. For example, do you know that there are more stars and planets in the universe than all the grains of sands in all the beaches and deserts in the world?

Without telling you the number of stars the mere image I have depicted has conjured in your mind how many stars exist.

There are indeed many grains of sands in the desert. I should know.

I was once a member of a research team in the desert and my task was to count the number of grains of sands. I counted up to 23 and got tired. So I can categorically claim that there are more than 23 grains of sand in the world and more stars than that in the universe. Just look up to the sky at night to prove it.

The Ancient Greeks were great mathematicians. Pythagoras for instance used mathematics to work out the measurements of shapes, especially triangles. He found out that the square on a hippopotamus is bigger than two other squares in the bush. He also had great respect for flava beans as he thought they were the source of life itself. One day he was chased by his enemies and he came across a field of beans. He stopped and refused to go through it and was killed by his enemies.

Archimedes was another mathematician of sorts. He was having a bath one day and the water in his bath overflowed. He ran in the street naked shouting "Eureka" and was arrested for indecent exposure.

One day I was traveling on a train with my college professor of mathematics. The train was going fast and we passed a field full of sheep. He remarked "Look over there, 134 sheep!"

I was impressed and asked him how he counted them so quick with the train traveling so fast. He replied "Easy ... I counted their legs and divided by four!"

A bit later we passed another field full of sheep and I tried the same trick. I counted the legs and divided by four; but I had a remainder of

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three. Which means there was either one sheep with three legs, or three sheep with one leg each!

The Ancient Romans, unlike the Greeks, used letters instead of numbers. The letter I meant one, II meant two, III meant three ... they then got tired and tried something different. IV was four, V was five, X was ten ... and they also had L, C and M as numbers.

All this suddenly stopped when the Emperor Claudius received a text saying - I LV CLAVDIVS - and he didn't know whether it was an amorous message from his girl-friend's or his wife's new telephone number.

Einstein too was a great mathematician who devised Einstein's Theory of Relativity without the use of a calculator. According to him, the richer you are the more relatives will attend your funeral. Also, according to Einstein, if a tree falls in the forest and there is no one there to see it then it will remain upright.

He was once asked, is it true that sound does not travel in a vacuum, and if a man shouts in a vacuum then his screams will not be heard?

He replied "It depends whether the vacuum is switched on at the time and how much dust is in the dust bag."

Which all reminds me of the skunk running through the forest as the wind suddenly turns direction. He stops and says "AAHH ... it all comes back to me now!"

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VISITING THE HEALTH CLUB



Years ago when I was a reporter for a radio station I was sent to a new Health Club which had just opened in an old country manor out in the countryside.

I took with me a young reporter trainee who had just started at the station.

We were met by the owner of the club who was most eager for the free publicity. After the obligatory talk about the importance of being healthy and eating well we were invited to participate in a session which had just started in the Grand Hall of this ancient and prestigious manor.

We left our tape recorders and other gear and entered the Hall to discover that I was the only male there. My trainee looked at me and the smirk on her face said it all.

We were asked to join the group of "Club Members" right at the back so as not to disturb the session. There were about 30 or so women standing on tiptoe with arms stretched above their heads and listening intently to their instructor up front.

My colleague and I stood at the back and copied the same position as best as I could. I was never good at standing on tiptoe because of my big feet. Whenever I stand on my toes my head hits the ceiling!

Our instructor then said "Relax ... arms by your side for a minute or so ... now assume the plough position!"

I was suddenly faced with a dozen female bottoms pointing upwards as everyone in front of me lay down on the floor lifting their legs forward and over their heads whilst arching their back as best they could.

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This was more than a hot-blooded young male could handle!

Why is it that women who go to these gym classes have to wear those skimpy leotards made of almost transparent material?

I tried unsuccessfully to copy the plough position much to the amusement of my colleague beside me. She bent forward and collapsed in a heap on the floor in a fit of stifled laughter.

The instructor then asked us all to sit on the ground cross-legged with our hands resting gently by our sides.

This is easy to do if you are slim and svelte like all the ladies in that room, including my colleague. But it is impossible in my case.

My legs just would not get crossed with each other or remain crossed. The more I tried the more I failed as I wobbled from side to side. My failed attempts were yet another source of hilarity to my colleague as I could see from her shaking breasts that she was stifling an uncontrollable fit of the giggles. The more she looked at me the more she shook like a jelly trying not to disrupt the class.

Our leader asked us to close our eyes and hum "Ommmmmm" continuously.

Apparently this helps you relax better, or in my case forget the pain in my abdomen as a result of sitting in this unnatural position. Why not let us hum whilst lying down on an easy chair?

As I hummed quietly I noticed an echo from somewhere. It was some trapped wind deep within me which had been disturbed and looking for a new location in which to travel. As it moved deep inside me it made an uncontrollable sound which led to my friend giggling a little louder.

"That's right ..." said the instructor, hearing the noise from the back, "breathe in deeply as you hum!"

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My friend giggled even more to the rhythmic rumblings of my insides. I have never been pregnant, my friends, but I assure you I could feel the movements of my little baby within as I wobbled from side to side.

Our next instruction, for reasons far beyond my understanding, was to lie flat facing downwards on the ground with our legs wide open - a sort of Y shape if you could imagine that.

As I lay facing down I could see from the corner of my eye that my friend's giggles had turned into uncontrolled laughter.

"Stop it!" I whispered sideways.

"I can't," she said, "your nose pointing down looks like a woodpecker trying to drill a hole into the parquet floor!"

Now that's not a nice thing to say is it? So personal too.

A few more exercises later and the ordeal was finally over. I can assure you I've never been to a Health Club since.

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MEDICAL MATTERS



Why is it when you visit an optician he always checks whether you can read before he examines you? Every time I go for a check up the optician asks me if I can read the alphabets from a chart on the wall. What has knowledge of the alphabets got to do with an eye examination? And why do the letters get smaller as you read? Are they trying to save ink?

The last time I went, the optician had a small TV monitor on the wall with the alphabets on. He was called out by the nurse to answer a phone call. So I memorized all the alphabets on the screen to show him that I could read as well as anyone else.

When he came back he clicked on his computer and put on new letters on the screen. That is cheating I think.

A friend of mine went to the same optician and complained that he could see blurred pink elephants everywhere. They were big and pink, but all blurred.

The optician asked him to read the alphabets and then gave him some spectacles asking: "Is this better?"

My friend replied: "Yes ... I can see the pink elephants much clearer now!"

Going to the doctor is not much better.

For a start they all have very ancient magazines and newspapers in their waiting rooms. I'm told it is to help you remember the good old days. Although I was saddened to read that a ship called Titanic sank the other day!

Whilst at the doctor's waiting room there was a very old man all bent down with back pain and holding on to his walking stick. He struggled in to

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the doctor's and a few minutes later he came out standing all straight and proud. Everyone thought it was a miracle.

He said "No miracle ... the doctor gave me a taller walking stick!"

When I went in to the doctor's I told him I get a pain when I raise my arm up, like when putting something on a shelf. He said: "Don't raise your arm up!"

I also told him I get a sharp pain in my eye when I drink tea. He said: "Take the spoon out of the cup first!"

I explained that sometimes I envy my dog. All he does is eat, sleep and go for walks. He never bothers about paying bills or bad news on TV. The other day I was out in the garden cleaning his business and my dog looked at me as if to say: "That's great ... I get to poop where I want. And you get to pick it up! Who's the boss now?"

The doctor asked me: "How long have you envied your dog?"

I said: "Ever since I was a puppy!"

He asked me to lie down on the couch. I replied: "I'm not allowed on the couch!"

He then threw his stethoscope at the corner of the room and I told him to fetch it himself.

After the doctor's I went to the dentist to make an appointment which I can miss later. You hear all sort of horror stories about dentists don't you?

I nearly got killed by a dentist some years ago. I was driving down a country lane and he came at me at speed on the wrong side of the road. Now I avoid all dentists at all costs.

At the chiropractor I was asked whether I get back pains early in the morning all down my spine accompanied by pains in the knees and elbows. I replied: "No ... why do you ask?"

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The practitioner replied: "I've been getting them all week and I wondered if you knew what it was!"

I told him I'd only come to fix the carpet which was a bit loose in his room. He said: "Whilst you're down there can you pick up my pen, because I can't bend down with back pain!"

A friend of mine went to hospital so they could check her hearing. When I picked her up she had half a lemon stuck in each ear. I asked her if this was a new type of hearing aid. She said: "No ... lemonade!"

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SECRETS TO A HAPPY MARRIAGE

I was reading a book the other day about the secrets to a successful, long-lasting and happy marriage.

It's amazing that after centuries of people coming together in matrimony there are still, apparently, secrets that we do not know about on how to make our marriages happy and successful.

I read with some trepidation and curiosity in order to discover what else I have to learn on the subject.

It seems that the first steps in choosing a partner for life are the most important ones. Marriage is not to be entered into too lightly and one must be careful with whom we pledge to spend the rest of our lives - come sunshine, rain or snow. It is imperative at the outset to decide who will clear the path when the snow is feet deep and blocking your way out.

Love, mutual respect, patience and understanding are obviously very important in a marriage. But just as essential is the fact that one of the spouses should be slightly deaf - preferably the husband.

The choice of spouse is vital not only for reasons of compatibility, shared interests, hopes, values and aspirations. It seems that the occupation and profession of one's partner plays a major role in the longevity and success of the union.

Statistics prove beyond doubt that archaeologists make the best marriage partners. The older you get the more interested they are in you.

It is of course inevitable that in any marriage arguments will occur sometimes out of the blue and on the most absurd and un-important subjects. The trick is not so much on how to win an argument; if this was at all possible, but to avoid getting into one in the first place.

It's not a question of capitulating and giving way in the first instance, but choosing which argument is important enough to defend as a matter of principle and which is not worth losing privileges for.

The question of principles is worth dwelling on for a moment or two. Don't just have one unbreakable principle which you will uphold at the cost of

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your marriage, happiness, and future livelihood. Be generous. Have plenty of principles; and if one doesn't work out for you choose another one. No one who is anyone has ever succeeded by having just one principle.

The book also has a chapter about mutual interests and doing things together as a couple which both marriage partners can enjoy.

Now, doing heavy work together like changing the engine oil in the car, tuning the engine, changing the tires and other mechanical tasks may be ideal for certain couples; but personally I'd rather sit back and admire her handiwork and praise her every now and then. Besides, I hate it when the engine oil and dirt gets under my fingernails. It's a devil of a job to clean when I'm at the manicurist.

In a chapter specifically for men, the book states that women like to be re-assured frequently that they are loved and cherished. Frequently the words "I love you" are not heard as often after the honeymoon, or are used as a pretext to wanting something, like watching the football on TV.

The book suggests that the husband writes down the words "I love you" on a piece of paper which the wife can refer to as often as needed in future. Laminating the piece of paper will ensure its durability, especially if it is the size of a credit card so it can be easily carried in one's purse or handbag. Drawing a heart, or a flower, (before laminating), will also ensure a successful purpose.

So there you have it ... a few secrets to a long, happy and successful marriage. Now where's my dinner?

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SHOES

I was out walking in the countryside the other day taking some exercise and breathing the fresh air. It was a little cold and it was spitting slightly. That light drizzle which you get sometimes in Britain and it goes on for ages creating damp, wet and gray everywhere.

I kept walking down the country lane towards a village a few miles away, looking forward to a sit down in a pub with a pint of Guinness. Might as well wet the inside as well as the outside; I thought.

Anyway, as I walked on I noticed that I had a hole in my shoe; and it was letting in water. My left foot started to get cold and damp.

I stopped at a bus shelter which you sometimes find in the countryside and took my shoe off. I had miles still ahead of me; so I decided to make another hole in my shoe with my pen so that the water that came in from the existing hole could go out of the new one.

In the countryside buses come round every ten years or there about, so I had a long wait and time to kill. I sat there ruminating about everything in general and shoes in particular.

Do you realize that shoes are the most important invention in humanity?

Without shoes the human race would not have got very far. They would have stumbled their toes against a rock or stepped on sharp objects and got no further.

Armies of soldiers over the centuries would not have gone further than their barracks. The Romans would not have conquered anything and their politicians would have spent their time washing their feet from animal deposits left in the streets instead of telling everyone what to do.

It is fair to say that without shoes humanity would not have progressed at all.

Shoes are the most important item of clothing ever invented. One can be totally naked but without shoes one would go nowhere and be there for all to see.

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My thoughts, for some reason, turned to nudist camps. You know the ones? Places where people go to air their differences.

I don't know why people go to such places; but many do. Even on very cold days, I understand!

I wonder if nudists wear socks with their shoes! I mean ... how can they possibly play tennis in bare feet?

And if they play cricket or baseball, do they wear gloves, helmets and those thick leg pads? Or hats and sunglasses when it is sunny?

At what point does a nudist cease to be a nudist, I wonder?

Is a person wearing a hat, sunglasses, gloves, leg pads, socks and shoes - and nothing else - still a nudist?

My reverie was interrupted by the bus coming down the hill. I got on and dreamed of a cool Guinness waiting for me!

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MUSICAL MATTERS

I've always wanted to be able to play a musical instrument.

I started with something simple - the harmonica. All you have to do is suck and blow and suck and blow as you move the instrument left and right in your mouth. It was fun and easy. Sadly, it made the cat climb up the curtains and the dog howl whilst the rest of the family screamed at me all at once.

So I tried taking lessons at playing the guitar. We started with tuning exercises. I had to hold the strings tightly against the neck of the guitar with the left hand and pick at the strings with the right hand!

The problem was that my left hand did its job all right. But the right hand kept moving up and down frantically a few millimeters away from the strings. When the instructor suggested I move my hand a little closer somehow my fingers got all tangled up in the strings with a horrendous sound. I just could not co-ordinate both hands to do what they were supposed to. Sometimes my left hand moved up and down on the guitar neck, whilst the other hand pushed the fingers into that hole you have in the main body of the instrument.

My patient instructor suggested I use a plectrum. That's a small triangular piece of plastic which you hold between your fingers to pick at the guitar strings.

As I tried to hit the strings with the plastic bit it flew out of my hand and hit the instructor straight in the eye. Would you believe it? It could have gone anywhere ... but NOOOOO !!! In my case it went straight in his eye.



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He was taken to hospital and the rest of the class blamed me for a ruined guitar lesson. I mean ... why not blame the stupid plastic triangle?

I gave up the guitar and decided to self-teach myself the violin instead. No plectrums or picks ... just a long stick which you move up and down over the strings and sound comes out.

I bought myself an expensive violin and decided to learn at home using a book and a CD I got from the library.

It made some good sounds I tell you. The cat still climbed at the top of the curtain and the dog hid in his kennel. The rest of the family chose to go out shopping instead!

It was then that I noticed that whilst playing the violin I had a tendency to walk up and down the room instead of standing still. At first I did not know why I was doing this; then I realized that the music I was playing had been written for the bagpipes.

So I sold my old Stradivarius at a garage sale and used the proceeds to buy a set of bagpipes and drums.

I practiced for hours in our garden sometimes marching up and down with the bagpipes, and at other times using the big drum whilst playing back a recording of my bagpipes practice sessions.

I became really good at the pipes and drums and could soon play Chopin's piano concertos as well as a number of other famous tunes written by all the well known composers. Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Michelangelo ... I could play them all.

However I noticed that our neighbours had become a little un-friendly and somewhat uncharitable. One suggested that I play far away but I could not find the sheet music to that tune.

I tried practicing indoors but there was not enough room to march up and down. So I walked on the treadmill whilst playing the bagpipes and watching TV at the same time.

I sometimes practiced in the garden at night so as not to wake up the rest of the family.

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A jovial neighbour always opened his window and shouted "Stop banging that **** drum at three in the morning!" What a laugh that was!

I could even play "Silent Night" on the big drum, you know. For some strange reason our priest refused to let me play it on the drum at the Christmas Carol Concert.

I eventually gave up on the bagpipes due to several letters received from various solicitors. They were all written in the same threatening tone of voice ... including the one sent on behalf of my wife.

The thing is ... I love music. Putting a piece of paper over a comb and humming quietly doesn't sound quite the same. Does it?

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NO TO ECUMENICALS

It has long been a notion amongst Ecumenicals that it is a good idea to mix with people from other denominations, to learn from them, exchange views and create friendships hopefully leading to unity.

Well in my experience mixing with Ecumenicals can lead one astray in a direction you never intended to go to in the first place.

As I shall demonstrate.

Some Ecumenical Leaders in our church decided it would be a great idea if they arranged a joint visit to a famous shrine and invite members of a number of other denominations who are part of our Parish Ecumenical Movement. They organized the trip and publicized it widely in all the member churches as well as encouraged our congregation ... coercing me more than once ... to come along on the pilgrimage and show willingness and unity.

On the day in question about sixty or so people from the five different churches gathered in our church car park ready to set off in two buses waiting for us.

One of the leaders stood on a box so that he could be seen by everyone and addressed us on a portable loudspeaker.

"It is so nice to see so many of you here from our Ecumenical Family. Today we have a great opportunity to make new friends and meet new people. To this end, when you're on the bus, and during our visit to the shrine, do not sit with people you already know from your own church. Seek out new faces. There'll be many people you've never met or seen before, sit with them, smile, have a chat and welcome a new friend in your life. Mingle ... mingle ... and mingle some more! A stranger is a friend you've yet to meet. Have fun!"

"Great ..." I thought, "organized fun. Just what I've always wanted. Because I do not have the imagination and initiative to make up my own enjoyment and have my own friends!"

I sat at the back of the bus in the hope that no one would sit next to me and I'd have a peaceful journey. No such luck.

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I don't know why, but complete strangers often stop and chat with me and tell me their life stories ... in the shops, on the bus or train, in the streets, anywhere. What is it about me that attracts people to me?

Soon enough an elderly lady came and sat next to me and as the coach left the church car park she started talking.

First she said hello and introduced herself. Then she said something inane about the weather, which we often do in the UK when we have nothing better to say. After that she said how she looked forward to the shrine visit. And before you know it she was telling me her life story.

She talked about the voluntary work she did during the Second World War, about her husband dying, how she grows prize-winning azaleas, whatever they are, about her grandson Quentin and how she bakes the best steak and kidney pies. I mean ... who these days calls a boy Quentin???

It was obvious the old lady wanted to talk so I nodded and smiled politely at this continuous monologue pretending to be a dialogue.

I wished I'd never agreed to go on this pilgrimage in the name of Ecumenism.

Is this how Chaucer felt on his way to Canterbury? Having to listen to tales about Quentin, azaleas and steak and kidney pies?

After about two hours of this non-stop listening to this nice but verbally diarrhetic old lady the coach drew up at a pub on the way to the shrine to allow us to stretch our legs and use the amenities.

I went to the pub's beer garden and sat at a lonely table away from everyone else to enjoy a lovely pint of Guinness.

I thought about the shrine we were visiting and about God in His infinite wisdom looking down upon us from Heaven.

What does He make of all this Ecumenical Movement? Does He approve and like the diversity of all the different Christian denominations mingling and making friends? Or would He prefer us all to be of one Church, one

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trade brand, with one trademark? And which one does He prefer I wander?

What does He think of us Catholics who can be a little bit fishy, especially on Fridays? Arguing amongst ourselves about different types of Masses and other such matters!

Which kind of Mass does He like? Does He enjoy Latin Gregorian chants or does He prefer guitars and waving of hands in the air? And does all that incense going up to Heaven make Him open all the windows to clear the smoke out before the smoke alarms go off?

Having had my personal discussion with God on how He could improve things down here I got up and headed towards the car park.

There was only one coach waiting there. Obviously the other one had already left and would await our arrival at the shrine.

I got in and sat somewhere totally different to avoid the non-stop-talking old lady.

Moments later the coach started filling up and a man in his forties sat next to me.

"You all right mate?" he said and I smiled back. "Did you get to the last game with Granchester?"

"No ..." I mumbled, and before I could say anything else he turned round and started talking to a friend sitting behind us.

I leant my head towards the window, closed my eyes and pretended to go to sleep to avoid another unending conversation.

I must have dozed off because after about an hour of driving a few of the people at the back of the bus started singing. Strangely ... these were not the familiar "Praise Songs" I'd heard so often at our prayer meetings with the Charismatic wing of our congregation.

No ... these were totally new songs I'd never heard before and ... wait ... the lyrics are quite risqué and at times quite rude. What kind of Ecumenical types are these?

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What's going on here?

I asked the man sitting next to me which church those people at the back belong to.

"Church?" he replied, "I doubt any of them have ever seen the inside of a church ... not unless they give free beer there now!"

"But ... why are they going to the shrine then?" I enquired being somewhat slow on the uptake.

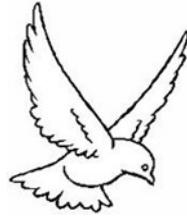
"We're going to no shrine pal," he said, "we're off to Granchester for the football match. Where you off to?"

As I said ... I don't like Ecumenicals or anything to do with mingling with people you do not know.

I prefer a Catholic bus with a Catholic driver who knows where he's going and people from my church whom I know well and who have nothing to do with azaleas and steak and kidney pies or Quentins!

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THE CONSEQUENCE OF BEING ERNEST



Take my advice friends, if ever you want anything done do not ask Ernest to do it.

Ernest is a nice enough member of our church always eager to volunteer to do anything that's needed, although he doesn't always get it quite right. That aside, we normally let him do all sorts of jobs as long as there's someone else to supervise him in case he does it all wrong.

Sadly a prominent member of our church died recently. He was very elderly, lived alone and was a member of our choir. A few of us got together to set up a committee to work out the funeral arrangements. The deceased had no family, nor much funds, so we decided to take it upon ourselves to make the arrangements for his final journey from this valley of tears.

As expected, Ernest joined the committee. We all met and discussed various arrangements. The Order of Service, hymns, choir, burial and so on. At one point someone suggested that it would be a nice gesture if, as the deceased was lowered into the ground, all those standing around the grave would release white doves into the air as a symbol of peace.

What?

I've never heard of such a thing. White doves at a funeral? By the graveside?

I was about to protest when the suggestion was quickly picked up by others and before I could speak they'd all agreed it was a brilliant idea.

Ernest volunteered to obtain the white doves at little expense from a friend of his; and the decision was made and agreed in the minutes of the meeting.

On the day in question, as we all stood around the grave, there stood Ernest with a large box in his hands.

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At the appropriate time he opened the box and started handing out white gloves to all around him!

You should have seen their faces.

Well done Ernest ... clean your ears next time before volunteering.

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MUCH ADO ABOUT PANTS

Why is it when things go wrong they continue to go wrong like a chain of events one triggering the other?

I was at a posh hotel preparing to give an important speech to a group of managers about our budget plans and future forecasts.

It was a two-days Conference and mine was the keynote speech before everyone packed their bags and went back to their homes.

I was in my hotel room packing my suitcase and getting dressed in my best suit ready to face my audience. As I put my leg in the trousers my foot somehow caught the inner turn-up of the trousers and tore into the stitching. The trousers were not torn but obviously with the turn-ups loose one trouser leg was now much longer than the other.

How can I fix it with only a short time to go before I'm supposed to stand on stage facing all these people?

Needle and thread ... that's what I need. What's the use? Men are no good with needles and thread ... I wouldn't know what to do if I had any anyway.

What else can I use to keep the turn-up back in its original place?

Pins ... must find some pins ... no ... there aren't any either.

How about paper clips? I have some in my briefcase ... no ... they don't hold so well. They keep moving and are clearly visible from a distance. I can't stand on stage with one foot behind my leg as if I need to go to the toilet.

What if I use the sticky-tape to tape the turn-up back in place? It doesn't hold very well. It falls down again. There must be something else in my briefcase I can use.

Aha ... necessity is the mother of invention ... my stapler!!!

I can staple the turn up back in place.

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I raise my foot on the chair and click ... click ... click ... click ... a few staples later and the turn-ups are back in place. I feel proud of my ingenuity.

I go to the basin to wash my hands.

Why is it that hotel basins are so designed that when you open the faucet the water rushes into the basin, swivels round at speed, and splashes all over the front of your trousers with embarrassing results?

And why does it happen when you're in a hurry?

I can hardly stand in front of all these people giving the impression that I have been caught short? I have no other suit to change into.

I try desperately to dry the trousers with a towel but the large stain on my front is still clearly visible.

Even if I button up my jacket the wet stain is still there for all to notice.

Aha ... I remember seeing a hair-dryer in one of the drawers.

Plug it in ... stand in front of the mirror and blow hot air on the stain. Hopefully it will dry quickly and in time for me to get down and give my speech.

Wow ... this hair-dryer is hot!!!

And noisy too!!!

So noisy that I did not hear the hotel maid knocking at the door and entering the room.

She is standing there behind me watching as I get forever hotter. One can only imagine what she's thinking.

"Eh ... my trousers ..." I mumble, "they're wet ... I'm trying to dry them ... I got them wet with water ... from the basin ..." I try to explain incoherently as my mind becomes more and more confused with the situation.

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"I understand Sir," she replies with a smile, "have you tried the trouser-press? If you fold the trousers in here the heat will soon dry the ... water."

I did not like the pause before she said "water". She's got the situation all wrong.

She pulls out the trouser-press from its compartment and switches it on. "It is ready now Sir!" she says with a smile.

"Eh ... I think it is better if you now leave," I mumble again, "I'll take it from here!"

"Of course Sir!" she smiles broadly as she leaves the room.

I try to take the trousers off in a hurry ... drat ... why is this stupid trouser leg stuck? I nearly trip standing on one leg and fall back on the bed ... drat and double drat ... the leg turn-up is stapled to my sock ... how did that happen? How did I staple the trousers to the sock whilst I'm still wearing it? Would you believe it? Now of all times I have a pair of trousers stuck to a sock at the end of my foot.

Too late to untangle it! Take off the sock as well as the trousers and put the whole lot in the press. Close the press. Turn on the heat to maximum so the stain dries quicker.

Open the press and put the trousers back on in a hurry ... GEEEEEEEE ... that is HOT!!!!

I hop from foot to foot wandering whether I have done myself a mischief.

Now I put the stapled sock back on. It is still warm too.

Later that afternoon whilst I was checking out at the hotel reception with my boss the chambermaid passes by and asks me "Did your trousers dry OK Sir?"

My boss looks at me with raised eyebrows and says nothing.

But the chain of disasters does not end there.

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As I get to my car and pull out my car key from my pocket I find that the plastic top where the automatic car-opening system is, has been totally melted by the hot trouser-press.

Luckily, I had a spare car key which I always carry in my briefcase.

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HILDA, KENNETH AND ROBERT - *Ménages à trois* ?

I received an unexpected phone call from a colleague at work who had retired a year ago. She's a pleasant acquaintance rather than a friend as such and in conversation she said that her husband had passed away and that she had moved to a two-hundred years old thatched roof cottage out in the country.

She was her usual jovial self on the phone and, somewhat surprisingly, she invited me to visit her for the day so we could catch-up on old times.

I was not that keen on the idea, but she insisted and I was persuaded to go and see Hilda.

She was her usual bubbly self as we sat down to tea and biscuits reminiscing about work. After she retired she left the city and moved with her husband to the countryside and then he died a few months later.

I nodded politely and made small talk wandering why she had insisted on this visit and then it came ... right out of the blue.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" she asked. "You know ... you having beliefs and all that? Are there ghosts do you think?"

Before I could answer she went on "The reason I ask is because I believe this house is haunted. I wanted to speak to someone about it and then I remembered you from work."

"What makes you think the house is haunted?" I asked, "Have you seen anything?"

"Not seen as such," she replied, "but I heard him ... Robert ... he's often screeching especially at night."

"Robert ..." I repeated politely and then after a short pause I asked "is Robert your husband?"

"Oh no ..." she laughed, "my husband was called Kenneth. He did not die here. He died in hospital. And he's far too lazy to haunt me! He was so lazy that if he ever fainted he'd need help to get him to the ground" she giggled.

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"I see ..." I said still not seeing where all this was leading to. "So Robert must have lived in this old cottage centuries ago?"

"No ... no ..." she giggled again, "He lived here with us. Robert died here four weeks ago and a few days later his ghost started haunting the place!"

My mind started doing somersaults wondering who Robert was. Was he a lodger? A boy-friend? Living with her and her husband? How did he die? Was it a tragic accident? Or something more sinister?

She interrupted my train of thoughts and totally derailed it by declaring "Robert was my parrot!"

"Parrot?" I repeated.

"Yes ... he was my parrot. I got up one morning and found him off his perch. He was lying on his back on the ground with his feet pointing upwards as stiff as a board. I buried him in the garden!"

"And you believe a parrot is haunting this house?" I asked tentatively not believing I'd ever ask such a question.

"No doubt about it ... I hear him screeching at night when I'm in bed. I think he's frightened when I put on my face cream and have my hair in curlers ... he's never seen me like that when he was alive!"

I imagined her in face cream and curlers and suppressed a smile crossing my legs tightly for extra security. I suppose the sight of a woman in cream and curlers would frighten the most threatening of ghosts.

"Well ..." I hesitated, "I've heard of people seeing ghosts but never the ghost of a parrot before!"

"I've not seen him," she said, "only heard him. I've asked a ghost exorcist to come today. That's why I asked you here."

About an hour later a man in his fifties turned up carrying a small suitcase.

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We sat in the main front room and he brought out a small metal plate explaining that first he needed to incense the place. He lit a few pieces of charcoal on the plate and then added what seemed to me an excess of incense.

There was smoke everywhere; so much so that we could not breathe or even see each other, and then we heard the screeching sound ... it was the smoke alarms in the corridor and the kitchen which set off simultaneously.

The three of us stood up coughing and wheezing and dancing as we waved handkerchiefs and newspapers around the smoke alarms trying to dispel the smoke and silence the deafening sound.

Eventually all was quiet again and the man asked Hilda about the ghost.

"His name is Robert" she said, "he's lived with me for 8 years!"

"Was he your husband?" asked the exorcist cum smoke-maker.

"No ... my husband was called Kenneth" she replied "Robert has always been very dear to me and I've always loved him" she continued in all innocence not realizing how confusing her answers were.

"Can you describe him for me?" asked the ghost hunter "so that I can visualize him as I send him on his way ..."

"He was green, about 11 inches tall and he had a wonderful personality."

The man looked at her in total surprise as I stifled a guffaw and crossed my legs even more tightly; wishing I did not have that second cup of tea.

"I ... I ... don't understand" he said hesitantly "green and only 11 inches tall?"

"Yes ... our parrot had such a lovely personality. Even though he could not talk!" she explained with a smile.

"A parrot?" he mumbled, "do you mean to say that the ghost is a parrot?"

"Yes ... I thought you knew".

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A cold sweat suddenly appeared on his forehead. He stood up and said "You didn't tell me ... I have to go ... I have a morbid fear of parrots, all birds in fact ... chicken especially. It's their vicious beaks ... I have nightmares about them!"

"But this isn't a real bird" I said flippantly, "it can't harm you, it's a ghost bird!"

"They're all the same ... dead or alive ... all birds have beaks ... sharp ones. I was once chased by a turkey you know!" he continued as he gathered his paraphernalia in his suitcase.

"What am I to do?" she asked me after the man had gone "how am I to get rid of Robert's ghost?"

"I think the ghost has flown away after him to haunt him" I replied jokingly, "you'll be OK now."

As far as I know she has not been disturbed with screeching noises since.

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LONDON NIGHTS

Why is it that people jump to the wrong conclusion when they see me dressed in my usual attire?

Some time ago I went to London to stay with friends and I was told that one of them goes out at night with members of his church to go to London parks and feed the poor and the down-and-outs.

Would I like to join them?

On the day in question a van from his church called at his house and he and I and two others drove into London just before 10 o'clock at night.

We parked the van by the roadside and it broke my heart to see literally dozens of people sitting on the wet grass waiting our arrival.

"Word soon gets around" I was told "they tell each other that we're here by around 10 and every time we come there's more of them!"

"There's another van parked a hundred yards away" I said.

"Yes ... it's another church. We're glad they come too because we couldn't cope on our own!"

I was given a big box full of pre-wrapped sandwiches which the ladies in church had prepared and I walked by the park edge handing them out as the vagrants got up and went to the van for a hot drink.

By the time I had emptied my box of sandwiches I had reached the other van from the other church.

"Hello ... you are new here" said a middle-aged lady from near her van "I haven't seen you before!"

"Yes ... this is my first time here ..." I smiled back.

"Would you like a sandwich?" she asked "and a cup of soup? We have chicken and tomatoes, which do you prefer?"

"Oh no ..." I smiled, "I don't need anything to eat ... thanks!"

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"Do sit down ..." she interrupted, "the chicken soup is hot and tasty ... I made it myself!"

Before I could answer she was joined by another lady who said "He's probably shy, Mary! It's very difficult for some of them to accept our help."

I was about to explain when Mary interrupted again "You look very cold my dear ... this jacket you're wearing has seen better days ... we have a spare coat in the van ... about your size I should say ... let me get it ..."

"No ... no ... you don't understand" I protested with a smile hiding the insult at my authentic 12 years old tweed jacket, "I am not one of the poor people. I came here to help with my friend from another church!" "Now you've embarrassed him ..." said the other lady to Mary, "either that, or the poor man is hallucinating ... it happens when they've been drinking ... does he smell of drink?"

I'll have you know dear readers that I do not smell of drink but always of the best after-shave lotion I can buy for a few pennies down the market. This farce had got on too far and it was time I put these two lovely well-meaning ladies straight.

"Look ladies ..." I said calmly yet authoritatively, "believe it or not, I am not here to ask for food or drink or clothing. I came with my friend from another church to help feed these poor people. I came in the van parked ... parked ... over ... there!!!

"Where has the van gone? Where's my friend and the other two people from his church? Did you see them leave?"

"Never mind ..." said Mary in her sweet voice, "sit down here and try this soup and sandwich ... I'll go get you the coat!"

As she left I told the other woman, "I don't know what's going on. My friend is from St Bartholomew church. Do you know it?"

"He's gone and left me stranded here ... can you help me please and give me a lift in your van to his house? It's near the church."

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"Oh no ..." she replied, "we're not allowed to take passengers in our van. It's only for us to come here and serve food ..."

She walked away hurriedly and stopped Mary who was coming towards us with a coat. They both moved towards the van at speed. A man came out of the van towards me and said "Here friend ... I have something for you ..." and handed me two sandwiches.

He then jumped in the van and they drove off.

I gave the two sandwiches to two men sitting nearby and hurried as quickly as my legs would carry me towards the main road where I stopped a taxi and went home.

"Why did you drive off and leave me?" I asked.

"We thought you'd gone into town to see the London sites" was the jovial unperturbed reply.

"But ... but ... I was wearing my cowboy hat with a large feather in it ... clearly visible from afar ... what do you want me to do? Put on a flashing light on top so you can see it from miles away?????"

This story is dedicated to someone I know who does a lot of good work feeding the poor at night in London.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

THE AIR THAT I BREATHE

As I got out of my London taxi and made my way to the big apartment block, a luxurious car drew by, and the uniformed man at the entrance of the apartment block came out on the sidewalk and opened the door.

Out came a bejewelled woman carrying a small poodle in her hands and a small man carrying her handbag. They were both in their late fifties or early sixties, I would guess. She was somewhat large and what could euphemistically be described as rotund; whilst he was somewhat diminutive in stature and obviously submissive to her demands.

I let them go through into the building first; out of politeness of course. As I followed them in, the other security type person checked my credentials before letting me in. What a cheek!!! Just because I was wearing my red tartan trousers, green jacket and cowboy hat with large feather; there's no need to suspiciously ask why I was there.

Anyway, moments later we were waiting by the elevator doors and we were joined by a pretty young lady also obviously well to do.

"Hello Stephanie!" said the rotund woman.

"Good morning Mrs Flabbergast," replied the young lady, "how is Bijou this morning?"

"Bijou?" I thought, that's a stupid name for one's husband.

"Oh he's all well again," replied the rotund woman, "Mr Flabbergast and I have just been to the vet for his injections!"

"Why did her husband go to the vet for his injections?" I thought, "maybe he's caught something from the dog!"

The elevator arrived and we all got in.

"We're going to the penthouse, young man" said the rotund woman to me looking down her nose.

I smiled and pressed the buttons as the young lady said "17th floor for me please!"

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

The elevator went up smoothly for a minute or so and then stopped with a jolt.

"Perhaps you didn't press the buttons properly!" accused the rotund woman.

I mean ... what an insult ... There's only one way to press an elevator button, and I did just that. I pressed 17, Penthouse and 21, the floor I was destined to. And now here I was stuck in an elevator with high society looking down on me.

The diminutive man said "They'll soon let us out dear ... these elevators automatically inform the engineers when something is wrong!"

"Oh do be quiet Gilbert ..." she responded, "Bijou is getting upset!"

"There's an opening in the ceiling" the young lady pointed out, "if you lift that flap there you can go through, and there's a lever that opens the doors. I've seen it done in the movies!"

I looked up and said nothing.

"You don't expect me to get up there?" said the young high society, "not in my mini skirt, I won't!"

"Gilbert suffers from vertigo" said Mrs Flabbergast, "and I certainly will not climb up there in this new dress. So it's down to you young man!"

"Or up to you ..." said Gilbert with a smile pointing upwards.

"I am not going up there." I said authoritatively. "I may press the wrong lever and things would get worse. I'm sure the engineers will soon let us out. Let's be patient for a while."

We remained patient for about five minutes or so. Silently looking at each other nervously and smiling politely. And then it happened ...

Someone ... (cue in dramatic music) had cowardly broken wind!

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

It was one of those silent wind breakers that turns the air a darker shade of grey as it slowly suffocates your every breath and presses your eardrums outwards.

I don't know about you ... but I think breaking wind in an elevator is totally wrong on so many levels.

They all looked at me accusingly. I resented that. I knew it wasn't me but how could I prove it? If I objected it would have been taken as admission of guilt. I said nothing and looked at my watch, pretending not to notice their accusations or the distinct lack of air in this suspended cage.

"Would you like some chocolates?" said Mrs Flabbergast trying to deflect the silent conversation to another subject.

She opened her handbag and brought out a packet of chocolate drops which she handed round to the young miss and her husband. Neither took any.

I took a couple, out of politeness of course, and to show there were no hard-feelings regarding the false un-spoken accusations.

She got a couple of drops out of the bag and gave them to Bijou.

"Chocolates can be harmful to dogs," said the young lady with a smile.

"Oh ... they're not chocolates!" replied Mrs Flabbergast, "They're specially formulated chocolate substitutes for dogs. The vet just gave them to us!"

Before I could say anything the elevator smoothly moved upwards and took us to our destinations.

Lately I've often had this urge to scratch my ears violently with my feet. Very embarrassing ... especially when on a bus!

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AT HEAVEN'S DOORSTEP



I stood at the doorsteps of Heaven in full anticipation. It was not a large Pearly Gate shining brightly as we've often been told and is depicted in some pictures; no ... this was just a small wooden door. A humble ordinary wooden door with no sign or any distinguishing features foretelling where it led to.

I remembered the quote from the Bible: "Knock and it shall be opened to you ..."

I knocked and as my luck would have it the door opened outwards and hit me in the face.

An old bearded man stood there and asked: "Yes ... what do you want?"

"I ... I ... want to enter Heaven ..." I mumbled hesitantly.

"Why?" he asked abruptly.

"Because I want to spend eternity with God ..." I replied still fumbling for suitable words.

"And what makes you think He wants to spend an eternity with you?" retorted St Peter sternly.

It was a good question. We often assume that because we're good Christians our entry to Heaven is guaranteed, but are we judging ourselves by our standards or God's standards? I may believe that I am good to enter Heaven; but am I really?

The Saint noticed my discomfort and asked: "Who are you anyway?"

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

I gave him my name and he produced an electronic tablet and started punching his finger on the screen. I thought he was quite an up-to-date Saint technologically speaking considering his age.

"Ah yes ... your name's here ..." he said finally, "I had to check. You'd be surprised how many people we get here expecting to enter Heaven as if it were a hotel. It isn't an open house for all and sundry, you know. Just because some people attended church on Sunday and did not eat meat on Friday does not automatically give them free access to Heaven.

"As my friend Matthew quoting Jesus wrote: 'Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do what my Father in Heaven wants them to do.'

"Look it up in Matthew's Gospel at 7:21.

"He always had an affectation of numbering every sentence he wrote, old Matthew did. But don't tell him I said so!"

I smiled feebly not knowing what to say.

The Saint continued: "The trouble with the world today is that too many people do the bare minimum and expect they are in God's good book. Over the years they have interpreted the Ten Commandments to be ten suggestions and debating points to discuss and amend as they wish to suit their selfish lifestyles.

"The reason God asked Moses to write them in stone is so that they don't get altered. Admittedly, Moses broke the first set; but fortunately there was another copy available.

"Over the years people have broken every Commandment even though they were set in stone. As I was saying to some of the disciples over tea this morning ... people these days are no different to the Pharisees and Sadducees of my time on earth."

I could see Saint Peter was rather upset which was indicative to what we'd learnt about him in the Gospels. Sometimes outspoken and short-tempered. For he it was who hit a priest's servant with a sword when Jesus was arrested. I stepped slightly backwards in case he hit me with his electronic tablet.

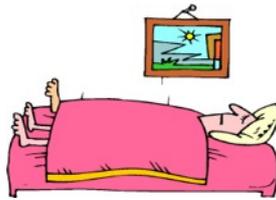
THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

He looked at me and chuckled, "I see here that you're due a short spell at the Purification Center" he said, "Some of you lot call it Purgatory ... it's a bit like a car wash where you're cleaned up and made ready to enter Heaven for eternity. I'll be seeing you again shortly!"

I woke up with a smile on my face.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

THERE WAS A WOMAN IN MY BED



It was late in the evening when I entered my hotel room. It had been a long day at work with one meeting following another, and then I had to attend a Conference where they discussed ways to extrapolate sales and costs figures against profits in order to estimate how many paper clips we'll need five years from now. It was so exhilarating that I could not sleep at all throughout the Conference.

Anyway, I got to my hotel room late and got myself in by using one of those electronic cards you put in a slot and the door opens. I did not bother to switch all lights on. A small light shone from a nearby table-lamp and this was enough. I intended to fall into bed and dream of better days.

As I took my jacket off a man got out of the en-suite bathroom in his pajamas. Why he had an en-suite bathroom in his pajamas I do not know. Maybe he was rich and could afford an en-suite bathroom in his pajamas; whilst the rest of us have to be content with an elastic band or a cord to keep our pajama pants up.

I don't know what nationality he was, but as soon as he saw me the man said: "Qui êtes-vous? Que faites-vous ici?"

I know exactly what he said because I remember writing it down at the time. I then took out a dictionary to translate but could not understand a word. It was an Italian dictionary.

The man shouted at me and beckoned me to get out of my room. At which point an enormously rotund woman got up from my bed and she too started shouting at me "Allez-vous en! Allez-vous en!" and waving her hands in the air.

I wrote that down too but could not find a translation in my Italian dictionary.

I picked up my jacket and as I turned to get out I accidentally knocked a large wicker basket which was on the table beside me. The top of the

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basket opened and a flock of pigeons flew out into the room. They flew everywhere, trying to land on something high up. Luckily the bedroom door was shut and they eventually settled on the wardrobe, perched on the chandelier, (it was a posh hotel), and one settled on the man's head.

There was cooing and flapping of wings everywhere. A few feathers floated in the air before settling to the ground. The pigeons did what most animals do when frightened and started leaving deposits everywhere. Including on the man's head.

I was totally stunned by what had just happened and stood perfectly still. The rotund woman picked up the phone on the bedside table and started shouting in broken English "pee john pee john ..."

Moments later a hotel porter entered the room and disturbed all the pigeons which started flying all over again and dropping deposits all over the place.

We waited until they had settled down and then he asked me "Why do you have pigeons in your room, Sir? Pets are not allowed in this hotel!"

I was astounded that he asked me about the pigeons and had totally ignored the fact that I also had a rotund woman in my bed and a man with an en-suite bathroom in his pajamas.

He asked for my electronic card which he tested on the door. It worked. He then took the man's electronic card. It worked too.

You guessed it. It was a double booking and we'd both been given the same cards.

I picked up my luggage and was moved to another room.

By now you may be asking why there were pigeons in a wicker basket in my room. Simple.

I was told the man was a magician and he used the pigeons in his act by making them appear and disappear out of a hat. Apparently his wife, whilst younger and less rotund, was a stripper and she too used the pigeons in her act. For an encore the pigeons used to take their feathers off!

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

BLESSED ARE THE POOR

Once upon a time there was an old man in his nineties living alone in a small cottage in the countryside. He'd farmed there all his life and now he spent the rest of his days there with a dog as old as he.

Once a week a friend visited him for a while for a chat and to help around the house. Just for fun, the old man gave his friend £1 a week to buy him a lottery ticket.

This went on for ages and the friend always checked the old man's lottery ticket for any winnings. One day to his surprise he discovered the old man won £2m.

He was both pleased and very concerned about this. If he told the old man of the winnings the shock could easily kill him.

So he went to the priest for advice and after much debate he convinced the priest that he was better placed to break the news to the old man. After all, priests are trained for all circumstances.

The priest visited the old man and after enjoying a cup of tea and biscuits he approached the subject carefully as the old man was seated down comfortably.

"Life certainly has its twists and turns" started the priest, "and you've certainly seen many in your life I should say!"

The old man nodded.

"Imagine" continued the priest, "another unexpected twist. Imagine ... say ... you won £2m in the lottery. What would you do?"

The old man smiled and said "At my age I've outlived all my relatives and I have few friends to speak of. I suppose if I won £2m I'd give it all to you."

On hearing this the priest had a heart attack and died.

And the moral of the story is:

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

When you're a certain age never play the lottery.

No ... that's not it.

The moral of the story is never give a priest £2m.

No ... that's not it either. I'm sure there's a moral here but I don't get it.

Sometimes it pays to know when we're already happy.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

THE LONG TRIP OF COFFEE

It was a few years ago when my work colleague Jennifer and I drove to the city for an important meeting with some clients. We'd decided beforehand that she'd drive her own car, giving me the opportunity to read a financial report I needed for the meeting.

On the way back home Jennifer decided we stop at a cafe for some refreshments. She knew that this place served every kind of coffee you could wish for, and of course, she was right.

It was mid-afternoon when we set off again on the way home, Jennifer in the driving seat, and I sitting beside her making notes about the meeting and every so often seeking her advice and opinions on financial matters. She was a keen accountant equal to no one, so her views were invaluable.

An hour into the journey home we met a delay on the highway. All three lanes were full of cars as we slowed down to a snail's pace. Pretty soon we stopped in what turned out to be the longest car park I'd ever seen. Ahead of us, for as far as we could see, there were stopped cars in all three lanes. Behind us, within minutes, a longer queue of parked cars developed into eternity.

Every so often, we moved forward a few yards and stopped again. There'd probably been an accident ahead, or perhaps road works. There was no way of knowing. We were travelling at about 5 miles an hour if not slower.

And that's when the coffee came into play!

I felt I needed to go to the men's room; but unfortunately Jennifer's car did not have such a facility. At first I put up with the slight discomfort which, with every passing minute, grew into ... a more pronounced pain.

"Why are you fidgeting in your seat?" she asked me.

Embarrassingly, I told her. She sympathised by hoping we'd soon be out of this slow traffic.

Fifteen minutes later I became desperate. We'd been at a standstill for quite a while with cars parked all around us.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

Jennifer said she had an idea. She got out of the car, opened the boot, and came back holding a small potty in her hand.

"We always keep this in the car for my young son," she said, "perhaps you could use it and then discreetly empty it on the road."

"What?" I asked in a panic, "I couldn't possibly ... besides, it's too small ..."

"I'm not asking you to place it on the ground and stand on the seat aiming at it!" she said irritably, "just do it sitting down."

"With you here beside me watching me? It's too embarrassing ... " I replied crossing my legs together.

"Forget it ..." she said with gritted teeth as she drove forward a few yards and put the brakes on suddenly turning my pronounced pain into extreme agony.

"What I meant ..." I said soothingly, "the potty is too small for me to use fully ..."

"Do it in stages ..." she replied increasing her level of irritability.

"I can't just turn it on and off like a faucet" I pleaded sheepishly.

And that's when I realised the reason for her uncharacteristic bad temper.

"And I can't exactly lift my dress and sit on the potty inside the car, can I?" she hissed under her breath, "or would you prefer me to sit on the potty in full view in the middle of the road?"

She was obviously in the same coffee predicament as myself.

We drove silently for about twenty minutes when we eventually reached an exit on the highway. As soon as we left the highway I asked her to stop by some woodland and I ran behind a tree and some bushes to commune with nature.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

Jennifer, on the other hand, was much more of a lady than I ever was, or will be. She got out of the car and asked me to drive.

I sped to the nearest diner a mile or so ahead where we welcomed a much earned comfort break; and then we sat down and enjoyed their variety of coffees.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

LOST

I've just lost a game of chess to a vacuum cleaner.

Let me explain.

I like playing chess, especially when my opponent is good and I have to plan a few moves ahead. Shall I move the knight? Or the bishop to trap my opponent?

Anyway, I brought out my white and pink chess board given to me as a present years ago and set out all the pieces.

I then got my chess book recording games from the old masters and set out to role play an old game. Me against an old master.

First I played the master's move by placing his chess piece as recorded in the book. Then I hid the rest of the text in the book, and decided where I would move my piece next had I been playing this game in real life. Then I checked the book to see if I made the right decision.

Slow and labourious perhaps, but it's a great way to learn how old champions played each other.

After about half-an-hour, to my dismay, two pages in the book were stuck together with old age. Married for life and not to be pulled apart until death doth separate them.

Rather than risk tearing the book, I left it aside and went searching for an older book I had in a box in the living room, hidden behind a piece of furniture.

In my eagerness to find the game I was playing, for I was sure it was in that book also, I forgot to wipe the book clean first. Some dust from the book fell on the chess board and the pieces.

I got the vacuum cleaner and with the tube I tried to clean off the dust on the chess board.

The vacuum cleaner sucked off all the pieces from the board and won the game !!!

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

INTERVIEW WITH MY BRAIN

Me: Well ... that's interesting ... I'm talking to my brain.

Brain: I would prefer it if you did not call me "my brain".

Me: What would you like me to call you?

Brain: I am your consciousness.

Me: Hein?

Brain: Your consciousness ... you've heard the saying to be conscious is to be aware that you exist. Is a dog or cat aware that he exists? Does he know he is a dog? Or does he act through instincts? You are aware you exist ... you're conscious. If you prefer you can call me the soul! That's what most people choose to call their inner self.

Me: Wow ... this is getting complicated.

Soul: It isn't. Let's look at it another way. Imagine we have a car. It goes forwards, backwards, left and right, slow or fast. It doesn't do this by itself. The driver inside it makes it move or stop.

The car is your body, and the driver inside it is me ... your soul. The brain is merely the engine of the car. It's an organ which receives and sends information to the other organs or components such as the heart, liver, kidneys, ears and eyes and so on. Just like the engine of the car receives information from the steering wheel, the driving pedal and the brakes and sends it to the wheels.

The soul is the driver, the body is the car, and the brain and other organs are just components.

Me: Wow once again ... I never thought of it that way.

Soul: I was put in the car ... your body ... the moment you were created. When you were born. I accumulate knowledge over the years based on the surroundings and environment I am in, the love and care I receive from other souls, my up-bringing, my education and lots of other factors. And

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

with all this information I am free to steer the body anyway I like ... with me in it of course.

Me: Free to steer the body ... I never thought of it that way.

Soul: Yes ... the soul is the main driver and is responsible for all actions taken throughout the journey. Whether to go left or right, to do good or bad and so on. I am influenced by many factors as I've explained but the final decision and responsibility for the journey is mine.

Me: You mean up-bringing, education and all these things!

Soul: That's not all ... I am also influenced by a Higher Being ... my Creator ... mostly known as God. He advises me just as a driver would have a passenger next to him showing him the way. The driver is free to accept the advice or go his own way ... perhaps influenced by ... shall we say ... other not so good advice!

Me: Wow once more ... for the third time.

Soul: And as the journey goes on ... over the years the car gets worn out and tired, perhaps damaged along the way, until the time comes when it can go on no more. That's when it's time for me to get out and go to meet my Creator.

Me: Why?

Soul: To tell Him how I got on with my journey. And depending on that He will hopefully give me a prize!

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

THE BALL OF WOOL

Once upon a time there was a little boy of about ten going home from school. As he crossed through the woods he met an old lady who stopped and talked to him. He told her that he was sad because he was unhappy at school. She gave him a gift of a ball of wool.

"Whenever you're unhappy" she said, "just unwind some of this wool and your unhappiness will pass away!"

For a few days he did nothing with his new gift. But one day he got home really upset because he was being bullied by the other children. He took out the ball of wool and unwound it a few turns to see what would happen.

Suddenly, he was a couple of years older, still at the same school, but no longer bullied.

He was a young teenager now, enjoying school, but he wished he could go out late in the evenings and at weekends with his friends. His parents would not let him do so however out of love and parental caring.

"If only I was a bit older" he thought, "then my parents would allow me to go out whenever I want!"

He unwound a few more turns of the ball of wool and he was soon nineteen years old; a young man able to drive and go out with friends.

He got to like a particular young lady he met at college and wished they could date. But he was still a student, he did not have a steady job and money to buy her all the gifts he thought she deserved; and go on holidays together and enjoy themselves.

A few more turns of the ball of wool and he was in his late twenties.

Married to the girl of his dreams and with a young family. A good job and a beautiful house. But the young children were a bit of a problem. The baby up all night, the older toddler wanting to play all the time, teething problems, childhood sickness, and all the difficulties one has with a young family that obscured his real happiness and joy. He was always tired in the mornings not having slept all night because of the baby crying. His

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

wife tried her best to raise the family and keep home, but somehow life was difficult for all of them with all the chores one has to do.

"If only the children were a bit older" he thought; and a few more turns of the ball of wool and the kids were about eleven and nine. But sadly at this time his father became very ill and died.

The young man was totally distraught and could not get over his father's death. He lost all interest in family, work, and life in general.

"Make the pain go away" he cried as he unwound a few more turns of the ball of wool.

The children were much older now and studying at University. His hairs had gone grey a little and he struggled to go to work every day, having to drive long distances and cope with ever increasing responsibilities. He also suffered from a few minor pains and aches one gets as one gets older. His mother had grown older too and was frequently unwell. As a good son he often took her to the doctor's and for frequent hospital visits. This added to his ever increasing workload.

He felt sorry for his mother in old age, he felt sorry for his wife also getting older and struggling a little with daily life, he worried about his children having left the nest and taking their first steps into adult life. He became concerned as to how much longer he could keep working with his many ailments.

He unwound the ball of wool a little more to get out of his melancholy.

As he did so, his mother grew ever so older and eventually died.

This tragedy broke his heart more than losing his father. His children had grown up and moved away with families of their own. His wife was grey haired too and ever lovingly by his side. His minor pains and aches had developed into painful ailments and illnesses requiring constant care and medication. It was now his turn to visit doctors and hospitals for frequent check-ups.

He became ever so sad at having lost his parents and children so far away from home that he rarely saw them. He longed to be with his

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

grandchildren but they lived so far that he could not manage the travelling involved.

Every day became a struggle as he stayed at home nursing his many ailments and being looked after by his loving wife. He regretted his state of affairs and the fact that life could not be better.

One night, sitting in his room, he held the ball of wool now no bigger than his thumb in his trembling weak hands, and wondered where all the years had gone. He cursed the old lady who gave it to him as a gift all that long ago.

In his tiredness he fell asleep and the ball of wool fell to the ground and unwound itself completely. With a last gasp of breath he died.

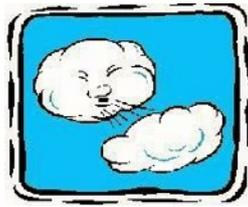
The little boy of ten had lived all his life in a matter of weeks.

MORAL OF THE STORY

Know when you are really happy and thank God for it.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

BLOWING IN THE WIND



Why is it that embarrassing things keep happening to me?

Let me explain.

At our supermarket car park you usually pick up a ticket at the barrier which you place inside your windscreen so that the car park attendant can easily see it when he does his rounds. When you leave, you hand the ticket at the exit barrier and if you've stayed over an hour you pay a small fee; otherwise you have parked for free.

I'd finished shopping and I placed all my goods in the car. As I opened the driver's door a gust of wind blew the ticket out of the car. I chased after it. It went under another parked car some yards away. I looked around for the car park attendant - there was no one to be seen. The place was deserted.

I knelt down and there winking at me teasingly was the ticket under a parked van. It was just out of reach as it smiled at me saying: "Come and get me!"

I went totally flat on my tummy and stretched my arm right out under the car, inching forwards a bit at a time until I touched the ticket with my fingertips. Another stretch and ... "Got it!"

At this point I heard a woman say: "Are you all right Sir?"

I eased myself from under the car as she said: "You seem to have fainted, Sir; and rolled under this van!"

Before I could explain myself she had called the car park attendant who now appeared out of nowhere. Where was he when I needed him?

The attendant called for help on his walkie-talkie radio. Another shop assistant turned up with a chair followed by someone else with a glass of water.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

"Sit down Sir ..." they all seemed to say in unison, "have a sip of drink!"

I tried to explain what had really happened ...

"He's delirious poor soul ..." said the woman who first found me on the ground, "he doesn't know what he's saying ... maybe he hit his head hard as he fell!"

"I did not fall ..." I said biting my lip to suppress any insults on my mind "I went down on my knees voluntarily!"

"Did you want to pray, dear?" she asked patronisingly, then turning to the others she mumbled "he doesn't know where he is ... thinks he's in church!"

At this point the first aider turned up with his bag with a red cross on it. He opened it and asked "Is he bleeding? Where did he hit his head?"

Before I could answer, the assistant manager turns up and asks me "Are you making a complaint and seeking compensation, Sir?"

This gave me the opportunity to explain matters to someone who might be able to listen. I asked that everyone leaves except the assistant manager. I told him what happened and assured him I had not intention to make any complaint or seek compensation. I just wanted to leave.

He went away much relieved.

As I reached the exit barrier the attendant there wanted to charge me a fee for overstaying my welcome.

I had to explain it all over again. He called the assistant manager who let me out without paying.

The moral of this story is:

You don't need to go down on your knees to pray.

No ... that's not it.

Oh ... watch out for gusts of wind before you open the car door. (Don't eat too many beans!)

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

CATAclysmic Catastrophe

Some friends of ours arranged that we'd all go as two families to a beautiful stately home out in the country. The intention was to visit the mansion and also have a picnic in the park. Apparently there was also a Garden Fair in the surrounding grounds which would add to the fun and excitement of the day.

"Not as good as watching football on TV" I thought, but I was outnumbered a million to one. They all seem to have more votes than me somehow!

On the day in question our friends turned up to our house in a mini-van type vehicle, like a small bus. Everyone got into their car with picnic baskets and what have you.

Everyone except me that is. There was no room for me. I tried to use this as an excuse to watch the football ... but I was outnumbered.

Apparently, there was a cat beauty competition at the Garden Fair and it was decided, (outnumbered as ever), that as my car was at the garage for service, I'd follow our friend's mini-van in a taxi; with our cat in one of those special cages to carry pets in.

I waited on the sidewalk for the taxi. When it arrived I put the cat on the back seat and said to the driver "We're following that car!"

How often had I seen this particular scene in movies, and how much I longed to jump in a taxi and say: "Follow that car!" - Well, now it was my turn to say it. And I said it with authority. Just like a movie hero would.

I then realized that I did not have my hat. You know the one. A cowboy hat made of green felt with a large feather on the side. I never go anywhere without it.

I got back in the house to get the hat and when I returned the taxi had gone. So had my friends!

I stood there in a daze. What's happened? I looked at the empty space where the taxi was, perhaps hoping for its sudden re-appearance.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

I looked up the street ... down the street ... don't know why ... they'd hardly reverse all the way to the stately home ... nothing. No friends, no taxi ... nothing. Not even anyone to ask if they'd seen what happened.

Now the intelligent thing to do is to go in the house and watch football on TV.

Not me ... after a few examinations of conscience on what I should do, I phoned the taxi firm. They confirmed the booking. They said they'd contact the taxi by radio and ring me back.

Twenty minutes later the taxi firm rang back. The taxi arrived at 49 Acacia Avenue and the owners there did not want the cat.

The cat ... I'd forgotten about the cat. It was on the back seat of the taxi in its box.

Apparently, the taxi driver followed another car instead of my friends' mini-van type vehicle. No wonder the people in Acacia Avenue were confused when they were gifted a cat.

I asked the taxi firm to return my cat to me.

Whilst I waited I tried in vain to remember the name of the stupid stately home we're supposed to be at. Our friends had mentioned it but I didn't make a mental note, seeing I was not interested in the whole adventure anyway.

I tried phoning them on the cell-phones. There's at least three cell-phones in that van whose numbers I have recorded here on my phone ... no replies. Phones switched off.

What is the point of having a cell-phone if it is kept switched off? You might as well have a fridge which you never bother to plug into the mains electricity, or a cat entering a cat competition without being there!

I left messages on the cell-phones. I waited for the cat to get home which, I hasten to say, cost me a fortune in taxi fares going all the way to Acacia Avenue and back again.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

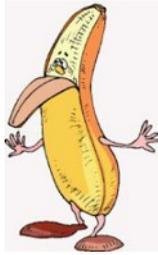
There was no point taking the taxi to a stately home whose name I did not know.

So I finally did the intelligent thing. I settled down to watch the football on TV with a glass of cool Guinness.

The family never forgave me for my absence ... or should I say the cat's absence. Apparently a mangy old black cat won instead of our beautiful ginger tom.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

A BANANA STOLE MY BICYCLE



In town there is a pedestrianized street to allow people to shop and sight-see away from any vehicles and cycles. There are bollards at either end of the street to stop any vehicles from entering and signs asking cyclists to dismount whilst going through.

I leant my bicycle against one of those bollards and walked six feet or so towards the newspaper kiosk to buy a paper.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a banana appeared, rode my bike and cycled at speed up the pedestrianized street.

I chased after it to the shouts of the paper vendor screaming: "Hey ... come back ... you haven't paid for your paper!"

The vendor's assistant got out of the kiosk and chased after me.

There we were ... banana on a bicycle chased by me being chased by the paper assistant. At one stage I believe a small dog got away from its owner and chased after us barking as loud as he could.

The shoppers moved aside like the parting of the Red Sea for Moses and let us run down the middle of the street.

I suspect they thought it was some "flash mob" type stunt so they stopped to see what would happen next. At the time I was wearing my usual green cowboy hat with a feather on the side, turquoise shirt and red tartan trousers. I heard someone say: "It's a Candid Camera stunt! Look how he's dressed!"

I nearly caught up with the cycling banana and at one stage almost caught him ... her ... it ... What gender is a banana anyway? But it was too slippery and gave me the slip.

I stopped as I ran out of stamina or energy or whatever it is people run out of when they can run no more.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

The paper boy caught up with me and started arguing. A policeman appeared out of nowhere. I tried to explain that a banana stole my bicycle. He asked me if I'd been drinking. The paper boy accused me of stealing a newspaper, which technically was correct, although there were proper extenuating circumstances.

As we were both talking together trying to explain what happened to the policeman a voice boomed "Cut ... cut ..."

We looked round and there was a small crowd of people with cameras, lights, microphones and all the paraphernalia used when shooting a film.

Apparently, they were making a short TV commercial for a new fruit shop which opens shortly in town, and the banana man was meant to pick up a bike from the bollard point and cycle up the street to introduce the advert. He inadvertently took my cycle by mistake and my chasing after him ruined the whole shoot.

I paid the paper boy and got my bicycle back.

The icing on the un-wanted cake was when a small group of people asked me for my autograph thinking I was part of the whole ridiculous show.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

A PORTRAIT OF THE VICTOR AS A YOUNG MAN

It all happened so long ago yet memories flood back as clearly as if it were just happening.

As a young man I had to visit one of our Branch Offices in the big city with a colleague of mine, Josh MacKintosh, to discuss future sales and profits projections.

It was a cold and snowing winter's day when we arrived at the Railway Station and were met by a chauffeur driven car sent by our Branch Office - after all, it isn't often they get a visit from top management, and they were trying hard to impress.

The visit was to last for two days and they looked after us well. At the end of the first day they offered the chauffeur driven car to take us to the hotel.

As we entered the car, the driver asked us which hotel we were staying at, and Josh blurted out an address. The driver raised an eyebrow and said nothing.

At this point I should mention perhaps that Josh MacKintosh was careful with money. He had an aversion to opening his wallet lest he disturbed the moths living there.

As the car drove on, heading outside the big city, I noticed that the surroundings were becoming less and less salubrious. It was obvious from the houses and the general feel of the place that we were heading for the poorer part of town ... much poorer part of town. Despite the snow covering everything with its mantle of white it could not hide the poverty of the place.

It was as if we were travelling back in time to Dickensian England.

Eventually the posh car stopped outside a dilapidated house. The chauffeur got out of his seat and opened the doors for Josh and I. He then opened the boot and brought us our luggage.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

Around us a lot of urchins stopped playing football with a rolled up sock filled with sand and looked at us in our pin-striped suits. They'd obviously never seen a limousine before nor anyone dressed as we did.

The chauffeur saluted by touching his hat gently and then drove off.

As we stood there in the freezing cold I heard myself mumble "Are you sure about this, Josh?"

"Och aye ... it's OK," he said, "my friend recommended it!"

We entered the house and were met by a young-ish woman named Elvira; she was in her mid-thirties I would guess.

She took us to our rooms upstairs and suggested that "dinner" was at seven o'clock prompt.

As Elvira left I noticed that the door had no lock, and the room was rather cold and damp, but at least it had hot and cold running cockroaches.

I killed one of them on the wall by my bed and pretty soon there were dozen others attending the funeral.

I pulled the bed away from the wall and the cockroaches pulled it back to hide their habitat.

I decided that we were not eating at this place. We had no choice but to spend the night there, especially since it was cold and snowing outside and our car had gone, but I had no intention to risk eating at this unhygienic house.

Josh and I went out for somewhere to eat ... but would you really find a restaurant in this part of town? We just bought a bit of bread, some cheese and an apple or two from a small shop still open and decided to eat in our rooms.

As we neared the house a man brandishing a knife stopped us and asked for our wallets or our lives. I must admit that for a few seconds I had difficulty in deciding.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

I then said sarcastically, "You're too late mate! We've already been mugged by another man down the street."

To my surprise our mugger replied, "Oh that must be Gary. I told him many times this is my street!"

He let us go and as we were leaving he shouted "Say Hi to Elvira for me !!!"

Josh and I got home and after sharing our meagre repast we decided to call it a day.

I went to my room, got in bed to keep warm as best I can, and started reading the many reports I'd been given by Branch Office about their sales and profits projections.

After an hour or so there was a knock at the door and Elvira came in wearing a very revealing see-through white negligent. (Is that what they call it?)

I did not know where to look ... well, I did really, because she was speaking to me at the time. And it is not polite to look elsewhere when someone is speaking to you.

"Do you want some time?" she asked with a smile.

I must have misheard her, (or was it my subconscious), because I looked at my watch and said "It is a quarter to ten!"

She moved forward a couple more steps teasingly and asked again "Do you want something to keep you warm?"

"Yes please," I replied, "I'd like a hot chocolate drink if I may".

"You don't understand ..." she continued patiently as she sat on the bed, "You have not left your shoes outside the door, which means you require personal services ..."

At last the penny dropped in a young man's befuddled mind. So that's why she was wearing nothing else but the revealing see-through negligent despite the freezing cold! I thought she was just hot-blooded.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

"My shoes ..." I mumbled "I'll ... I'll ... I'll put them out later ... I must have forgotten ..."

"So I went to all this trouble for nothing?" she growled as she stood up, "do you think your friend forgot to put his shoes out too?"

"I don't know ... better ask him ..." I mumbled again as she left.

Needless to say, I stayed up all night fearful in case anyone took my shoes !!!

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

A GHOSTLY EXPERIENCE

Not many people believe in ghosts. I didn't either. Until one day I saw one. Yes, I saw a ghost and he spoke to me. I'll never forget the experience.

It happened years ago on a dark and wintry night in the depth of a mountainous region of Scotland. I was driving late at night after visiting some business customers up North and somehow I lost my way. It was the days before satellite navigation systems and cell-phones to help you communicate and get from one place to another. It was raining heavily with thunder and lightning brightening the skies for brief intervals and piercing the darkness of the road ahead. As usually happens in ghost stories and movies, my car eventually stopped having run out of gas. But this was for real. Not a movie script which I could put down and return to my reality sitting next to a warm fire with a hot chocolate drink in my hands. This was for real. My car stopped in the middle of nowhere on a cold rainy night with thunder and lightning for companionship. I swear I heard the howling of some wild creature in the distance.

What was I to do? I couldn't stay in the car all night and possibly freeze to death. Or be tinned food for whatever hungry creature is out there. I had no blanket in the car and I'd forgotten my overcoat at the office of the business I was visiting on behalf of my employer.

So there I was. All alone in a car with no means of communication. Cold. Hungry. Afraid. And I wanted to go to the toilet too. I should not have had that second cup of coffee they offered me. Coffee is quite diuretic, you know.

Stupidly perhaps, I decided to get out of the car and water a nearby tree. I could hold it no longer. Moments later I was back in the car totally wet and even colder than before because of the driving rain; but greatly relieved. After all, I had to do what I had to do and I could not do it from inside the car.

Now back in the car I was shivering and my teeth were chattering in tune with my racing heartbeat. My wet clothes stuck to the leather seat. My shoes and socks were soaking wet throughout. Because of the rain ... the rain ... are you paying attention? Please don't make up your own jokes at my misfortune.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

Stupidly again, I decided to get out of the car and walk in any direction trying to find shelter. I locked the car and walked ahead in total darkness and driving rain, (or should I now say walking rain?). Every so often my solitude was broken by the occasional clap of thunder followed by a flash of lightning. (This was Scotland where thunder comes first because up North sound travels faster than light. Everyone knows that!)

Anyway, after walking for about half an hour there it was. Not a castle, as you'd expect in the Highlands. But a house. Admittedly a large house; again just like you'd expect in horror movies, big and dark with overhanging trees and climbing ivy everywhere. But not a castle.

I knocked at the door ... no bell. And eventually, after what seemed an eternity an old man opened the door.

He was wearing an eye patch. What I mean, he was wearing clothes, very old clothes, and he had an eye patch on. Did you really think he was wearing nothing else but an eye patch? I wish you'd pay more attention.

"Och aye ... It's a dreich day! Aye right." he said in his native tongue. I didn't understand a word he said, so I asked him whether I could seek shelter for the night.

"Yer're drookit!" he said, "Aye ... come in ... come in ..."

I entered a dark room lit by a couple of candles. He beckoned me to sit by a small log fire to keep warm. As I sat there still shivering he walked away towards the wall and vanished through it. My blood ran cold. A shiver, ran down my spine ... that's a new shiver, not the one I was shivering with previously. I could have said a frisson, but I was in Scotland not France. So a shiver it was ... och aye!

I could not believe my eyes. The man had actually walked through a wall. Admittedly, it was dark, I was cold and freezing wet and quite hungry, but I assure you I was not hallucinating. I did not imagine it. The man just walked towards the wall and vanished through it. The experience made me want to go to the toilet once again; and this time it had nothing to do with the coffee. I must have cried in fear a little because I felt tears running down my leg.

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Moments later he returned through the wall just as he had vanished. He stood there looking at me with one eye. The other eye was covered by an eye patch, remember.

My knees were knocking together in rhythm with my heart and chattering teeth. I had butterflies in my stomach and their knees were knocking too. Even my goose bumps had goose bumps of their own.

"Are you ... are you ... a spirit?" I heard myself mumble.

"Yer mean ... be I a drop of whisky?" he muttered, "Of course not ... I be a ghost ... A ghost, laddie. I been here fer' years. Och aye! Trapped in this house of doom fer ever, laddie."

I gulped and asked "Are you the ghost of a pirate? I mean ... the eye patch ..." I continued pointing at his face.

"Och no ... laddie," he said, "this be no pirate's doing! I got this one day as I was sliding through a keyhole and someone put a key in it. Occupational hazard for us ghosts!"

I smiled and said nothing.

"Now I just walk right through walls and solid objects" he said in perfect English, "much safer what?"

I picked up a bottle of vintage whisky nearby and took a gulp to keep me warm.

They found me the next morning fast asleep with an empty bottle beside me.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

HELLO. HOW MAY I HELP YOU?

Travel Agent Lady: Hello ... how may I help you?

Me: Oh hi ... I'd like to book a room in a good hotel in Aberdeen for about a week.

TAL: Certainly Sir, when will that be?

Me: Now, right now ...

TAL: You'd like a room starting today, Sir?

Me: No ... no ... I'd like to book the room right now.

TAL: I understand ... and when would you like to stay in Aberdeen.

Me: Next month ... the week starting the 12th. I'll be staying for the whole week.

TAL: Do you have a preference of hotel Sir?

Me: No ... I don't know Aberdeen that well. I want a good hotel, not just a bed and breakfast.

TAL: Yes Sir. I have one available which I am sure will be suitable. May I have your name and address please Sir? And a telephone number where we can contact you? Thank you Sir. Will you require a single or a double bed room?

Me: Oh double bed ... a large bed. And make sure there's a TV too.

TAL: Yes Sir ... all rooms have a TV, telephone, Internet access, as well as adjoining bathroom and several other facilities. I'll be sending you a hotel brochure Sir. Meanwhile, I need a name for the other guest staying with you, Sir. Will that be Mrs M...?

Me: No ... no ... my wife will not be with me.

TAL: So it's just you, Sir?

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Me: No ... me and Maurice.

TAL: Maurice ... That's the other guest ... May I have Maurice's surname please Sir?

Me: Just Maurice ... he has no surname ... Just Maurice and I will be staying for a week.

TAL: I understand Sir ... That's a double room for a week commencing the 12th of next month for yourself and Maurice. Will there be anything else Sir?

Me: Eh ... yes ... does the hotel have room service? Can we order breakfast and other meals to be delivered to our room? We'd rather stay in the room most of the time.

TAL: Yes Sir. There will be a menu in your room and you can phone your order which will be delivered at any time day or night. Some guests prefer to have a meal at all hours, like two in the morning, for example. This hotel will deliver any meal you wish to your room at any time for you and Maurice to enjoy.

Me: That sounds great ... One more thing. Will they also deliver bones?

TAL: Bones, Sir?

Me: Yes... raw bones, for Maurice.

TAL: I don't understand Sir.

Me: Maurice prefers raw bones before his performance.

TAL: I still don't understand Sir.

Me: We're in Aberdeen for the sheep dog trials. We're coming incognito. We'll enter the trials in the last possible moment. That's why we'll stay in the hotel room for as long as possible. Maurice is a champion sheepdog, and any news of his entrance in the show will affect the betting odds, you see.

TAL: Yes Sir ... I see clearly now ... (deep breath) ... I understand.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

DEAR DIARY

It's been a while since I communicated with you and shared my deepest feelings and inner thoughts. In all truth, a lot has been happening lately and I feel rather melancholy. I have this heavy weight on my heart which makes me rather sad.

Perhaps I should not have had so much ravioli. I pride myself in always having a well-balanced meal. Ravioli for starters. Ravioli for the main meal. And ravioli for dessert. Perhaps it was the honey on that last plate of ravioli which did it for me!

Anyway, on Monday I did some gardening and fell off the ladder and hurt my foot. I didn't cry so much since that day I lost 20 pence!

But sad and painful as that day was, I mean Monday, as well as that day years ago when I lost 20 pence, Tuesday was much much worse.

On Tuesday I got mugged on my way back from the newsagent. They had delivered the paper in the morning as usual but I noticed that on page six the corner of the page was torn a little. Not much of a tear, about an inch, but enough to make the paper damaged as opposed to new. So I went to the newsagent for another copy of the paper.

On my way back home a young man pointed a plastic knife at me and said "Your money or your life!" It took me a couple of minutes or so to decide my options. The knife blade was at least two inches long so I decided to give him my money. I gave him all I had on me - 60 pence.

When the man ran away I went to the police station and reported the mugging. They asked me for a description and I said the 50 pence coin was dated 2006 and the 10 pence coin was 2008. They still haven't found the money to return to me.

On Wednesday evening there were a lot of birds chirping and settling for the night in the trees in our back garden. It was wonderful to hear and see it all. I called the Mrs to come and see. She said she was busy but eventually came out in the garden with her hair in curlers and her face all creamed up; you know, a white cream to make skin soft or something. She was quite a sight. The cat got frightened and rushed up the tree. The dog, for some reason, barked and then bit my leg.

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The sight of the Mrs with cream on her face had quite an effect on the birds. The next day they returned all the seeds they had taken from our garden the previous years. She must have frightened them to death!

I'm glad Dear Diary that no one reads you except me. The things I write here ... Actually, I tell you a secret. I keep two diaries. You and a decoy one I leave lying around in case it is read. In it I say kind things like how nice the green dress she bought looks; even though it is hideous.

On Thursday our goldfish in the tank in the living room died. I grilled him and had him on toast with tomato ketchup. Afterwards the family said they wanted to bury him in the garden. I quickly produced a small box filled with sand which we ceremoniously buried. I said the farewell prayers: "Wherever you are Toby. May you digest in peace." I was asked what digest means. I said it was like saying "Earth to earth and dust to dust". By the way, I had stomach ache that evening.

On Friday at work we had a new receptionist join us. Her name is Matilda. I welcomed her and congratulated her on her pregnancy. A few minutes later I saw her cry and some women were with her consoling her.

My manager told me that she is rotund by nature, and not pregnant. I asked: "Are you sure?"

After my Friday's faux-pas, I decided to go to Confession on Saturday. I arrived a little late and noticed Father get out of the confessional quickly and hurry into the Sacristy. I'm sure he'd seen me, but he pretended not to. I followed him into the Sacristy and asked to go to Confession. He said if it is the same sins as last week he'd give me absolution there and then. I explained that this was a new sin; never sinned before, and that I needed to go to Confession. He said: "All right ... if you must!" and he sat down in the Sacristy and asked me what was on my mind. I told him about the pregnancy that never was and he said: "Oh just that ... OK ... you're absolved!"

Today is Sunday and I've had three courses of ravioli. I suppose this is greedy. I'll confess it next week.

That's all for now Diary.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

DEAR DIARY (2)

Dear Diary,

Here I am once again sharing a few minutes with you.

The other day I went out to the pizza shop to get myself something to eat. In front of me in the queue was another customer. The pizza man put the customer's pizza in a card box and asked him: "Do you want it sliced in 6 or 8 pieces?"

The man replied: "Six pieces please, I'm not that hungry to eat eight pieces".

God must really love stupid people considering He created so many.

I was thinking about my friend Fred yesterday. I haven't heard from him since he became a mime artist.

He told me he'd been visiting a hypnotist to cure him of the compulsion to visit hypnotists. He'd gone to a hypnotist to cure him of his fear of heights. He got hypnotised and when he woke up he was on top of the cupboard. Anyway, enough about my friend Fred.

On Tuesday I went to the doctor with fluid on the knee and he said: "You're not aiming straight!" What did he mean?

I then got this new deodorant stick. The instructions said, "Remove cap and push up bottom." I can barely walk with it, but when I "toot" I smell real nice.

I went to the cemetery on Wednesday to lay some flowers on a grave. As I was standing there I noticed four grave diggers walking about with a coffin. An hour later and they're still walking about with it. I thought to myself, they've lost the plot!!

On the way back I remembered that my daughter had asked me for a pet spider for her birthday. So I went to our local pet shop and they were £15 each. Blow this, I thought, I can get one cheaper off the web.

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I then went next door to the baker's and asked him for a wasp. "We don't sell wasps!" he said. "You've got one in the shop window!" I replied.

On Wednesday night Thursday morning my neighbour knocked on my door at 2:30 in the morning. Can you believe that, 2:30am?! Luckily for him I was still up playing my bagpipes.

At lunchtime on Thursday I went to a Department Store with a colleague from work. She picked up a pink negligee from the display unit, put it accross her and with a smile she said expectantly: "Do you like this?" I gulped and replied: "I don't look good in a negligee!" She frowned and said nothing. Pink isn't even my favorite color!

On Thursday night I had a terrible dream. I dreamt that the ghost of Gloria Gaynor was standing at the foot of my bed. At first I was afraid ... then I was petrified.

I went to the library on Friday. I stood by the "Geography" shelves and looked at a few books. A few moments later a man approached me and said "Do you realise that all the time you've been standing here a hundred square miles of rainforest have been destroyed?" So I moved somewhere else. I don't want to be responsible for the destruction of any forest.

As I left the library, there were a few people in the street handing out leaflets about Freedom of Speech. One asked me "Do you believe in free speech, Sir?" I nodded and said yes. "Good," he continued, "can I use your cell-phone please?"

On Saturday I went to Confession. The priest said "Do you realise you've confessed the same sins and in exactly the same order for the past five weeks?" I replied "I am a regular sinner. Not a haphazard one who sins informally whenever temptation strikes!"

Some time ago this same priest said to me "You know there are two priests in this Parish. It would be beneficial to you if you confessed to Father Bruno Crusher every now and then!" I replied, "That's funny. It's exactly what Father Bruno said to me when I used to confess to him."

My priest, undeterred, continued, "Why don't you try St Vincent Church in town for a while?"

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Actually I had tried that church some time ago. After a few weeks their priest asked me during Confession "Are you from this Parish?" I said I wasn't. He then said "Go confess in your own Parish. We have enough sinners over here without us having others from somewhere else!"

I think I'll have to be innovative with my sins during Confession. Perhaps I could alter the order in which I say them, and leave a sin out every now and then. See if the priest notices!

On Sunday a friend and I went mountain climbing. Well ... not mountains as such, but very high hills near us. As we almost reached the summit it started raining. My friend slipped and hurt his ankle. He didn't break any bones but he hurt badly. We sheltered behind some rocks and got more and more wet as it continued to rain. It was getting very cold and the evening was drawing in. I was concerned we'd have to spend the night in the open. Then I heard from a distance someone call my name. After a while ... there it was again. Someone with a loud speaker was calling my name and also shouted "We are The Mountain Rescue! We are looking for you!"

I shouted back: "I gave at the office!"

Honestly ... here I was hoping someone would come out and save us, and these people were out for a collection. In this weather too!

Eventually they found us and helped my friend and I down the mountain.

Ha ... ha ... they forgot to pass their collection tin round. So I paid them nothing.

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MY INSENSITIVE SENSITIVITY

I think I am generally a sensitive person always caring for other people's feelings as best I can; even though at times my own feelings are really hurt; like the many times Lego bricks are left lying on the carpet and I step on one of them in bare feet. I politely say "By Jove, that was a tad uncomfortable!" and move on, rather than let my real feelings come to the fore.

The point I'm trying to make here is that although I try my best in the "caring" department there are times when circumstances conspire to make me appear insensitive.

Years ago we had a guinea pig called Porcus. Why a Latin name, I don't know. I would have gladly named him Pork, or Bacon, or Ham ... but hey ... the family chose Porcus and that's what it was.

For a few days I was at home alone. The family had gone away and left me in charge of the dog, the cat, the goldfish and Porcus the guinea pig. Not a difficult task really, and plenty of time to watch a series of football games on TV.

All was well in the household until one morning ...

I got up and found Porcus dead in his cage. I shook him up to wake him ... but no, he would not move. I rattled the cage and shouted "Wakey Wakey Porcus" but he did not respond. He was as deaf as a deaf bat! (Best simile I could think of at the time).

I bounced him up and down on the floor but he still would not move. He was well and truly dead.

What an inconsiderate stupid creature! Why could he not die at any other time? Why choose the only time I am alone at home to decide to die? Was it because of the football? Was the TV too loud? Did he not like who won the game last night? Why die now and have everyone blaming me for not taking care of the animals in my care? It was meant to be an easy task after all!

More important ... what do I do with the dead Porcus?

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I can't keep him until they come back because he'll begin to smell. Unless I keep him in the freezer! No ... that's stupid ... I'll be blamed for accidentally freezing him to death! Unless I keep him in the freezer and thaw him out in the microwave a few hours before they return! No ... that's stupid too ... I'll be asked when he died. If I tell the truth I'll be asked how come he is still "fresh" and not smelling after a few days of dying. If I lie that he'd just died, I'd have to go to Confession for lying. It's sometimes inconvenient being a Catholic and having to confess.

I've decided ... I have to get rid of Porcus.

How do I do that? Throw him in the trash can? That's not too dignified is it? Bury him in the garden? That's a possibility ...

For some unknown reason I decided to take the easy way out and give him a naval burial by flushing Porcus down the toilet.

Porcus took his revenge by blocking the toilet system. He got stuck in one of the pipes and would not go away.

I called a plumber ... have you tried calling a plumber in an emergency? They are all too busy for the next century and a half. The most amenable could only come in ten years' time. He said he'll be here in the afternoon because he was busy that morning!

Eventually a plumber arrived and sent Porcus on his way to a watery grave. He asked me what I'll do when the family gets home ... and suggested a replacement would ease the grief and get everyone to focus on naming the new pet.

Good idea ... off to the pet shop I went ... and then the next pet shop ... and the next ... there were no more guinea pigs in the whole wide world. We tried the planet next door, the whole galaxy ... no guinea pigs ...

I was offered a selection of hamsters. In sheer desperation I chose a hamster the same colour and size as Porcus.

As soon as they returned home and looked at the cage I heard "That's not a guinea pig ... it is a hamster!"

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Why is it they have to educate children to know the difference between a guinea pig and a hamster? I mean ... does it really matter? It's small ... furry ... and fits in a cage!

So I had to admit it was a hamster and it was not Porcus doing an imitation of a hamster. I explained that Porcus had been swapped for a hamster because he was homesick and pining to see his family again.

They bought it ... phew ... my sensitivity had triumphed once again!

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

HISTORY - HOW TIME WAS INVENTED

Have you ever wondered how we first learnt to measure time?

Here's a quick lesson you'll never forget.

Many years ago at the time of the Romans there was an Italian called Role. He was the tenth son of a tenth generation of men called Role - in fact he was known as Role the Tenth. Which in Roman times was written Role X.

Anyway Role X, and everyone else for that matter, noticed that it was sometimes daylight and sometimes night. "But how do we measure such a recurring occurrence to see how long is daytime compared to night time." thought Role X.

So he asked the opinion of his friend Galileo who at the time was looking up at the sky and wondering why the sun was always in different locations.

This is not the Galileo physicist, mathematician, astronomer and philosopher who lived between 1564 and 1642 - but most probably an earlier ancestor of his; which shows that the Galileo family were very clever for generations. But I digress.

Anyway, after a short discussion with Galileo, Role X planted a big candle which he had borrowed from his local church right in the middle of his garden. (The candle was in the middle of the garden - not the church. Just pay attention).

He measured the candle carefully. He waited until the sun was right above the candle, (i.e. no shadow), and he lit the large candle and left it lit until the following day when the candle had no shadow again. He then blew the candle out and measured the bit that was left. From this he deduced how much candle had burnt over the period it was lit.

He then got another candle with exactly the same dimensions and marked with his pen 24 equal segments from top to bottom. That's the candle's bottom not his bottom! Are you really paying attention?

He called each segment "hours". He quite rightly thought that if he lit the new candle at the same time as the previous day, (i.e. no shadow), he

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will call that MIDDAY and then every segment as it burnt down would be an HOUR, until the following day when there will be no more segments on the candle; and when there was no shadow (i.e. MIDDAY again).

Are you still paying attention? Good.

Role X decided he'd call the 24 segments one DAY.

He lit the candle and waited. But the experiment did not work because it was windy that night and the candle blew out.

He prepared a third candle which this time he kept indoors. That did not work either because the sun did not cast a shadow indoors.

So in total desperation, Role X bought himself a watch and solved all his problems about time.

Well ... I did promise you a quick lesson you'll never forget. Go buy yourself a watch and forget about lighting candles in the wind.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

HISTORY - THE ROMANS

History can be a dull subject to learn and teach depending of course on who's doing the learning and the teaching.

As a child I once talked in class and the teacher threw a piece of chalk at me. He then said: That'll teach you to talk in class!

And as it happened a long time ago it is history; so I learnt then a history lesson which I remembered to this day.

If you pay attention; you'll learn a bit more history in the next few minutes or so.

Let's go back to Roman times. When men were tough and strong and women told them what to do. Women always had the ability to make men obey their wishes by hiding the remote control even then. But I digress.

In ancient Roman times there were a lot of sculptures of Roman emperors and famous people; these were usually sculptures of their heads and busts and faces, although you could also get sculptures of the whole person if you were rich enough to have one done.

The history behind all these sculptures is quite fascinating I must say.

You see, in Roman times there were a number of check-points by the Roman guards along the Appian Way. That's the strategic main road connecting Rome to Brindisi and Apulia. The road was named after the Roman censor Appius Claudius Caecus.

He it was who held a census in the year something or other AD, and having discovered that most Romans did not like broccoli was frightened out of his census.

Anyway, the Roman Centurion guards along the Appian Way always stopped all chariots and checked that the drivers had a driving license.

Unfortunately, as cameras had not been invented at the time, all owners of chariots, such as emperors, senators and the like, carried a sculpture of their heads or faces with them as a form of Roman Identity Card.

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That's why there are only Roman sculptures of famous people and not the peasants and plebs.

As I said, some Romans were rich enough to carry a sculpture of their whole body with them in their chariots rather than just the head or face. Unfortunately the statues were so heavy that they often broke the chariots and fell to the ground.

This happened to a Roman lady called Venus whose statue fell off the chariot and the arms got broken. Historians have still to work out why she was not wearing any clothes when her sculpture was made; and exactly where her arms were when she posed for the stonemason.

When asked by Venus' angry husband whether she had posed in the nude for him, the stonemason tried to deny it and said that he did the statue from memory. This didn't help his case and the husband punched him on the nose.

History also teaches us that ancient Romans collected urine. By that I don't mean that they resisted going to the toilet and walked around cross-legged. I also don't mean that they collected it like you or I would collect stamps, or books or whatever else people collect as a hobby.

No ... they collected urine in large tubs left around in the street. People would walk by and when nature called they deposited their half-pint in the tub - there in public!!!

The collected deposits were then used in washing all those white togas. Apparently the ammonia in the urine acted like a bleaching agent and turned the togas extra clean and white.

And when all the senators met and debated in the senate and some jeered at one of them making a controversial speech by shouting "You stink!" - they meant it quite literally as well as referring to his speech.

And whilst we're on this subject ... what subject?

Keep quiet and pay attention!

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

I want to mention another person born in Italy who was a famous Greek mathematician, physicist, engineer, inventor, astronomer and all round big head know-it-all.

His name was Archimedes and although he was a Greek he was born in Syracuse in Southern Italy. No doubt his mother was on vacation there at the time; but the least said about it the better!

Anyway, one day this Archimedes fellow was asked by King Hiero II to find out whether a crown he had made was pure gold or whether it contained silver; which is cheaper.

Archimedes thought hard about this problem, especially since he was not allowed to break or damage the crown in any way.

One night as he got home tired he decided to have a bath. Now in those days they didn't have baths like we do today with running water and drainage. All they had was a metal tub which they placed in the middle of the living room and sat in it washing themselves and watching TV.

As TV had not yet been invented they normally put a statue in the corner of the room and watched that instead.

Anyway, as Archimedes entered his house pondering about the crown dilemma he discovered the tub there in the living room with water already in it. He was so tired that he gladly took off his clothes and jumped in the water thus displacing some of the volume therein.

Unbeknown to Archimedes, his wife had filled the tub with sea water and put a few crabs there to keep them fresh until lunch.

Archimedes jumped out of the tub and ran in the street naked shouting "Eureka" which in Greek means "I've found it". However, he also added a few other choice words in his native language which loosely translated mean "Who is the **** who put crabs in my bath? My manhood will never be the same again!"

Later on, as he calmed down a little and nearly got arrested for indecent exposure, he realised that as a body, (his and the crabs), is placed in a tub of water it/they displace an equal amount of water as the volume of said bodies. That didn't mean much to him; so he Googled his crown

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problem and solved the mystery of how to ascertain whether it was pure gold or not. He could of course have checked for any Hallmarks as we do now and save himself all the trouble of an encounter with a dozen crabs.

This concludes our history lesson for now. I hope you'll remember what you've learnt here today.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

HISTORY - GALILEO'S DISCOVERY

This history lesson will focus on how we got to find out that the earth is round and revolves around the sun as well as round itself.

It all started a long time ago in Italy when a man called *Galileo Galilei* (1564-1642) became a famous mathematician, physicist and philosopher. He was born in Pisa and often walked leaning sideways. When he eventually became famous the townsfolk built a tower in his honour and made it lean sideways to look just like him.

He achieved great distinction amongst society by doing his homework whilst at school and not wasting time watching TV or playing video games. This proved easy for him because at the time neither TV nor video games had been invented; so it was either a choice of doing homework or helping with the household chores.

Anyway, as he grew up *Galileo* used to think a lot. He would sit on a chair in the veranda for hours and just think rather than help his father work in the fields. One day he looked over the field at the people far away and wondered why they were small. "Do people shrink as they walk away from you?" he thought. "And how is it they grow up again the closer they get to you?"

It was a mystery which exercised his imagination until his friend *Vidi Maximus* suggested that he should invent the telescope.

It is worth noting here that *Vidi Maximus* was the second of the three *Max Brothers* - *Veni, Vidi, Vici*.

Vici was always fighting, whereas *Vidi* had great foresight as well as hindsight because he had eyes at the back of his head. Not much is known of the elder brother *Veni*.

But I digress as I often do to add interest to my conversations and to check whether you're still paying attention or have fallen asleep.

So, using a few inner rolls of toilet paper *Galileo* stuck them together and made a long cardboard tube. He looked down one end and was disheartened to find that the men in the field were just as small as before.

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It took Vidi Maximus quite a lot of patience to explain to Galileo that it would be better if he were to put some lenses in the tube first. And that's how Galileo invented the telescope.

One day as he was sitting in the veranda thinking, Galileo noticed that the shadow of a nearby tree moved every so often and it was not always in the same place. He looked up to the sun and was nearly blinded by its brilliance; so he cursed that he had not invented sunglasses as well as the telescope.

He figured out that either the sun is moving around and so giving the illusion that the shadow is moving, or the sun is standing still in one place and it was the earth which was moving.

He waited until nightfall and then he got his friend Vidi Maximus to walk in a big circle in the street holding a lit torch. To his delight he noticed that as Vidi walked around in a big circle the shadow of the tree moved round as well. This proved to Galileo that the earth moved around the tree ... until Vidi patiently once again pointed out that the earth moved around the sun not the tree.

Eventually, the slow Galileo saw the light, from the torch as well as in his head, and realised that the earth indeed moved round a stationary sun. They were both so excited by their great discovery that they stopped suddenly and cheered at the top of their voices. Unfortunately they were run over by a passing fast chariot.

The following day, dazed and bedraggled, Galileo got out of hospital and decided to go public with his discovery. He told everyone that the earth revolves around the sun. They all laughed at him.

Some church people said that this was all heresy and he should be arrested.

It was at this period, whilst challenged for his beliefs, that he is supposed to have said "Eppur si muove!"

This is a famous saying which in Italian means "and yet it moves".

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This is believed to refer to the fact that he maintained at all times that the earth revolves around the sun; and has nothing to do with the notion that he was referring to his over-large mother-in-law who got up from her chair to make everyone a well deserved Espresso coffee.

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HISTORY - THE GREEKS

Today's history lesson is about the *Ancient Greeks*. A people who have brought civilisation many things we love and cherish today, like the *Olympic Games* as well as *ouzo* and *stuffed vine leaves*.

Of course the *Olympics Games* have changed a lot since they were first held in *Ancient Greece*. In those days the games consisted mostly of running round the track and throwing the *discus* or *javelin*. To be fair, they did try to throw the *boomerang*, a sport introduced by *Australian* competitors, but it did not catch on because the *boomerang* kept coming back and hitting the contestants on the head.

One little known fact about the *Olympics* is that only men competed at the games when held in *Athens*. And they did so totally naked which must have been somewhat disconcerting during the relay race.

Another little known fact about the *Olympics* is that in *Athens*, apart from the men, only *virgins* and *un-married women* were allowed in as spectators. *Married women* were forbidden to watch the *Games* under penalty of death; in case they got attracted to the *naked athletes* and put them off their stride.

By contrast in *Sparta*, which compared to *Athens* was more liberal in outlook, they allowed both men and women to compete in the *Games* in the nude. (I bet there was a lot of socialising afterwards).

The history of the relay race is quite interesting. Apparently, the god *Pormetheus* stole fire from the other gods and brought it down to earth for humans to use. The other gods got very angry, and presumably somewhat cold without a burning fire to keep them warm. So they chased the humans to get their fire back. The humans ran away with burning torches.

The relay race in the original *Olympics* was run with burning torches in honor of the god *Pormetheus*. Also, running naked with someone behind you with a burning torch gave the athletes extra incentive to run faster!

A famous *Greek* was a man called *Pythagoras*. He was a mathematician, philosopher and founder of a movement known as *Pythagoreanism*.

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He believed that the square on the hippopotamus is equal to the two other squares on the other side of the triangle. The triangle of course being an early musical instrument which was easy to tune since it only has one note.

This well known Pythagoras Theorem was taught to children at an early age and is still taught today for no apparent reason, since it has very little to do with getting a job as a celebrity, politician or even a cashier at the supermarket. It is still useful though if you work in a zoo and have to draw a square on the side of a hippopotamus.

Pythagoras, take my word for it, was believed to have a golden thigh. Which must have constricted his speed when he took part in the relay race. On the positive side though, he did not need to win a gold medal since he already had enough gold to weigh him down.

He believed in a strict diet and in particular had an aversion to beans. Hitherto, he noticed that his followers stood upwind from him at meetings; so he stopped eating beans and advised his followers to do the same.

This caused his eventual death when one day his enemies chased after him. He ran as quickly as he could and eventually reached a field where beans were being grown. Rather than enter the field and escape his enemies, he stood his ground and was killed.

Proving the point that it is not always wise to stand on your principles. And so it came to pass that within seconds of standing still by a field of beans, Pythagoras himself became a has-bean.

This is just a short history lesson about the Ancient Greeks. You can check the accuracy thereof in a book which I am writing on the subject. I'm hardly going to lie to myself, am I?

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HISTORY - THE PHOENICIANS

This History Lesson is about the Phoenicians who lived on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea from 1550 BC to 300 BC.

They were trading people using galleys to sail from port to port selling their wares. At first they traded mostly with the Greeks, but in time they became known from Greece to Rome. They sold wood, slaves, glass and a powder called Tyrian purple on which they had a monopoly. This precious powder was a purple dye made from sea snails and used, amongst other things, for royal clothing. The dye was greatly prized in olden days because the colour did not fade easily but became brighter with weathering and sunlight.

Which reminds me; I once put a red shirt amongst white washings in the washing machine and never heard the end of it. Some people have no sense of humour! But I digress.

The Phoenicians were the first people to make extensive use of the alphabet which are the ancestor of the alphabet we use today.

The story of how the alphabet was created is quite fascinating.

Have you ever been fascinated?

I was fascinated with a big needle when I was a baby ... it's a protection against many diseases. But I digress again.

As I was saying before I interrupted myself. The alphabet was created by a Phoenician teacher called Abacus one evening whilst he was in his garden waiting for his wife to come home from the pub. He looked up at the clear sky and admired the number of stars sparkling brightly.

He hummed in his head "Twinkle twinkle little star ..." and as he was humming the song an owl flew past and dropped his load on the teacher's head.

Abacus cried "AAAAAAH !!!!" and as he wiped his head and face with a nearby white dress hanging on the washing line the tune was still humming through his head and it developed into "A ... B C ... D E F ... Gee!"

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He quickly got out his indelible ink pen from his pocket and wrote on the dress the whole alphabet to the tune of "Twinkle twinkle little star" before he could forget it. That's also why both songs have the same tune.

When his wife got home she made him spell words like "Aaaah!!! Ouch !!! Ayeee !!! Stop ... you're hurting me!" using her rolling pin as a writing instrument.

And that's how we got to have the alphabet as we know it today. Remember that next time a bird leaves a souvenir on your head.

Which reminds me of another song about birds ...

"Why do birds ... suddenly appear ... every time ... you are near!!!"

It's because you have seeds in your hair.

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HISTORY - DIOGENES

Diogenes is certainly an interesting character from ancient history. He was also known as Diogenes the Cynic (you'll learn why later) and was born in either 412 or 404 BC (not sure which) and died in 323 BC.

He was a controversial figure. His father was a banker who minted coins for a living, and for a while Diogenes worked with him. There was a banker's scandal and Diogenes was banished from Sinope, the city where he lived.

He moved to Athens where he proclaimed many of his theories:

He believed that virtue is better shown in action rather than in theory.

He criticised the social values and institutions and the corruption in society.

He believed in living the simple life without too many possessions and clutter. (He did not even have a TV because it was yet to be invented).

Diogenes made a virtue of poverty and begged for a living. He slept in a large ceramic jar (or tub) in the marketplace; and was notorious for his philosophical stunts - like carrying a lamp in the daytime, claiming to be looking for an honest man.

When he arrived in Athens Diogenes had a slave called Manes who ran away from him. Diogenes declared: "If Manes can live without Diogenes, why not Diogenes without Manes?" explaining that it was wrong for a master to have a servant doing things for him.

As I mentioned earlier, he lived in poverty in a tub in the market place with no possessions but a small bowl from which he drank. One day he saw a boy drinking from the hollow of his hands; so Diogenes destroyed the bowl and was much grieved that for years he had a useless possession.

In those days it was forbidden to eat in the marketplace. Remember it was the days before fast-food outlets and milkshakes - even chocolate ones, because chocolate too, like TV, had not yet been invented.

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Notwithstanding the lack of a good hamburger, Diogenes would still eat in the marketplace. When he was told off he replied: "It's when I'm in the marketplace that I am hungry; not somewhere else!" A logic which today would have earned him a punch on the nose.

In those days in Athens there were other clever men like Plato, (I believe he could spin twenty plates on long sticks which he would shake every now and then to keep them spinning) and Socrates who much enjoyed the show and made 10% from ticket sales.

During one of his performances Plato described man as a "featherless biped" and the audience applauded in delight at this joke. Easily pleased I suppose!

So Diogenes plucked a chicken and declared to Plato "Behold! I've brought you a man." It is not recorded how Plato reacted; but no doubt the distraction made him loose concentration and he smashed many plates spinning on sticks.

One day whilst in Corinth Diogenes met Alexander the Great. Diogenes was relaxing in the sunlight in the morning. Alexander was keen to meet the famous philosopher and, he being a man of great influence and power, asked Diogenes politely if there was any favour he might do for him. Diogenes replied, "Yes, stand out of my sunlight".

Alexander then declared, "If I were not Alexander, then I should wish to be Diogenes", to which Diogenes replied, "If I were not Diogenes, I should also wish to be Diogenes."

Proving that despite his reputed cleverness Diogenes was in fact stupid because he could have asked Alexander the Great for a TV and chocolate milkshake and civilisation would have enjoyed both much earlier.

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HISTORY - THE BEGINNING OF NUMBERS

We have all grown accustomed to writing numbers as 1, 2, 3 and so on, having learnt them from an early age at school.

But have we thought how these numbers and shapes came to be?

In ancient times, even before when Romans ruled the world, people used to count in a very basic way. They would point at an item; say an apple, and say "an apple". They would write that as an I or just a vertical straight line. Pure and simple.

If they wanted to count more they would say "Another apple", and write II, (two vertical lines) and another apple, III ... and another apple, and another apple ... you get the idea.

This basic system of writing vertical lines every time you added something went on for years and years up to the Roman Empire. (They must have had a lot of apples to count).

And so it came to pass that two items (apples, although it would also work for pears, or grapes), would be represented by II and three items by III, four items by IIII and so on.

For a while everyone was happy with this system.

But it soon became too cumbersome when people started counting 10 apples as IIIIIIIIII. Can you imagine having more than 10 apples? Pretty soon people started confusing big numbers such as eleven: IIIIIIIIII and twelve: IIIIIIIIII and so on.

A centurion in charge of a 100 men would stand them all in a long line and write down IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII and on and on and on ... until he ran out of paper; or his pencil lead would wear out and he'd have to start all over again. Sometimes the soldiers would faint in the sun and the centurion would have to start counting all over again.

When the centurion went to his captain with the attendance record, the captain had to count all the vertical lines on the paper to find out how many soldiers were present. He might as well have counted the soldiers in the first place!

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idea they later franchised to the Swiss). They also had sundials too with Roman numerals. They even painted the sundials with florescent paint so they could tell the time at night.

The use of Roman numerals suddenly stopped one day when, many years later, another Roman ruler, the Emperor Claudius, received a text saying - I LV CLAUDIVS - and he didn't know whether it was an amorous message from his girlfriend or his wife's new telephone number.

He sent a message back saying LOL and got slapped in the face by both his wife and his girlfriend.

In total fury Emperor Claudius banned the use of all cell-phones in the Roman Empire rather than just change the numerical system to the 1, 2, 3 ... which we now use.

In so doing Emperor Claudius held back civilisation by many years because people had invented other electronic devices such as tablets and laptops but were too afraid to use them in case he got angry again.

It wasn't until many centuries later that civilisation as we know it started using the familiar 1, 2, 3, style numerals which we have learnt to love.

Which goes to show that whilst time waits for no man, it certainly stands still when women are getting ready to go out.

Why do they take so long?

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HISTORY - ROBIN HOOD

Today's History Lesson is about a character in English folklore called Robin Hood and his band of Merry-men.

First of all, let me clear up a common misconception. This is not a musical band like Glenn Miller or Benny Goodman or such old style musical bands from long time ago. Albeit Robin Hood and the Merry-men are at least of that period and beyond.

Robin Hood is believed to have lived in the late-12th-century; at the time of King Richard the Lionheart of England. Now some people believe this is all a tall-tale and he never actually existed. But he really did, because I have seen a statue of him in Nottingham, England. So he must have modelled for the statue, don't you think?

Also, there have been many films made about him - so there! he must have existed all those years ago.

Robin and his Merry-men lived in Sherwood Forest and they robbed the rich to help the poor. His companions were called Will Scarlet, Much the Miller's son, Little John and a monk called Friar Tuck. His girlfriend was Maid Marion. And his enemy was the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Robin and his men always wore green. Some believe it was to camouflage themselves in the forest from the Sheriff's soldiers; but truth be known it was because washing machines had not yet been invented, and clothes do get dirty when you spend your life climbing trees like a monkey.

There have been many adventures written about Robin Hood and his Merry-men and all of them seem to have a similar theme. They lived in the forest; they stopped bad rich men travelling through the forest, took their money and gave it to the poor. Every so often the Sheriff of Nottingham works out a plot on how to capture Robin and the plot always seems to fail at the end and they all live happily ever after.

But reality was far different from what we are led to believe in the cinema or in books. The reality is that they lived in a damp and wet forest which froze them to death in winter and gave most of them rheumatism and aches and pains. One day Robin was in such back pain that Friar Tuck, who was a part-time doctor as well as a monk, suggested he stays away

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from all dampness. He couldn't even take a bath in the nearby river. So for weeks Robin sat in an empty tub and vacuum cleaned himself.

Many ballads and songs have been written about Robin and his Merry men being ace swordsmen and great archers able to shoot an arrow through a castle window from a great distance. But again that's an exaggeration.

On one occasion Maid Marion was imprisoned by the Sheriff of Nottingham in a room high up in a tower with her lady-in-waiting Matilda Woodenleg. (They all had rather peculiar names in those days).

Robin Hood and his Merry men gathered outside plotting on how to release them. The idea was that Robin would shoot an arrow with a string attached to it through the narrow window up in the castle where Maid Marion and her lady-in-waiting were there waiting. The lady-in-waiting was waiting on Maid Marion and Maid Marion was waiting for the arrow to fly in through the narrow window.

I hope you're paying attention to all this; because I'm getting rather confused.

Anyway, in those days windows were narrow vertical apertures in the big thick stone walls with no glass as we have now. The always-open windows allowed air to circulate throughout the castle and enabled soldiers to shoot arrows from the windows down on anyone attacking the castle; without themselves being seen or risking being hit by arrows aimed up at them by the attacking armies.

Robin's plan was to shoot an arrow through the window. Maid Marion would pull the string attached to it, which in turn was attached to a rope, which Maid Marion would tie one end to the bed tightly. Robin Hood would then climb up the rope to the window and rescue Maid Marion and her lady-in-waiting, Matilda Woodenleg, who would both be still waiting in their prison room.

After he explained his plan one of the Merry men, Little John, said "You'll never make it mate! The window is too narrow and too high up. No one could shoot an arrow through that from this distance!"

"Except Robin Hood !!!" exclaimed Friar Tuck with a smile.

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Robin replied "I bet you a squirrel's leg I could do it blindfolded".

He was blindfolded and he shot an arrow which hit one of his Merry-men in the backside giving him a scar to be proud of many years later when he related the story and showed his scar to anyone interested in hearing about Robin Hood and his Merry-men.

Robin took off his blindfold and shot a second arrow high up, which entered the window and hit the lady-in-waiting, Matilda Woodenleg, in her good leg making her cry out in agony and bite hard on her wooden leg to stifle her screams.

With no more waiting Maid Marion got the arrow out of Matilda's leg, and pulled up the string and the rope attached to it. She then tied the rope to the bed for Robin Hood to climb up to the window.

When he reached the top Robin found out that the window was too narrow for him to get in or for Maid Marion to get out of; which proves that being a big shot does not stop you from being stupid too.

It is believed that this experience was the precursor of modern slimming diets which we now follow even today to no avail to help us in and out of tight corners. However, since there are no more narrow vertical windows in modern houses and apartments most people prefer eating delicious fast-foods instead which were not invented at the time of Robin Hood. Given a choice any sane person will choose a good hamburger to a slimming diet.

And so over the years many more ballads and stories got written about the various adventures of Robin Hood and his prowess as a swordsman and archer. But these were all for the benefit of the book and film industries and their authenticity is often disputed.

For example, there is no truth in the legend that Robin once shot an arrow with an apple on his head.

Nor is it true that he once threw an apple with an arrow on his head.

In fact there's no recorded incident of him having anything on his head apart from his hood when it was cold.

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There is some truth however about his burial place; which authenticates the fact that he actually lived.

When Robin Hood got very old, (18 November 1247, about 87 years of age), he lay on his death bed breathing lightly and reminiscing about "olde tymes" when he could climb trees without the aid of an elevator.

His Merry men surrounded the bed and regaled in "olde tales" about how they got the better of the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Maid Marion was there too making endless cups of coffee to keep everyone awake until Robin went finally to sleep.

Anyway, the Merry men whispered to themselves about where they would bury Robin when he died.

Little John suggested a nice spot in Sherwood Forest.

Friar Tuck preferred a burial in Nottingham itself, to make a political point so to speak.

Others suggested a burial at sea would be more fitting ... there's no record as to why they wanted this, but then we can't assume that those people were either intelligent or logical.

Much the Miller's son suggested cryonics preservation but this was dismissed since the fridge was broken at the time.

Robin Hood tapped his hearing aid gently to hear them better and then said: "I know what you're talking about ..."

They all looked innocently at the ceiling and whistled or hummed silently.

The ceiling needs repainting, thought Maid Marion.

Robin continued: "Give me my bow and arrow. I shall shoot an arrow high in the sky. Where it lands that's where I wish to be buried!"

They gave him his bow and arrow. He put on his spectacles and weakly pulled back the string on the bow with his shaking hand. They all looked

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silently in anticipation. He raised his arm high, still shaking, and released the arrow.

And that's how Robin Hood came to be buried on top of the wardrobe.

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HISTORY - KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

The Knights of the Round Table were characters in the leg end of King Arthur in England. It is not quite clear which leg end it was, the right or left; but it doesn't seem to matter anyway.

In those days of Olde England they had many restless knights. This is because people used to eat cheese and drink mead just before going to bed. Also, it was very difficult to get to sleep with all that metal armour on. It was like asking a sardine to go to sleep inside its tin can. It must have been somewhat cumbersome when having to get up in the night to go to the toilet. Especially since in those days of Merry Olde England toilets were outside in the garden and not part of the house.

They had many restless days too when the womenfolks the next morning told off their husbands for staying up all night drinking and wassailing. "What time did you get up to bed?" they would ask, "I heard you get up the stairs making quite a racket with your rusty armour. Why don't you put some oil on the joints? And whilst you're at it put some oil on your creaky body parts too!"

No body seems to know what wassailing is but it seems to be something to do with saying "cheers" before drinking, or it may refer to the festival itself of drinking alcoholic beverages. Anyway, they did a lot of it in the times of King Arthur and his restless Knights ... or is it nights? Either way, we've established that wassailing has nothing to do with sailing a boat since you cannot get a boat on a Round Table. Which is the subject of this lesson.

So pay attention and let's get on.

King Arthur had a lot of restless Knights each thinking he was more important than the other. They had names like Lancelot and Runalot, and Laughalot and so on, depending on what they did the most. There was a knight who ate a lot of beans ... can't remember his name!

In order to prove that none of them was more important than the other King Arthur asked a carpenter to make him a large Round Table. It had to be large enough to enable twelve knights as well as the king himself to sit around it. And it had to be made of one piece of wood so that none of

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them would complain they sat where two pieces were joined together and thus mean he was less important than the other knights.

Some records say that King Arthur had as many as twenty-five knights, others say fifty or perhaps even more; as many as 150 !!! Which leads one to wonder how big the Round Table must have been. Also, how difficult it must have been to call a meeting and have all of them attending on the same day. Believe me, I've tried at work to set up a meeting of just six or so people and there's always one person who can't attend when the others can.

Anyway, eventually a very large round table was made by a carpenter named Ivor Woodenheade. The problem was, having made the Round Table, how do we get it into the big Round Room which is at the top of the Castle in Camelot? (Presumably they had a lot of camels there!).

Remember those were the days after the wheel had been invented many years previously; so making a round table was in itself easy. Some historians believe that the wheel is the greatest invention of mankind after laxative. Being an eminent historian myself ... I disagree. I think the second wheel was the greatest invention of mankind because then we had the bicycle. But I digress once again.

So the carpenter and his crew decided to stand the Round Table upright and roll it up the hill like a wheel all the way to the castle, into the big hall, up the stairs and into the Round Room which was right at the top of the castle.

Problem !!!

Once they reached the Round Room at the top of the castle they found that the door is too low for the table to get through.

The carpenter was fired and another carpenter hired to build a new Round Table INSIDE the Round Room.

Clever, don't you think?

So the second carpenter, Ivan Idea, brought all the wood he needed and his tools and made the table inside the Round Room to save having to roll it up the hill and through the small door.

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Another problem !!!

Once the table was built there was not enough room in the Round Room for 150 chairs to be put around the Round Table in the Round Room.

The second carpenter was fired.

A third carpenter, known as Aye Fearalot, was very reluctant to take on the job and be fired like his predecessors. In order to avoid such dire fate he convinced King Arthur to build a smaller Round Table, inside the Round Room, around which he put enough chairs for just thirteen people. The other Knights could stay outside the castle and listen to the goings on on the loudspeakers - reasoned the carpenter. King Arthur agreed.

Contrary to popular opinion, all these Knights did not speak in different accents depending on which part of Olde England they came from.

They all spoke in perfect English as you can see in the various films which have been made over the years about King Arthur and Camelot. Not in any of these films do you find a Knight speaking in a London cockney accent or a Liverpudlian tone.

Once Knighted a Knight had to promise not to commit murder, treason or be cruel. He had to be nice to ladies, "gentlewomen", (presumably he could be nasty to those not gentle), and widows, (not windows), and to help them cross the road whether they wanted to or not.

In those days many women spent time crossing the road for no apparent reason.

Just for the record, and to prove I do research my History Lessons, here are some names of the Knights of the Round Table:

King Arthur, Sir Galahad, Sir Lancelot du Lac, Sir Gawain, Sir Percivale, Sir Lionell, Sir Bors de Ganis, Sir Kay, Sir Tristram de Lyones, Sir Gareth, Sir Bedivere, Sir Bleoberis, La Cote Male Taile, Sir Lucan, Sir Palomedes, Sir Lamorak, Sir Safer, Sir Pelleas, Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Dagonet, Sir Degore, Sir Brunor le Noir, Le Bel Desconneu, Sir Alymere, and Sir Mordred. There was also one called Sir Ywain the Bastard. I bet he wasn't very happy about that !!!

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HISTORY - THE TUDORS

A long time ago there was a Royal family in England called the Tudors. They ruled from 1485 to 1603.

In those 118 years there were five kings and the most famous was Henry VIII.

He was famous for wanting a son and married many times to achieve this. His first wife Catherine of Aragon was a Catholic and she gave him a daughter. So Henry VIII divorced her which upset the Pope. Henry created the Church of England with him as head. He got rid of Catholic monasteries but he still worshipped as a Catholic ... and executed those who didn't.

Living in Tudor times was not much fun. TV had still not been invented so people could not watch soaps for hours on end.

It was not a healthy time either. They had open sewers in the streets and toilets were a hole in the ground in the back garden. They often emptied chamber pots out of the window onto the people in the streets down below. Hence the phrase "Gardyloo !!!" which roughly translated meant "watch out for the water" (and what's in it) !!!

Umbrellas had yet to be invented; but I bet the Laundry Business was quite successful.

People had very odd cures for illnesses, like swallowing live spiders, covered in butter to make them go down quicker. And swallowing powdered human skulls, or eating bone-marrow mixed with sweat. They also believed in blood-letting. You'd go to the barber and he'd cut you up and let the blood out.

A man went to the barber's once for a haircut. As the barber was working on him the man looked down and saw a human ear on the ground. "Whose ear is that?" he asked.

The barber replied, "Hold it. If it's still warm it's yours!"

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Hence the phrase "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!" which is a famous line in the play Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616).

It was at this time that barbers also started a side-line of piercing people's ears whilst they wait. It was very convenient not having to come back for your pierced ear the next day. Other piercings however took a little longer.

Of course in Tudor times life was not as sophisticated as it is today. People had to use quills to write with.

These were feathers of various birds which had to be sharpened daily with knives - hence the word pen-knife. Once they sharpened the quill they used it to tap the keys on their computer keyboards.

Crime was also rife in Tudor times because people were generally poor. The same people appeared in front of the same judge again and again because of their repeated crimes.

The judge eyed a man carefully once and asked him "Have you ever been up before me?"

The man replied "It depends on what time you get up!"

On another occasion the same judge had two thieves before him. He asked the first where he lived and he replied "No fixed abode!"

He asked the second man where he lived and he replied "In the apartment above him".

Life for women was terrible in Tudor times. If a woman did not marry she often stayed at home with her parents and spent her time spinning - hence the word "spinster". She could not become a nun since Henry VIII had closed all convents.

Women could be punished by law for nagging and scolding. Women were warned in church to stop nagging and if they continued they were punished by ducking. They were tied to a chair and lowered in the river a few times.

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If a woman continued nagging and scolding she was made to wear a metal mask which clamped on the head with a metal bar in her mouth holding her tongue down. She was then paraded in town as a warning to other women.

Football was a favorite pastime played between two villages. The ball was a pig's bladder and they started the game at a mid-point between two villages several miles apart. The idea was to get the ball into your village. The whole village population would play and there were no rules or referee. Anything goes. Just fight everyone else and get the ball to your village. Many people got injured and hurt. Great fun!

In 1540 Henry VIII banned the game because he needed soldiers for his army and too many people were getting injured and maimed playing football.

As mentioned earlier, around this time, lived a man called William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616) who wrote many plays to make a living. Actors were all men who dressed like women to play women's parts. His plays were performed in various theaters for people to enjoy.

But some clever dick at some point or other decided to make life miserable for countless of generations by insisting that they learn Shakespeare at school.

There's as much point in that as making people learn the scripts of their favorite cartoon videos.

That's ... That's ... That's ... That's all folks !!!!

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HISTORY - FAMOUS BRITONS

Today's History Lesson is all about Famous Britons so please pay attention and you'll probably learn a thing or two about the people of these islands.

Now unfortunately, Famous Britons don't come in alphabetical or chronological order in as much as they are haphazard and arrive on the scene every now and then in no particular order or rhyme or reason. This has a lot to do with the weather in Britain which is likewise haphazard and in no particular order or rhyme or reason. We often have the four seasons in one day and in random order to confuse people as to whether to go out with their umbrellas or swimsuits. Hence you often see businessmen in London going to work in a bowler hat, umbrella, pin striped shirt and jacket and swimming trunks. Tourists often think that these businessmen have forgotten to put on their trousers. But they are quite mistaken. It is a deliberate attire to be ready for all circumstances; and as the sun comes out all they need do is take off their shirt and jacket and jump into the nearest pool, or lake, or river, or indeed the sea if you happen to work in a seaside town. I remember when I worked in London we had many a meeting in the swimming pool with the Board of Directors. It was quite distracting when the pretty secretary came in her swimsuit to bring us tea and biscuits.

But I digress.

Ok ... the first Famous Briton I want to talk about is a woman. Her name is Boadicea and she lived around AD 43. The Roman Emperor Claudius sent his troops to conquer Britain. His soldiers were faced by this wild woman from Norwich, who came at them on a horse-drawn cart with swords sticking out of the wheels. Apparently she got the idea from the famous chariot race in the film Ben Hur which she had seen on TV the previous night. She killed over 70,000 Romans in her many battles; but eventually poisoned herself when the Romans started winning again. Some historians believe that she just fell ill and died.

Roll time forward to 1066 when King Harold fought a battle in Hastings against William the Conqueror; known for his love of the game of conkers. This game is still played by children in England today and consists of two people threading a horse chestnut (conker) with a string and use it to smash the opponent's conker. They take turn at hitting the opponent's

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conker and sometimes the conker (horse chestnut) breaks and can cause injury if bits catch you in the eye. However, at the Battle of Hastings, it is believed, that King Harold caught an arrow in the eye. His soldiers advised him to blink a few times and it will work its way out.

Let's move on a bit forward to 1509 when King Henry VIII was King. He wanted a son as an heir and married six times to make sure his wife got him a son.

His first wife Catherine of Aragon brought him five daughters, (four dead), so he divorced her.

He married Anne Boleyn who also gave him a daughter. She was also friendly with a number of people in the palace so Henry VIII cut off her head and also that of all her lovers too. It is said that Anne Boleyn had an extra finger on one hand and three breasts! Henry accused her of being a witch because of her deformities.

Henry then married Jane Seymour who gave him a son in 1537 but unfortunately she died whilst giving birth.

In 1540 Henry married Anne of Cleves who is said to have been very ugly. The marriage was not consummated, (something to do with Consommé soup), so he divorced her.

In the same year he married Catherine Howard and shortly afterwards chopped her head off too.

In 1543 he married Katherine Parr. Now I ask you ... would you have married a man with such a track record? Anyway, by this time Henry VIII was very sick with diseases one gets when they are too friendly ... He died in 1547.

Queen Elizabeth the First was the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn and became Queen in 1558 at the age of 25. She was skinny and plain with red hair like her dad. She used lead-based white make-up on her face, which although fashionable at the time, ate into her face.

In those days people didn't wash as often as we do today because power showers had not been invented. So in time you could smell their arrival a mile off before they actually arrived. People with big noses suffered the

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most because they inhaled more of the bad smells. Having a cold was a wonderful relief. To hide their bad smell some people carried apples with cloves in it. Hmm ... I wonder what smelled worse. A rotten apple in your armpits or the "naturelle smelle" of said body parts.

From 1568 onwards the Spanish fought against the English sending their Armadas over. At this time a man called Francis Drake led the English ships against the Spanish and won many battles. It is said that before a battle Drake was playing bowls in Plymouth and he was told of the approach of the Spanish fleet. He replied there was enough time to finish the game and beat the Spaniards.

Two more people who lived at the time of Elizabeth I were William Shakespeare and Sir Walter Raleigh.

Shakespeare was a play writer who made it his mission to be a pain in the side of every pupil from then on and succeeded to the point that even now students have to learn and memorise his plays for no apparent reason whatsoever.

Sir Walter Raleigh on the other hand is said to have introduced potatoes to Britain. Apparently he travelled abroad and bought a packet of French Fries as a present to the Queen. She said: "What? No beef burger and milk shake?"

Apparently, also when abroad he decided as a joke to put some leaves in his mouth and light them up. His friends enjoyed the joke and asked him to repeat it when he got back to England. The joke soon caught on and that's how he introduced tobacco to England.

In 1591, Sir Walter secretly married Elizabeth Throckmorton, one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, (what were they waiting for?), without the Queen's permission. The Queen got angry and imprisoned both of them in the Tower of London. What a honeymoon? She later released him and he became quite famous.

The Queen died in 1603. Raleigh was arrested and tried for an alleged plot against King James.

Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded on 29 October 1618.

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His head was embalmed and presented to his wife, and his body was buried in a church in Surrey near Lady Raleigh's home. She kept his head in a velvet bag and carried it wherever she went. I bet it was embarrassing when she went to parties and dinner dates carrying the bag with her. I mean ... there she was invited to a party and she brings a guest, (or part of a guest), in her hand bag. I wonder if Raleigh's head winked at the pretty ladies at the party! And did she ever take his head with her in the bag when she went ten pin bowling?

When Raleigh's wife died 29 years later, both Raleigh's head and body were buried in St Margaret's Church in Westminster.

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HISTORY - THE THREE MUSKETEERS

Now as many people know *The Three Musketeers* is a novel by the French writer Alexandre Dumas first published in 1844. The story is set in the 17th Century and tells the adventures of d'Artagnan who goes to Paris to join the Musketeer Guards. The three Musketeers were Athos, Porthos and Aramis and their motto was "all for one and one for all".

What not many people know however is that the story is based on real people who guarded King Louis XIV of France, a King who enjoyed good style furniture which to this day bear his name. If you find a Louis XIV chair you are sure to pay a good price for it because the chances are that at some time or other he may have sat on it.

Anyway, the names of the REAL three musketeers were Pathos (not Athos) because he was always sad and melancholy (face like a melon and body like a collie). Shortos (because he was very short. He had also trained as a doctor but because of his small stature he had qualified as a knee specialist). And Monami, (which in French means my friend. He was always friendly with the ladies and got into a lot of trouble).

The real young man who travelled to Paris to join the musketeers was named Tarte Onion (not d'Artagnan, because he was a baker and every one liked his onion pies).

OK ... preliminaries over. Now on with the real story.

Tarte Onion goes to Paris and stays in a small inn. The owner puts him up in a tiny room up in the attic. Right up in the loft of the house. Tarte Onion asks the hotelier if he has anything to drink. The hotel-keeper says there's some milk in the kitchen cupboard, "take it up with you to the loft".

For the next half-hour Tarte Onion struggles trying to take the cupboard up to the loft.

The next morning he struggles again getting the cupboard down three floors to the kitchen.

After paying the hotelier for his night's stay the hotel-keeper gives him directions to the Palace of King Louis XIV and bids him farewell.

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"Pull the door behind you as you leave!" says the hotelier and Tarte Onion duly obliges by pulling the door off its hinges and taking it with him to the Palace.

At the Palace, the Guards at the Gates, (also Musketeers called Left and Right because of the positions they occupied at the Gates), see Tarte Onion coming towards them with a door on his back. They stop him thinking he is a door-to-door salesman selling doors door-to-door.

"Do you have a gate?" they ask.

"No, I always walk this way" replies Tarte Onion.

(Pause a little for some people to catch up and understand this joke).

After a short pause by which time the two Guards understood the joke they ask Tarte Onion for some form of identification.

He pulls out a mirror from his pocket, looks at it and says "Yes, that's me all right!"

So they let him into the great hall of the King's Palace. As he's waiting there a beautiful lady comes in and walks towards him. Tarte Onion also moves forward a little and trips over the carpet hitting the beautiful lady in the face. That's when their eyes met, although their noses took most of the impact.

Tarte Onion explains that his main quest is to find the spy working for the evil Cardinal Richelieu who wants to kill the King and become King himself.

Now the young would-be musketeer has been told that the spy is a woman with a tattoo somewhere personal on her body spelling the word "LOLA".

"Could this woman be the spy LOLA?" Tarte Onion asks himself, "if only I could search if she has a tattoo!".

Before he could answer his own question, the lady rubs her face to ease the pain from her nose-to-nose close encounter of the painful kind and introduces herself by giving her name "Isadora Kitten".

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"No ... a door is a door, and a kitten is a small cat!" replies the hapless Tarte Onion.

Isadora smiles and marvels at his level of ignorance. It is then that Tarte Onion notices for the first time that, although she was very beautiful, sadly, she had one ear much much bigger than the other. One ear was normal size and the other much larger and sticking out a little ... quite a lot.

It was as if she was a car with a side door left wide open.

But as cars had not yet been invented no one had made the connection and compared her to a car with a door wide open. Although some had noted that she looked like a horse-drawn carriage with a door wide open.

Everytime there was a slight breeze the poor lady would pirouette round as the draught caught her ear like a big sail.

(Did you notice I used the French word "pirouette" rather than say spin? It is after all a French story. Many years from now, when people study my writings, like they do William Shakespeare's, they'll marvel at my grasp of a wide and international vocabulary. But I digress as I often do to my great annoyance.)

Anyway, Isadora spins round like a revolving hotel door, (that's where the idea of those doors originated), and as she spins a few turns she gets dizzy and falls flat on her back. That's when Tarte Onion notices that she has a tattoo on her leg spelling the word "LOL".

He does not know whether she is laughing out loud at him, or whether the tattooist ran out of ink before finishing her name.

At this point into the big hall enter the three Musketeers Pathos, Shortos and Monami, accompanied by a servant called Pantaloon; but they called him Pants for short!

The Musketeers befriend Tarte Onion and they fight many battles together against the evil Cardinal Richelieu; and in defence of their King, Louis XIV, who is always busy buying Louis XIV furniture, thus creating a shortage and an increase in prices..

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Tarte Onion also fights many duels against his greatest enemy Roquefort. A cheesy character who has two accomplices, an Italian called Gorgonzola and an Englishman named Stilton.

Tarte Onion is often cut up into slices in such duels with Roquefort who crumbles at every "Touché" of his opponent's sword. Meanwhile Gorgonzola and Stilton melt in the heat of battle with pathetic Pathos, shortie Shortos and the ever so friendly, (with the ladies), Monami.

With feeble puns such as these and such a selection of names you can imagine why the books by Alexandre Dumas became very famous for ever more. LOL indeed.

En garde !!!

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HISTORY - WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Settle down now, and pay attention. Today's History Lesson is about a famous Elizabethan who lived between 1564 and 1616 by the name of William Shakespeare. It is not known what other name he had outside of this period, but to many he was also known as the "Beard of Avon", because he was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in England and because he had a beard. But then, most people at the time had beards and they were not called the "Beard of London", "the Beard of Nottingham", or wherever else they came from.

Shakespeare's life is full of controversy and it is fair to say that he is the most talked about subject of conversation and debate in England (and elsewhere) apart from the weather. That is, if you have nothing else to talk about apart from Shakespeare and the weather. Some people like to discuss science, medicine, politics, religion, saving the planet, conservation, re-cycling and numerous other subjects, but they are not as important as Shakespeare and the weather.

One of the greatest controversy about Shakespeare is whether he actually wrote the 30 or so plays, sonnets and such like writings or not. The fact that they have been written is not in dispute; but their authorship is.

Can you imagine being the author of all these writings and be forever praised and lauded by everyone?

"To be or not to be?" to quote Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe or Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

So let's consider this controversy further for a moment and see what we know about old Bill the Beard.

He was an actor who went to London and made a small fortune in the theatre, and also by purchasing properties (theatres amongst others) which made him very rich. He returned to Stratford-upon-Avon and bought a large house and his fame spread.

Now then ... since no one actually saw him sitting at his computer late at night typing away furiously his many plays; it is safe to suggest that perhaps ... maybe ... there's a possibility ... that he was only the financial

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backing behind all these plays. He was a rich man, owned many theatres, and it is possible that he put on plays as a business; very much like a modern day producer puts on plays, or makes films or produces music records and CDs these days. It doesn't follow that today's producers write the plays or sing the songs on record; does it?

In time, Shakespeare's fame and plays became synonymous to saying "hoover" when we mean a vacuum cleaner, or "thermos" when we mean a vacuum flask. People went to see "Shakespeare plays" - that is plays produced and financially backed, but not written, by him.

Now, whatever the controversy about the authorship of these writings, one thing is for sure and un-disputed.

For years on thereafter, many generations of pupils have been forced to learn these plays and sonnets by heart for no apparent reason whatsoever, since they have no purpose in gaining you subsequent employment or career unless you wish to become a teacher and force another generation of students to study the same.

I remember as a child having to memorise several of the Beard's writings. The one that comes to mind with dread is from the play Antony and Cleopatra when Antony's lieutenant Enobarbus, once described Cleopatra's charms by saying: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety. Other women cloy the appetites they feed, but she makes hungry where most she satisfies."

Which loosely translated means "She is a good looking, what? Makes my monocle steam up, by Jove. Would love sharing a pot of tea with her!"

I remember my teacher saying I should remember these lines by heart and quote them in the exams as it would comfort the examiner and make him more liable to award me good marks.

Of course, as a child, I did not know what they meant; but I memorised these words and repeated them over and again.

Unfortunately, a few days later our history teacher was late because his mother had died that morning. To comfort him I blurted "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety."

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I got expelled for three days from school as a result. For some reason, I also failed my history exams that year.

And there you have it ... William Shakespeare ... the Beard of Stratford-upon-Avon ... writer ... perhaps ... dreaded memory of my past ... certainly.

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HISTORY - LADY GODIVA

It is perhaps unfair that Lady Godiva is best remembered for one act which historians dispute whether it actually happened or not. But that's the way of the world isn't it? You do just one thing and everyone is talking about it for ever on end. But more of that later.

Lady Godiva, was an 11th-century Anglo-Saxon noblewoman who lived in Britain all that time ago. She was the wife of Leofric, Earl of Mercia and they had a son called Aelfgar. (I suppose when you're rich and famous you can name your children what you want. Personally, I prefer "Hey You" as a name; but I digress).

Both Lady Godiva and her husband Leofric were very generous benefactors to religious houses. (Can you imagine being called Leofric? O Leofric, Leofric! Wherefore art thou Leofric? Doesn't sound right does it? But I digress once again. OK ... let's concentrate now and get on with the story).

As I was saying, they were both very generous and in 1043 Leofric founded and endowed a Benedictine Monastery in Coventry, England. Apparently Godiva was the persuasive force behind this generosity and she moaned and moaned "Leofric, build me a monastery. Leofric, build me a monastery ..." until he gave up and built her a monastery.

You know how persuasive women can be when they want something?

They go on and on and on ... clear the footpath of snow, don't forget to mow the lawn, the house needs re-painting, have you taken the trash bins out? Ehm ... sorry ... my mind was wandering a bit there ... thinking aloud what?

Well, at least I've never been asked to build a monastery. I suppose clearing the footpath is better and cheaper than having to build a monastery. Although I must admit, if it was a choice between visiting the mother-in-law and building a monastery, I would build a monastery any day. It is less stressful with much less moaning on and on in stereo !!!

But I digress yet again. Stop interrupting me!

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In 1050 the couple also gave land for the St Mary's Monastery in Worcester and for the minster in Stow St Mary in Lincolnshire. They are also benefactors of other monasteries in Leominster, Chester, Much Wenlock and Evesham.

Lady Godiva also gave a lot of jewellery and precious metals to various causes over her lifetime.

So all in all, she was an all round good egg as we normally say; and the sort of person you would like to meet and befriend. Especially if you're short of a penny or two.

Until we come to the legend of what she once did, (or did not do, depending on who you believe).

It seems that Lady Godiva took pity on the people of Coventry who were paying too much taxes imposed by her husband on the town. She appealed to her husband to lower the taxes and moaned and moaned for days on end "Please lower the taxes ... Please lower the taxes ... Please ... Pretty Please ..." You know how women go on and on when they want something? Have I mentioned that to you?

Well this time Leofric would not listen. But she went on and on about lowering the taxes. Eventually, to shut her up, (he must have had a terrible headache poor soul), he said "I'll lower the taxes if you strip naked and ride a horse through the streets of Coventry!"

To his surprise she agreed. Now that's dedication for you. Would any of us go to such lengths for our fellow man? (Don't answer that).

Lady Godiva issued a proclamation that on a certain day everyone should remain indoors and shut all their windows because she was going to ride naked on a horse throughout town. (I wonder how many horses volunteered for the job).

Now how naive is that? Did she really expect everyone to stay indoors after such an announcement? Would you?

Are you really telling me that NO ONE was tempted to take a photo with their cell-phones and post it on Facebook?

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On the day in question Lady Godiva rode naked on a horse and paraded throughout town.

But a tailor called Tom succumbed to temptation. He made a small hole in his window shutters and had a good look at what he should not have been looking at. And that's where the name Peeping Tom originates from.

Apparently he was struck blind after the event.

His friend Ivan Eyeful was wiser and more cautious because he chanced one eye through his peep hole.

Anyway, believe it or not, her husband kept his word and abolished the taxes.

Now why can't the wives of our politicians do the same thing and lower our taxes?

As I said, the veracity of this story is hotly disputed amongst historians.

But it raises an important question:

Assuming that Lady Godiva did as it is said in order to help the poor people of Coventry; is it OK to strip naked for a good cause? To help one's fellow man?

There are many instances of men and women being photographed nude for calendars which are then sold to raise a lot of money for a charitable cause.

Is this a good (fun) thing to do to help others; or is it wrong? Especially when we consider the amount of money that can, and has, been raised this way for causes like medical research, helping the elderly, ease starvation and so on.

If the cause is one that is very dear to your heart; would you go nude for charity?

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HISTORY - CLEOPATRA AND THE ROMANS

Cleopatra was a beautiful Queen or Pharaoh of Egypt who ruled until around 30 BC. At the time the Roman Empire was large and strong and was ruled by Julius Caesar. She got to meet him and after a few dinners and coffee they became great friends. Enough said.

After Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC the Roman Empire was ruled by three triumvirates, which means three rulers. These are different to the rulers you get in class or at home to measure things with and they are not made of wood or plastic.

These three rulers were strong generals and leaders of the Romans. They were Mark Antony, Lepidus and Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus the legal heir of Julius Caesar. This is heir like successor and has nothing to do with what grows on peoples' heads and on their bodies. It has nothing to do with rabbits running wild either.

Now there was a bald ruler in Mesopotamia who was distressed that although he was very rich he had no children to inherit. One day he cried out loud "Why is it that despite my riches I have no heir?" Someone bought him a wig which inherited the whole kingdom after his death. Eventually, the people got fed up being ruled by a wig so they deposed him (or it) and were ruled by a ruler instead - that's a real ruler, not one made of plastic or wood used for measuring things. But I've already said so, and you were not paying attention!

Back to Cleopatra and the three triumvirates - Mark Antony, Lepidus and Julius Caesar.

Although each of them ruled a part of the Empire in reality they were rivals and each wanted to be the top man ruling alone.

One day Caesar held a big party on his ship out at sea and had invited Mark Antony and Lepidus. As happens at parties, after a few vinos Mark Antony and Lepidus got rather drunk and no doubt started singing "O Sole Mio"; a well known Roman song at the time which was Number 1 in the POP music charts for weeks on end. This particular song had been made famous by a protégé of Julius Caesar, the singer Maximilius Tonsilitis the Fifth, also known as MTV.

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Anyway, one of Caesar's helpers whispered in his ear: "Both of your rivals are drunk. If we were to throw them overboard by accident like, you'd be left to rule the Empire alone."

After cleaning his ear from the man's spit Caesar replied: "If you had done this without telling me, I would have rewarded you greatly afterwards. But now you told me, I cannot sanction such an act."

Which goes to show that opportunity spits in your ear every now and then; and if you fail to take it you just end up with the spit.

So from then on, Cleopatra sided with Mark Antony instead of the rightful heir Caesar.

Their first meeting was in Egypt when Cleopatra sailed down the Nile in her royal barge and Mark Antony was on the shore and was astounded by her great beauty. His knees trembled at the sight.

Antony's lieutenant Enobarbus, once described Cleopatra's charms by saying: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety. Other women cloy the appetites they feed, but she makes hungry where most she satisfies."

Which loosely translated means she's for ever young with no wrinkles except the one she sits on.

Historians believe that the reason Cleopatra had such smooth skin is because she bathed in asses milk. I tried doing the same to help my complexion but the supermarket did not have asses milk. They had buffalo milk, goat milk, chocolate and strawberry flavored milk; but they'd just ran out of asses milk. Try bathing in chocolate milkshake and see what happens!

Well, as I said, Mark Antony felt his knees tremble at the sight of Cleopatra and invited her out for coffee. One thing led to another and enough said about that too. They had smiles on their faces for ever after.

One day after a heavy defeat in battle, Mark Antony committed suicide.

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Cleopatra was so distraught by it all that she put an asp to her breast. An asp ... not an ass or a donkey which is altogether a different creature too heavy to lift to one's breast.

An asp is another word for snake. Why did the snake not bite her hand and waited until he was at her breast, we'll never know. Maybe it was an amorous snake with trembling knees too. Enough said once again.

And sadly, that's how Cleopatra died.

Years later Shakespeare wrote a play about it all and then a film was made with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. I had to study the Shakespeare version at school and memorise many lines; why I'll never know. They've never served me in life until now that I have to give these History Lessons.

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HELEN AND HANNIBAL

An interesting thing you notice when learning ancient history is the number of people whose names start with the letter H.

Today we'll learn about a few of them. No doubt you can think of others.

We start with a Greek doctor called **Hippocrates** (460 - 357 BC), who studied bodies expertly and believed in proper healing based on science as it was limitedly known then. He invented the Hypocritical Oath which promised that he'd heal any hippopotamus regardless to the danger to himself. As there were no hippos in Greece his promise was never tested. So he healed hippies instead.

He believed in bleeding as a cure for most things. When a sick man visited him a quick punch on the nose followed by a nosebleed sorted him out. He also took samples from sick people like, their vomit, nose droppings, ear wax, tears and urine and tested it by tasting it. It is not clear what he discovered but no doubt he often had stomach ache.

Heraclitus (c. 535 - c. 475 BC) was a Greek philosopher who didn't like people in general. He was always sad and melancholy (face like a melon and body like a collie) and always cried in his beer in the pub. He was known as the "Weeping Philosopher"; and no doubt bored every one to death with his cheerful stories!

One day Heraclitus got sick with dropsy and no doctor could cure him. So he decided to cure himself by covering his body with cow manure and sitting in the sun for it to bake. This certainly did the trick. He died within a day.

Which goes to prove - when you're up to your neck in **** don't sit in public for all to see.

Helen of Troy - now listen carefully because this bit is a little confusing. Zeus the Greek god was chased by an eagle so he turned into a swan. Whilst he was a swan he hid with a woman called Leda and fell in love with her. With me so far?

Leda produced an egg from which Helen of Troy was born.

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Helen then went on holiday to Paris (or is it with Paris?) and they had a great time.

Homer was a Greek author living around 850 BC and is thought to have written two outstanding books called the Iliad and the Odyssey. Unfortunately, opinion is divided as to whether Homer actually wrote both works; a bit like the debate about whether Shakespeare did actually write all that he wrote. After various attempts to contact the publishers to find out the truth it was discovered that they'd gone out of business. So we'll never resolve this mystery.

Hannibal (247 - 183/182/181 BC) was a Carthaginian military man who appears to have died three times. Either that or perhaps we don't know when he died. But die he did!

He is most famously remembered for marching an army which included elephants from Spain to Italy over a range of mountains known as The Pair of Knees and the Alps.

Whilst on the Alps he lost many elephants because he did not have skis big enough for them to wear. But the après-ski parties were great fun.

He defeated the Romans in Italy because they had not seen elephants with skis before. After the battles he set up a travelling Circus with the elephants.

Hadrian was a Roman Emperor (76 AD - 138 AD) at the time the Romans conquered most of Britain up to the Northern borders with Scotland. There he built a great wall dividing the country from coast to coast.

The wall was 117 kilometres long and several portions still exist and are a great tourist attraction. It is so big that you can see the moon from there.

A few years back some archaeologists digging near the wall found a few spent match sticks and cigarette ends, proving that the Romans did smoke the same brands as we do now. They also found a cell-phone which was sent to a lab in London to find out whether it contains photos of the Romans all those years ago.

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Finally, in this History Lesson of people whose names begin with the letter H we have to mention **Heel**. Now come along ... pay attention ... don't tell me you've never heard of Achilles Heel?

Apparently he was a demi-god, a hero of the Trojan War and the son of Thetis and Peleus. When he was a baby his mother dipped Achilles into the river Styx to make him immortal and invincible. She held him by his heel and dipped him right in; and that's how he got the name Achilles Heel. Since then he was invincible except of course for the bit of his heel which was not dipped in the water. He was killed by a Frenchman called Paris who shot him in the heel with an arrow. He was aiming for his back at the time but missed by shooting too low.

Now what is not clear is why his stupid mother had not dipped him totally into the river Styx. That way, not only would he have been totally invincible but her hand too would have been invincible. Can you imagine? Being able to pull out a pot of meat from a hot oven without the need for oven gloves. Or being the catcher in a game of baseball without needing those big gloves. I bet there are many things she could have done with an invincible hand.

For your homework this week I want you to write ten things you'd be able to do with an invincible hand.

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HISTORY - CHARLES DARWIN

Charles Darwin was a controversial Englishman, naturalist and geologist who lived between 1809 and 1882. He came up with the idea of evolution. That is to say that humans have evolved over many many years from another species of animal - basically monkeys.

At the risk of over-simplifying all his works and theories here, suffice it to say that he believed that one species does change into another.

In his book *On the Origin of Species* he writes "As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be naturally selected. From the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form."

In other words, each generation would evolve a little bit more than its predecessor in order to improve itself and adapt to its environment and thus survive. He added that "light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history".

Ever since the theory that men could be descended from apes came to light people have been arguing for and against that particular possibility.

What I'd like us to focus on, however, is the possibility that we may have evolved, over time into what we are now. We may not have started as apes, but perhaps we were always humans who looked like apes; i.e. we were covered with a lot of hair to keep us warm since clothes had not yet been invented and were not easily purchased on the Internet.

As we learnt to cover ourselves, first with fig leaves, (they don't cover much do they), and then with various animal skins, we evolved into humans with less and less body hair. So ... what I am saying is ... we did not evolve from apes but from humans who were covered with body hair when they roamed naked and then lost this covering when fashionable clothing was made available in shops and on-line.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

Are you with me so far?

It doesn't matter if you don't agree. Just hold that thought for a moment.

Now then ... as time goes by we "evolve" or adapt to survive our various environments. There is evidence for instance that in the Middle Ages people were much smaller and shorter than they are now. This is seen from the size of doorways in castles, and from bones found in graves. But as time went by and diets improved, as well as health standards, today's people are much bigger and stronger compared to their Middle Ages counterpart.

Now, if we accept this fact. It follows that we continue to evolve as time goes by into the future. Who knows how future people would look like!

Do we need toe nails for instance? What are they used for? Perhaps future people will not have toe nails.

But as we get busier and busier a second mouth would come in handy. We could use one mouth for talking, or answering the phone, and another for eating our lunch. This way we don't need to have a lunch break and we would work for longer and be more productive.

Personally, I'd like a mouth on top of my head. This way I could put a sandwich under my hat and eat it whilst going to work.

It would also be a good idea to have an extra eye. Say at the end of your index finger. This way you could clean your ear and see what's inside at the same time.

You know how you sometimes say "I've only got one pair of hands!" Well ... wouldn't it be nice to have two pairs of hand? Both coming from the side like now. This way I could drive the car and scratch my bottom at the same time.

I'm beginning to like this evolution thing. I wonder what else we could think of? A turkey with 12 legs so we can have one each on Thanksgiving and Christmas? Problem is ... he'd run too fast and we won't be able to catch it. Scrap that idea!

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

Can you think of any evolutionary ideas which would benefit us in the future? Don't be shy now ... let your imagination run wild and share your thoughts with us.

I promise not to laugh!

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

HISTORY - A LOAD OF OLD BONES

I had reason to visit our local suburban museum the other day. As I have been accused by some to being somewhat uncultured I decided to spend an hour or so looking around and educating myself in matters which will stand me in good stead in future cultured surroundings.

Here's what I learnt:

In a large room at the museum there was a collection of various dinosaurs' skeletons big and small with unpronounceable names such as leptospirosis and tri-cycle-steps; and they all had small labels with the dates of their various ages. One skeleton had no label so I asked the attendant in that room how old it was.

He replied with confidence "It is 230 million years and 9 months and 3 weeks old, Sir."

"That's very precise," I said in amazement.

"Yes Sir," he said, "I have been working here for 9 months and 3 weeks and it was 230 million years old when I started."

Now that's something I didn't know.

I then moved on to another room which had a lot of human skeletons and different bone parts collected from various places in the world. On a table there were two skulls - a small one and a larger one. The labels both read "Skull of Ivan Eyefull - Marco Polo's bodyguard".

I asked the attendant to explain and he told me that one skull belonged to the bodyguard when he was a child and the other when he was a grown man.

It was fortunate that both were found by the same archaeologist in the same excavations in the desert where Marco Polo had a picnic and his bodyguard choked on a fishbone stuck in his throat.

I was amazed at what archaeologists can learn from just a pile of bones. They must be really clever with all their knowledge and research.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

The museum attendant, who had knowledge written all over him, (some jokers had done it with permanent ink), told me a story I'll never forget ... You'll probably never forget it too.

He said that an archaeologist was digging in the Negev Desert in Israel and came upon a casket containing a mummy. After opening it carefully he recognised it straight away and he phoned the curator of a prestigious natural history museum. "We've just discovered a 3,000 year old mummy of a man who died of heart failure!"

The curator of the museum quickly sent a team to collect the mummy for thorough examination.

A week later, the amazed curator called the archaeologist. "You were right about the mummy's age and cause of death. How in the world did you know it was heart failure?"

"Simple ... there was a piece of paper in his hand that said - 'put me down for 10,000 Shekels on Goliath'."

I also discovered something else when visiting our local museum:

Statistics of marriages and divorces over the years show that archaeologists make the best spouses. The older you get the more interested they are in you.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

HISTORY - MY REALITY

As you know, I have written a few History Lessons in a humorous and light-hearted style to make them interesting and easy to read. Little did I know that they would have such an effect on a particular person in question.

I have explained before that in our town there is a pedestrianised street to allow people to shop and sight-see away from any vehicles and cycles. The area, a street about a mile long, is blocked at both ends by bollards to stop any vehicles from entering.

I was there the other day and noticed that they had erected a small stage in the middle of the wide street and a few amateur dramatic actors were performing Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra; or bits of it, as an advert for their performance at the theater nearby.

A small crowd had gathered to watch and I joined them.

I don't know whether it was because of my distinctive green cowboy hat with a feather on the side, or my turquoise shirt, or tartan red trousers; but the man playing Julius Caesar recognised me. To be fair, I'd recognised him too, although not by name. I'd seen him a few times in the library lecturing about Shakespeare and he's been in the newspapers often about his various roles as a Shakespearean amateur dramatics actor. We never actually met or spoke but somehow he seemed to recognise me more than I was aware of.

He got off the stage and started shouting at me: "You're the man who keeps writing those silly history stories full of inaccuracies!"

I said nothing. The crowd was astounded. He came towards me and continued.

"You confuse people with all your stories, and lesser learned people will believe all the nonsense that you write. History is history and it should be related accurately. You tend to humourise the whole thing with your articles."

I slowly backed off trying to walk away. He followed me and continued as the crowd looked on. They probably thought it was all part of the acting.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

"We take great care when we perform our Shakespearean plays" he declared, "The narrative as well as the costumes are very accurate and authentic. This toga I am wearing is authentic and made exactly as the Roman emperors would have worn it. Yet you spoil it all with all your silly history lessons and your jokes. You're a disgrace to historians everywhere!"

I smiled feebly, almost apologetically, and said nothing. The crowd grew interested and kept watching. Julius Caesar was furious.

"What steps are you going to take to remedy the situation?" he asked.

"Large ones away from you" I thought but did not utter a word.

I started to walk away hurriedly. He followed me still ranting and raving. I walked a bit faster. So did he. I began to trot, or was it a gallop? He continued after me faster. Some of the crowd followed.

As I began to run (or walk rather hurriedly) I noticed that he must have stepped on the edge of his toga which was made of several bed sheets wrapped together around him. Somehow they all became undone and fell to the ground like dried leaves off trees in Autumn, revealing that he was wearing absolutely nothing else underneath.

Is that really how the Romans dressed? Wrapped in a few sheets with no underwear underneath? When were pants invented anyway? Must write a history article about that!

Anyway, there was Julius Caesar with absolutely nothing on. Naked as the day he was born. The Roman Emperor had no clothes.

As he bent down naked to gather bits of torn sheets from the ground he was joined by Cleopatra who helped cover his Roman Empire with her hands.

At this point the crowd applauded in unison, no doubt still believing this was all part of the act.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

I learnt from the newspapers later that the performance at the theater was totally sold-out within minutes. Perhaps people had enjoyed our little advert and believed that it was a taster of what the show was like.

I wonder if anyone asked: "Where's the man in the cowboy hat?"

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

ANONYMOUS LETTERS

A man walks into the police station and pleads: "Help me please, I've received an anonymous threatening letter which says - stop having an affair with my wife or I'll beat you up".

The policeman suggests: "Well, why don't you stop seeing his wife?"

The man replies: "Can't you see - it's anonymous".

ARCHAEOLOGISTS

Archaeologists make good marriage partners. The older you get the more interested they are in you.

BIGAMY

The punishment for bigamy is having two mothers-in-law.

BIRTHS AND DEATHS

A man sitting in a library reads the births and deaths statistics. After a few minutes he whispers to the person next to him: "Do you realise, every time I breathe in and out someone dies". The other man replies: "Try a better mouthwash".

BALLET

I can't understand why ballet dancers go around on tiptoe. Why don't they just hire taller dancers?

CHIVALRY

Never ever give up your seat for a lady. That's how I lost my job as a bus driver.

SECRET

A lady friend mistook a tube of super-glue for lipstick. I asked her what happened; but her lips were sealed.

THE SOUP WAVED AT ME

STANDING STILL

I went into a shop to buy some envelopes, writing paper, pens and pencils. As I was paying for them the fire alarm sounded. The shop assistance stood there calmly.

"Aren't you leaving the store?" I asked.

"No ..." she replied, "I'm stationary!"

A TERRIBLE DAY AT WORK

It was a terrible day at work today. My secretary was upset because her dog died.

I went out and bought her an identical dog.

She was even more upset because she now has two dead dogs!

WHICH ONE ARE YOU?

Pessimist: When one door shuts another slams in your face.

Optimist: Knock and it shall be opened to you.

Realist: Knowing your luck, the door will open outwards and smash you in the face.

AND FINALLY ... THE FRUIT FLY

The fruit fly lives for just one day. Just 24 hours!

It wakes up in the morning, brushes its teeth, and by the end of the day it is brown bread ... totally dead.

It's hardly worth it buying a tube of toothpaste and using it just the once.

So remember this next time you brush your teeth. Thank God for yet another day and enjoy what it brings.