CELEBRATE BIG ISSUE STYLE

THE ROYAL WEDDING - A DIFFERENT VIEW

COVER CREATED BY DAVID TOVEY

ARMY CHEF, COOKED FOR THE QUEEN, BECAME HOMELESS, REBUILT LIFE THROUGH ART
OPERA, BALLET AND THEATRE ON DVD AND BLU-RAY

JULIUS CAESAR
SHAKESPEARE
Royal Shakespeare Company

Caesar returns from war, all-conquering, but mutiny is rumbling through the corridors of power. Angus Jackson directs Shakespeare’s epic political tragedy, as the race to claim the empire spirals out of control in this Royal Shakespeare Company production.

DVD | BLU-RAY

COSI FAN TUTTE
MOZART TUTTE
Royal Opera House

Cosi fan tutte is given a playful, theatrical treatment by German director Jan Philipp Gloger, who sets this new production for the Royal Opera in a theatre. The four lovers are performed by a cast of young rising stars, conducted by Semyon Bychkov.

DVD | BLU-RAY

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY
TCHAIKOVSKY
Royal Opera House

Royal Ballet Principal Marielana Nuñez delights as Princess Aurora, with Vadim Muntagirov as her Prince Florimund, in this performance of a timeless classic. The Sleeping Beauty captures all the magic and virtuosity that ballet has to offer.

DVD | BLU-RAY

MOZART OPERAS

These three facets in the prism of Mozart’s operatic genius shine in Glyndebourne’s typically thought-provoking productions, featuring skilled singer-actors buoyed by the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment’s luminous period sound.

3 DVD SET | 3 BLU-RAY SET

THE ART OF MARIANELA NUNEZ
Royal Opera House

In her twenty years with The Royal Ballet, Argentine dancer Marielana Nuñez has excelled in iconic ballet classics, Company heritage works and modern creations. This collection showcases her exceptional mastery in four quintessential roles including Swan Lake, La Fille mal gardée, Don Quixote and Giselle.

4 DVD SET | 4 BLU-RAY SET

1984
WATKINS
Northern Ballet


DVD | BLU-RAY

THREE TRAGEDIES
SHAKESPEARE
Royal Shakespeare Company

Rising star Paapa Essieud gives a stunning performance in Simon Godwin’s Hamlet; Antony Sher leads the way as the proud but fatally flawed monarch in Gregory Doran’s acclaimed King Lear; Iqbal Khan’s astonishing and groundbreaking production of Othello, featuring Hugh Quarshie in the title role.

3 DVD SET | 3 BLU-RAY SET

TITUS ANDRONICUS
SHAKESPEARE
Royal Shakespeare Company

In a world of chaos and disorder, Titus Andronicus feels chillingly contemporary. Rape, cannibalism, mutilation and murder are the gruesome tools in Shakespeare’s bloodiest play. Directed by Blanche McIntyre, cast includes David Troughton and Nia Gwynne.

DVD | BLU-RAY

opusarte.com
Hello, my name is Mark.

This week’s magazine is a royal wedding special. We’re marking the marriage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle by taking a look back at the royal family’s relationship with The Big Issue over the years – our Timeline starts on page 21. We take an in-depth look at the row which erupted about homelessness in Windsor, where the wedding will take place. You can read about that on page 25. We’ll also see Street Art contributors give their own unique take on the nuptials on page 26. And last but not least I tell my own story on page 46.

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His long-term diagnosis for the NHS is not good

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It’s nearly over – but Sofia Helin will always be Saga Norén

THE BIG ISSUE MANIFESTO
WE BELIEVE in a hand up, not a handout...
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**CORRESPONDENCE**

Write to: The Big Issue, Second Floor, 43 Bath St, Glasgow, G2 1HW
Email: letters@bigissue.com

**From the street to back on their feet?**
I was struck by the article by Tony Wood, triumphing the fresh opportunity provided by Airbnb for homeless people to find quality accommodation. His article gave a positive insight into something heavily criticised for reducing housing availability. What if those without a home could rent an Airbnb for half price? Although I think there is still a risk of abuse (with stories of housing being ‘rented’ full time on Airbnb), with the right regulation ‘rented’ full time on Airbnb, there really help get people back off the street and on to their feet?

Just a thought.
Katie Treadwell, email

**Benanza!**
Firstly I’d like to thank you for putting Benedict Cumberbatch on the front page [May 7-13]. It’s always a winner. Usually I just buy one but I bought this morning and will probably be picking up another five or so tomorrow!! It sells so quickly with him on the front though but I’m not complaining at all!! LOL

Secondly, I would like to mention the gentleman that sells TBI near Ludgate Circus.

**You’re not alone**
How sad that Laurie Canciani’s early life was so unhappy [Books, April 30-May 6]. What were her parents doing? She mentions “my small family” so presumably she had at least one parent and maybe a sibling. Did they not realise what this teenage girl was suffering?

I am very sympathetic towards Laurie Canciani, and delighted that she is doing much better now, but she hasn’t told us anything like the whole story!
Juliet Chaplin, Sutton

I was interested to read Tony Wood’s story [Sometimes, all I need is the Airbnb, April 23-29]. I am looking at this from the opposite point of view – that of a homeowner.

We are lucky enough to own a flat in England and a condo in Florida. Because we spend the winters in Florida, and do some travelling as well, our flat is empty for much of the year. This seems a waste: we would like it to be used but have not found a way of doing so. (Airbnb does not work for us.) There must be others in a similar situation. Tony Woods said that he had discussed his experiences with experts in the homeless charities sector.

Could they not set up a scheme whereby vacant property could be made available to people needing emergency or short-term accommodation? There would obviously be administrative costs, and some supervision would be required, but would the benefits not make it worthwhile?
Sandie Schagen (Dr), email

To my shame I don’t know his name (I will find out) but he is always polite, helpful, always says hello and always has a smile for everyone – even those that are rude.

The articles are always quirky and interesting and it’s never a boring read.

Just wanted to say this and... thank you!
Sharon Wells, Essex

**Fill up my vacant property please!**

I gave a lovely gent near Charing Cross the rest of the day off by buying him out. When I said I wanted 14, he asked if I was having a laugh. I said no. Benedict has fans everywhere. He said, HIM? And then kissed his picture! @Bigissue

@armorcats
11 down. 3 still to go. I gave a lovely gent near Charing Cross the rest of the day off by buying him out. When I said I wanted 14, he asked if I was having a laugh. I said no. Benedict has fans everywhere. He said, HIM? And then kissed his picture! @Bigissue

@FizzandFriends
Excellent cover on @BigIssue Festival Guide. Saw this magnificent woman @Miss_GraceJones in concert many years ago with my good friend @nurtureurbiz Excellent gig especially when Miss Jones turned spotlights on audience. #Memorable

@ChaptersStafffor
It would be brilliant if young people who can show an impeccable rent record could borrow a mortgage amount that equals their rent repayments. Also think it’s time to control those Machiavellian rent admin fees

@ianlovelandUK
Top marks to @jessphillips for having a go at selling the @Bigiss... Yardley are lucky to have her. Every MP should do this.

@ajohepworth
I’ve become obsessed with the crossword and Sudoku in the back of the @Bigiss but I’ve yet to complete one with or without cheating. This is who I am now.

@Lloydie_A
My day is always improved by the @Bigiss... vendor close to Oxford Circus who tips me off about new bands and acts. He is a man in the know.x

Sandie Schagen (Dr), email
Start your story today

90 years of publishing expertise; a lifetime of support & guidance. Find your perfect creative writing course today – call us on 0207 927 3827.
Last week Scottish musician Scott Hutchison died. He was 36. He had gone missing in the early hours of Wednesday from a hotel outside Edinburgh. His body was found on Thursday. Scott had left several concerning tweets on Tuesday, his final one saying simply “I’m away now. Thanks.”

Scott suffered mental health problems in the past but this disappearance was so worrying that his family made increasingly desperate pleas to him to return. Devastatingly for them, it was too late.

Some of the songs Scott wrote for his band Frightened Rabbit dealt with isolation, fear and depression. His fans are clear how the music had helped them.

The news of his death hit a lot of people hard. I didn’t know Scott, but I know a number of people who did. They speak of a good man, a good friend. Their grief is tangible. It is a desperately sad situation.

This came in the same week as a character called Aidan Connor took his own life in Coronation Street. It was a storyline, featuring Shayne Ward, that received plaudits for its handling of a situation that is a national crisis.

Young men are taking their own lives in staggering numbers.

This is not breaking news. Suicide remains a bigger killer than heart disease, cancer and road accidents for men aged between 20 and 49 in Britain.

I don’t know why that is. In fact, nobody really knows. Various reasons have been put forward: a rise in a certain modern toxic masculinity where corrupted ideas of an alpha male perpetuate an unattainable myth; social media growth that has led to increased isolation and a lack of human interaction; dramatic cuts in mental healthcare provision, withdrawing access to essential help for those who need it most; hopelessness due to rising levels of poverty.

I have a son who is just 11. He is a happy boy and he is really good fun to hang out with. I’m lucky he’s still happy to chat, a lot, to his dad. I know the hard knock of puberty is not too far away. And it’s uncertain where it’ll carry him across those adolescent years and beyond.

But I know that I will make it clear I will be there, come what may. That if darkness or confusion or anger grips, I will be within reach. The same goes for friends and anybody close who needs that at the darkest hour.

That’s not to say that those who see no other way out didn’t have support networks around. Frequently families are doing everything they can. It’s crucial that more properly funded research and support is put into this devastating scourge of society. And that mental health funding in the NHS is lifted to the levels needed.

For now, there is this from Lorna Fraser, an advisor from The Samaritans who worked on the Coronation Street story:

“One of the most important things that this storyline covers is the importance of talking if you are struggling to cope – talk to somebody, don’t suffer in silence, there’s always help out there.”

She added that the opposite was also true. “If there’s somebody that you’re worried about – if somebody doesn’t really seem themselves, talk to them about it. Ask them if they’re OK.”

We must listen. We must speak. We must be there.

The Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123

Paul McNamee is editor of The Big Issue
@pauldmcnamee paul.mcnamee@bigissue.com

Much-loved vendor Kevin Headley remembered with vigil

Figures from across London’s underground arts scene and readers of The Big Issue have joined together to pay their respects to much-loved vendor Kevin Headley, who has died.

The 52-year-old, who sold the magazine outside Hackney Wick Overground station for many years, passed away on May 5 after suffering a suspected heart attack.

He was well-known for his tireless work supporting homeless charities and local arts events and festivals, as well as selling The Big Issue.

Friends and regulars gathered to remember him at a vigil on his pitch on May 8. And two days later the regular open-mic event which he co-curated – Bring It, at Hackney venue Grow – was dedicated to his memory.

Stephen Robertson, Big Issue Foundation CEO, said: “Kevin was much-loved and a very popular figure in the community and the arts, who was constantly trying to play his part and show a different way of doing things. He went above and beyond.”

A statement from Grow added: “Kevin was a remarkable man who dedicated his life to helping others from all walks of life, in so many different ways and in many different places all over London.”
Creditworthiness Assessment Bill takes a step forward

Big Issue Founder John Bird’s push to make credit more affordable for some of the poorest in society is a step closer to becoming law.

The Creditworthiness Assessment Bill, introduced in the House of Lords by Lord Bird, progressed through the committee stage with widespread support and no amendments on Friday last week.

The proposed legislation had its first reading on June 28 last year before progressing to a second reading on November 24.

The Bill, which will require credit providers to take rental and council tax payments into account, passed the committee stage with no amendments. Two – one calling for a FCA review after two years, another reducing from “must” to “may” the obligation on credit providers to take rental payment data into account – were withdrawn after discussion.

Lord Bird said: “If there are any unintended consequences then it is our duty to look at legislation and not simply write off 80 per cent of people in order to protect 20 per cent. “The best thing you can do to protect them is to find out who they are, get very close to them and embrace them.”

Those are the people I know, the people I work with and the people I come from and there is absolutely no way I would ever come close to grassing them up.”

The Bill now progresses to Report stage and a third reading.

Housing First gets the green light

James Brokenshire has given the go-ahead to three Housing First pilot projects in his first act as Secretary of State for Housing.

The Old Bexley and Sidcup MP, who replaced former Housing Secretary Sajid Javid after his promotion to Home Secretary following Amber Rudd’s resignation, awarded £8m to bring the approach to Liverpool, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.

Previously announced in last year’s budget, the trials will give rough sleepers permanent housing alongside support to help with complex needs. In European projects Housing First helped at least eight out of 10 people exit homelessness.

“We know that the causes of rough sleeping are varied and Housing First will give people housing alongside the support they need to get off the streets and rebuild their lives,” Brokenshire told The Big Issue, as he vowed to work closely with the newly set-up Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel.

Formerly Northern Ireland minister, Brokenshire also pledged his support for the Irish border to remain open. The future of the border is yet to be resolved with passport and customs checks still not off the Brexit negotiations table less than a year from the leave date.

“I would like to see us retain that open border and that certainly can be done because it is important that we continue to negotiate with our European partners,” he said.

“The isle of Ireland is a special place and I am very fortunate to have been able to get to know it in my time as Northern Ireland minister so I would like to see that open border and the Good Friday Agreement preserved.”

ON BIGISSUE.COM

THIS WEEK

• Take a jog in the shoes of homeless runners of LA as we run the rule over the new documentary on the trailblazing running programme Skid Row Marathon

• Actor Ricky Tomlinson visited HMP Leicester last month, his first visit since walking free 43 years ago – a current inmate reveals how he got on back behind bars

• Benedict Cumberbatch is cutting to the heart of a rotten class system with new show Patrick Melrose
Street Art is created by people who are marginalised by issues like homelessness, disability and mental health conditions. Contact streetlights@bigissue.com to see your art here. You can buy prints of some of the art at bigissueshop.com – half the profit goes to the artist.

STREET ART

► DISPLACEMENT EXHIBITION

Displacement is an annual exhibition of photographs by people affected by homelessness. It’s organised by Accumulate, a charity that has helped hundreds of young homeless Londoners through a programme of creative workshops. The best photography from the programme will go on display and on sale at Kings Place, 90 York Way, London, from May 17-31, and is also available to buy online at accumulate.org.uk, with the participants receiving a share of the profits.
THE BIG ISSUE

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Despite their woes, it’s the world that’s in debt to Greece

I went to a small exhibition at the British Museum last week and realised that it has turned even more into a tourist destination. The world’s artefacts arranged in splendid rooms for the world’s visitors. They come to the BM to look at what perhaps their own ancestors hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago made and invented.

All human endeavour is there. Opened in the late 18th century, it soon became the leading museum of the world and spawned imitations elsewhere, especially in the US where they had even more money to buy and ship.

But I was there for a jewel-like exhibition that had that wonderful thing that rarely happens if you’ve looked at all the art I have looked at: surprise, wonder and enchantment.

My life was turned around in the BM, in the Japanese room when aged 18 I had to step over an art student. Sprawled out on the floor immodestly drawing and painting. We became friends and it was she who, looking at my proletarian sketch-book, insisted that I go to Chelsea College of Arts drawing classes, where I was drawn into being chosen for the diploma course.

Later when I became a Marxist English Leninist Trotskyist I marvelled at the big round library, then in an outdoor square in the middle of the museum, now indoors, in which Marx wrote the book that rocked the world solidly, Das Kapital.

But when I joined the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of tourists and visitors last week I was heading for an exhibition about three artists, one the writer Paddy Leigh Fermor, and two painters Ghika and Craxton.

I was asked after the exhibition by a Greek student doing some survey what I thought of the exhibition and I was speechless. Ghika is a great Greek painter who inspired the younger English man John Craxton to produce in Greece phenomenal paintings. And both united by their devotion and love of the writer Paddy Leigh Fermor who, having had a “good war” in Greece devoted, with his wife Joan, his lifetime to the Peloponnesian village and peninsula he built a house on.

Ghika and Craxton are such great painters and Paddy such a brilliant writer, with his writing interspersed throughout the exhibition that you can see the art and the creative friendship grow before your eyes. It made me want to abandon my neglect of this brilliant historical and beautiful country. I had been there once, to Athens a few years back for a social enterprise conference. I wanted to go there immediately and ignore the heat, not good in that, and just drink in its great beauty.

Paddy’s ‘Good War’ involved being a supporter of the Partisans in Crete and capturing a German general, the subject of a very popular post-war British film. Paddy, aged 18, had set off to walk from Rotterdam to Constantinople – Istanbul – and wrote copiously in a number of books of that adventure. And also other adventures and experiences in Greece. I’m reading the books at the moment, spurred on and inspired by this beautiful exhibition.

Of course, it’s not easy today to talk about Greece without being saddened by their European debacle, where they became the scapegoat for an ill-functioning common market. And were and are punished because they didn’t get it right. When I went to Greece that one time it was right in the middle of the period of greatest agitation. And it was terrible to see so many people driven to express their suffering at what the northern countries had decided.

Life’s short so there is no mention of Greece’s great contribution to our world history, philosophy, theatre, poetry, pottery, architecture! Our modern world is made in its eternal and timeless image.

Ill Met By Moonlight, which saw Paddy hiding in the hills and capturing one of the German occupier’s top men, was a great film. But maybe a greater film might be about that complex country and its complex people, their pluses and their minuses, and their enormous contribution to our civil and cultural society.

I did suggest at the time I had just come back from Greece that we had a word tax. And that every word we used that sprang from Greece we paid a word tax. They would be able to pay off all of their debts in no time.

Of course, the British Museum is the home of some of the greatest of Greek sculptures, the Elgin Marbles, bought by the aristocrat of that name who did so from the occupiers, the Ottomans of Greece, and shipped these wonders to London to become part of the cultural backbone of the British Empire’s own museum.

The very wonderful Greek actress called Melina Mercouri, a dead spit for my mother, campaigned for the whole of her life to have the Marbles returned to their rightful place on the Parthenon overlooking Athens, but she died before it was realised. It still remains a dream of many Greeks to have their artefacts back.

Aside from those Greek artefacts, the Egyptian, and my favourite the Mesopotamian, go see the small, perfectly formed Ghika, Craxton, Leigh Fermor exhibition. It is unique and beautiful and astonishing. Almost as one whole piece of art and culture itself.

John Bird is the founder and Editor in Chief of The Big Issue. @johnbirdswords john.bird@bigissue.com
Charmed Lives in Greece: Ghika, Craxton, Leigh Fermor is at the British Museum until July 15. britishmuseum.org
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A few years ago I discovered a word that pinpointed a primal fear that’s gripped me since childhood: thalassophobia, an acute anxiety around vast, deep bodies of water. As long as I can remember, dreams and nightmares have drawn me time and again into a watery netherworld in which I’m alone in an endless sea or subsumed by murky waters.

Like the rush of vertigo that hits many of us as we approach a cliff edge, thalassophobia manifests when I’m crossing an ocean or swimming in deep water. Shadows below the surface are terrifying; seaweed gives me the creeps. I have no desire to swim with whales and dolphins. Even Blue Planet can evoke the same unsettling eeriness as a David Lynch film.

If you recognise these fears, you’re in good company; thalassophobia is as common as a fear of snakes and spiders. And while on the flip side there are those who can’t keep away from deep water – and feel compelled to live their lives on the ocean – it’s telling that sailing legend Alain Colas described his fellow kind as “a special brand of maniacs”.

Even for those who do eschew the life of a land-lubber, oceans can still have adverse effects on the psyche. While dehydration, confinement and loneliness are recognised as significant factors in driving countless sailors to “disappear” over the centuries, there is something about the vastness of our oceans themselves that can do strange things to the mind.

Water remains one of the most mysterious substances. It is the most destructive force on Earth, it is three times harder to compress than diamond and defies the laws of physics by expanding when it freezes and freezing faster when it’s hot than when it’s cold. Roughly 70 per cent of the Earth’s surface is covered with water, a similar proportion to that in a young human body. Like our oceans, we are composed of a similar ratio of salt to water.

Despite my phobia, I love to swim in natural bodies of water, provided I can see the bottom and I’m close to shore. I’m blessed to live by the sea in Brighton and when the weather is warm I regularly swim with a friend. Sometimes she encourages me to swim out with her to one of the yellow buoys that lie 100 metres from shore. I know, rationally, that there is nothing below to harm me, yet dark shadows and seaweed still make my heart race and often I find myself flipping on my back and paddling furiously to shore as if my life depended on it. I’ve never dared make the swim on my own.

Carl Jung saw water as “the commonest symbol for the unconscious”. If he was right, thalassophobia points to a fear that goes beyond the vastness of water and its deep, dark shadows. It is an anxiety about what is buried within us, in the vast unchartered depths of our own thoughts. That thalassophobia may be a fear of ourselves is a sobering thought.

Somehow I doubt I’ll ever be seeking out the company of a sperm whale in the Pacific, yet still I look forward to summer when again I’ll be tiptoeing into Brighton’s waters with my friend and – exhilarated and anxious – trying to make peace with what lies beneath. One stroke at a time.
In 1991
The year Ronnie O'Sullivan turns 16...
The first edition of The Big Issue magazine goes on sale / Bryan Adams spends a record 16 weeks at the top of the UK singles chart / The Birmingham Six are released from prison

Ronnie O’Sullivan
The Rocket
When I was 16, I had just turned professional. My main passion was snooker and my life revolved around billiard halls. All my friends were there. It was my social place, my workplace, we would have dinner up there. I was eager to get going. As you get further into your career, the fear can kick in, but as a young snooker pro you have nothing to lose. It was pure excitement. All I wanted to do was play snooker, so the opportunity to play professionally was fantastic. And when I started getting a few results and a few pay cheques, even better.

I miss young Ronnie. My younger self was so grounded, so stable, so together. Snooker was great, family life was great, things couldn’t be better than when I was 16. Then my dad went away [his father Ronald was killed in 1992 for the murder of Bruce Bryan in London, and was released in 2010] and that rocked me massively. After that I was over-trying on the snooker table because I didn’t want to make him feel responsible for me getting bad results. I put a lot of pressure on myself. And sometimes the harder you try, the less it happens so it is a vicious circle. I didn’t know how to deal with it.

I would tell my younger self to get counselling a lot earlier to deal with the grief of my dad going away. I felt like I was carrying the whole world on my shoulders. In hindsight, I would have sought professional help to get through the grieving process with somebody. I don’t think I could have done much differently. I got my head down, I carried on playing snooker, I hadn’t yet discovered drink or other stuff. I was pretty sensible really. It was just too much.

I drank and took other substances just to fit in. After I’d won my first ranking event, that monkey was off my back and I’d made my dad proud. I decided it was my time and went on a bit of a barge – out drinking and hanging around with people who weren’t like-minded and didn’t have to perform as a professional sportsman. If I could live my time again, I would delete that part of my life. If I was a party type of guy, that’s one thing, but I never actually enjoyed it. My mum and dad were my role models and they used to do it. But when I speak to my dad about it, he says it wasn’t for him either. My mum liked to stay out partying, so he had to go with her.

My younger self wouldn’t believe how much I am into fitness and nutrition. My dad used to have to force me to run. Part of the deal was that if I wanted to leave school early to play snooker, I had to have a fitness routine. Running was a good addiction for me. I have an addictive nature, so if I find something I enjoy, which I did with the running, I stick at it. But I could never have seen myself doing cross-country races and running for a club. Running took me away from the typical snooker player culture of gambling and drinking. When I am running in the woods and the sun is shining through the trees it is great to be alive.

I don’t feel I have both feet in snooker. One foot is already out. But the bad thing is that I am winning more than ever. It is very difficult to walk away when you are getting results. I am not practicing like I used to, I am not devoted like I used to be, but I am still winning. It is like an injured animal – I can’t put my snooker career out of its misery.

In China they have a saying that you have two lives – aged one to 40 and 40 to 80. And that rings true for me. I have enjoyed my snooker career, but how do I want the next 40 years to pan out? I don’t want to be playing snooker every day so I have to test the waters. I have made a conscious effort to try different things. Writing the books, doing after-dinner speaking, I did a show in America and a bit of punditry work, which I loved. The least enjoyable at the moment is playing snooker.

If you had told my younger self that he would write two novels, he wouldn’t believe it. Even three or four years ago I would have said no way. But I have always been a keen reader. At the moment, I’m reading a lot of Martina Cole. She is fantastic. I write a lot while I am on the road. I put all my ideas down on paper – I overwrite – but a friend of mine helps me tighten it up. I love it.

I’m not the parent I would like to be. My mum and dad were so close, we always pulled together. I had the best of everything, the best support you could ask for. We were a unit. I’m not a unit with my children, I kind of have to watch from afar [He has three children from previous relationships]. I make sure they are all right, they go to a good school, their mum does whatever she does and they are healthy, polite, nice kids who will grow up to be whatever they want to be. But I think love and support, and knowing my door is open to them 365 days a year, 24 hours a day and that I love them to pieces is all I can do in the circumstances. They have their own routine and flow in life. Sometimes I don’t even know what they like to eat. So it is difficult to have the same impact on them as my dad had on me.

I would tell young Ronnie to meet a nice, stable girl who is supportive and puts you first. In the type of job I am in, I need someone who is an equal but also very supportive of what I do. In the past, I chose the wrong type. I think stability is important – especially as a sportsman you are away a lot. Choosing the right person is the advice I give to my son as well. Make sure they are right for you.

I was never political as a youngster. It is only since I met my girlfriend Laila [Rouass] six years ago. She has made me much more socially aware. And you can’t help getting into it. I find it very interesting. I am a Labour supporter. I’m not against capitalism and people making money, I just think it could be distributed more fairly, put in the right places. I like Corbyn and I really liked Ed Miliband. I met him a few times, he is a nice guy. I was sad to see him not get in. I think Corbyn is a very strong leader, he is not going to waver.

I was playing up in Cardiff and it was snowing and there were so many homeless people outside. It is so wrong they don’t have a roof over their heads, the basics in life. It frustrates me to craziness. I try to help out as much as I can – we helped feed the homeless at a Christmas dinner near Trafalgar Square. And it was my best Christmas ever. I’ll probably do it every year now. I’m hoping to join up with a homeless charity and raise some money, because that is something I am really passionate about. I don’t like to see people struggle.

Double Kiss by Ronnie O’Sullivan is out in paperback on May 17 (Macmillan, £7.99) Interview: Adrian Lobb @adey70
Sorry NHS, but this is going to hurt

Straight-talking TV doctor Christian Jessen thinks our health system hasn’t kept pace with society — and in Mental Health Awareness Week he says it’s leading to a social media-fuelled crisis. Interview: Steven MacKenzie
If it’s deformed, engorged or oozing pus, Dr Christian Jessen has seen it, prodded it and made it feel better. Boldly going where no “TV doctor” dared go before, Embarrassing Bodies started exposing the nation’s sorest spots in 2007 and since then, Dr Christian has become one of the most recognisable faces in medicine, while still working at his Harley Street practice and treating hundreds of thousands of Twitter followers with a straight-talking style that delights in busting through the pseudoscience online.

Here he tackles his biggest case yet – our ailing NHS – which he believes is not fit for purpose in the modern world. With the internet and social media changing everything around us and about us, including our own health and wellbeing, the system urgently needs to adapt to address the rise of mental health problems before they spiral out of control.

How many patients are now coming to see GPs with problems connected to social media?

It’s slow and insidious. I’m not sure people immediately relate it back but we’re definitely seeing an increase in body image and self-esteem issues, low moods, depressions, and in younger people, those are almost always linked to this phenomenon of comparing your life with others through social media. Couple that with the amount of cyberbullying that goes on and yeah, it’s quite worrying.

Is the internet the cause of problems or does it just exacerbate existing ones?

I think it can directly cause them. Let’s say you’re starting to post pictures of yourself online and all you get back is negative comments. You start to look into what’s wrong, you start comparing your stuff to others. What you see is a false reality but nevertheless you think it’s better than your own and you can see how that could brew and grow.

If someone is having a major medical issue – if their arm is falling off – they seek medical help. But are people put off getting help when appointments are difficult to get?

Remember too, the very nature of problems associated with low self-esteem is that you don’t consider yourself worthy of help and therefore your mind tells you there’s no point, I’ll just be taking up time. It sounds rather dark and depressing but it’s important we recognise that. The nature of somebody who is depressed means they probably won’t seek treatment.

The internet may be the cause of an increasing number of problems, but can it also be the best place to find help?

That’s the interesting dichotomy, the killer is also the cure. Often psychotherapy or CBT is very effective treatment, but it’s the wandering away from that and back to the darker places that can sabotage that treatment.

What do doctors think when patients arrive for an appointment with a diagnosis they’ve had from Dr Google?

I’m a fan of Dr Google. I think an informed patient is a better patient than a completely uninformed patient. Patients can find it quite difficult to put into words what they’re feeling, particularly when it comes to mental health issues. So after initial consultation what I often do is say, I think it’s this or this, why don’t you go away and read about both of them, come back and tell me what you think fits. Or if the internet acts as a driver. It tells you you’ve got head cancer or HIV – those are the only two options it seems to ever come up with – but that often scares you enough to drive you into the doctors to have your cold treated.

What is the psychological reason that people act differently online?

It’s the cowardice of anonymity that leads to a lot of the behaviour that people would probably never actually do face to face with a person. The internet is often used as therapy, as an outlet, as a place to vent, a place to scream and shout and rant and rage against the world. That can be good in some ways, it can be absolutely pointless in other ways.

You advise people on social media not to respond to bullies – but I wonder if you always follow your own advice...

Do as I say not do as I do, alright? I’ve noticed it is incredibly easy to become a bully online as it is to be bullied. So my responses to things on Twitter sometimes are possibly a little bit too aggressive and I need to be careful about that. What I try to do is correct misinformation. OK, I don’t always strictly stick to that. When you’re a public figure you feel a slight responsibility. You have a platform and misinformation that’s spread about on the internet needs correcting, needs challenging, otherwise every celebrity without any sort of an expertise will tweet their opinion which is treated as gospel.

But no one has ever won an argument on Twitter, right?

What I suspect is that there will be plenty of people on the side-lines watching, unsure, who see a dialogue going on and make their mind up. That’s what I’m hoping anyway, otherwise it’s all a futile scream into the void.

Dr Christian’s Guide To Growing Up Online is out now (Scholastic, £8.99)
End-of-life care is an overlooked symptom of homelessness, but Dani Garavelli meets a hostel manager and a nurse who worked together to stop a dying man becoming yet another street death statistic.
In the end, Iain did have to be taken to hospital, but, after treatment, he was discharged to the hostel and died there on Valentine’s Day last year. Staff and residents attended his funeral where, at his request, Amy Winehouse’s Rehab was played.

For a homeless person to be able to die, like Iain, in the place of their choice with medical support on hand is still rare. The number of people dying on the street or in temporary accommodation has doubled in the past five years, The Guardian found. Some of those deaths will have been caused by overdoses, but others will have succumbed to terminal conditions for which they ought to have been receiving treatment.

In the last few years, the Care Quality Commission has published two reports exploring the barriers to end-of-life care for homeless people. Those reports draw on research carried out by the charity Pathway in collaboration with St Mungo’s, Marie Curie, University College London and Coordinate My Care.

Having interviewed 127 people who had been homeless or worked with homeless people, Pathway identified some of the factors that limit their access. Chaotic lives and a reluctance to engage with services mean there are fewer opportunities to diagnose illnesses; and, even if they are identified, it is more difficult to give an accurate prognosis for conditions like cirrhosis of the liver than it is for cancer.

Then there is the issue of where homeless people should be cared for: hospices may not be an appropriate setting, especially for those addicted to alcohol or drugs, while hospice staff often have trouble balancing the needs of patients with chaotic lifestyles with those of others who crave tranquility.

At the moment what tends to happen is that a terminally ill homeless person might be found unconscious, taken to hospital, treated and then discharged. With no long-term plan, they get trapped in the revolving door of homelessness; they fall off the radar, do not receive follow-up care and end up back in hospital – or dead.

In the wake of the Care Quality Commission reports, Lib Dem MP Ed Davey introduced his Homelessness (End of Life Care) Bill which was due to have its second reading in the House of Commons last month. At present, local authorities are under no obligation to house those deemed “intentionally homeless”. The Bill would change that for those who are terminally ill.

Across the country there is a growing momentum, with innovative collaborations between homelessness and healthcare services being developed in London, Manchester and Cheshire.

The catalyst for Barringer’s project was caring for a heroin addict with double lung cancer who was sleeping on a sofa at a friend’s house after twice being thrown out of hostels. “No one wanted to engage with him because he was known to be difficult,” she says. “They did engage in the end. He got his own flat and he had a good death which is what we were trying to achieve, but it was the obstacles we encountered along the way that led to this project and which have now been broken down because of it.”

Together with Gail Wilson, St Luke’s deputy director of clinical services, Barringer, who was highly commended in the RCN community nursing awards, devised a four-day training programme for 15 charities including soup-run volunteers and street pastors, who were likely to be in direct contact with rough sleepers.

At George House, a regular drop-in clinic was set up to help identify those who were in the last six months of their life. The challenge of storing the drugs necessary for treatment on-site was overcome by installing a safe to which only visiting health professionals had the code.

The next step will be to appoint a care co-ordinator to ensure homeless people don’t slip through the net as they move from one healthcare setting to another.

Though initially the 11 shift workers at George House were split over Mitchell’s decision to accommodate Iain’s death, all now support the policy. One of the hostel’s “clusters” has been dedicated to complex needs and end-of-life care.

Since December there have been two more drug deaths there and Mitchell says he is having to administer Naloxone – the antidote for a heroin overdose – once or twice a week. As a result, he wants to extend the end-of-life conversations to those who, though not terminally ill, are at raised risk of sudden death. He has also asked that staff be trained to the level of first responders.

Mitchell’s last gesture of friendship to Iain was to prevent bailiffs taking the silver cross around his neck to offset the cost of his public funeral. “That cross was very important to him so I made sure it went in his casket with him,” he says.

Dying at 54 is no one’s idea of a good outcome but, unlike so many homeless people found dead in doorways or under hedges, Iain spent his last days with the people who cared most about him. And that must count for something.
Don’t miss this LIVE WORLD PREMIERE event, as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra performs the sensational soundtracks of PlayStation® games, within the iconic surroundings of London’s Royal Albert Hall.

Featuring favourite themes from chart-topping games, including: Shadow of the Colossus, The Last Guardian, Uncharted, Everybody’s Gone to the Rapture, LittleBigPlanet and Horizon Zero Dawn, this exhilarating live show – with a full symphony orchestra, guest presenter and spectacular light display – takes you on a musical journey from vast deserts and overgrown ruins, to ancient artefacts and futuristic landscapes, celebrating some of the most memorable gaming music from the past 20 years.

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*Tickets for 16 and under £15 (in selected areas)
When Windsor was announced as Harry and Meghan’s wedding venue, a right royal media storm kicked up. And the town’s homeless population was caught in the middle. Rough sleepers should be swept off the streets ahead of the big day, council leader Simon Dudley urged police earlier this year. As an activist for homelessness charities, Harry confronted the row, albeit sideways. He and Meghan visited Social Bite, the increasingly famous Edinburgh cafe that trains homeless people. It didn’t take Sherlock to read this as an indication of the couple’s position.

Their wedding has kept homelessness on the agenda, and maintained focus on other issues the couple feel strongly about. Prince Harry is involved with armed forces and mental health charities and Meghan has long supported organisations including the UN Women’s political participation and leadership programme. Shunning politicians, they invited campaigners and local community heroes to their big day (even if they have to bring their own sandwiches). Pamela Anomneze, with close Big Issue ties, is just one (see page 25).

The Big Issue has enjoyed a long and storied attachment to the royals. We join the celebrations with a special look back at the history of two British institutions: The Big Issue and the royal family...
DOESN’T ONE KNOW YOU?
The Big Issue was given the royal seal of approval in 1997 when Prince Charles visited our offices in London. While he was there he bumped into an unlikely acquaintance. Clive Harold had been a classmate of Charles at Hill House School. He later became a journalist and author before falling on hard times and selling The Big Issue. Harold joked with the prince that he remembered him from their school days over 40 years ago because they both had big ears.

CHARLES THE SECOND
Prince Charles came for a tour and to open our new premises in Pentonville Road, London. The plaque marking the day now adorns the wall of our Finsbury Park office in north London.

WE ARE AMUSED
Regular Big Issue buyer and office visitor Prince Charles must have shared his love for the magazine with his family. The Queen made sure to pick up a copy when she was in Brighton the following year. She was presented with it by Ivan Vetson, who the previous night had slept in “a shed made out of bins”. 

DOWN UNDER
He’s back. Charles must have been delighted to spot a reminder of home while on the other side of the world. Visiting Melbourne’s Federation Square, Charles came across Paul, who was selling the Australian edition of The Big Issue. Our sister paper started up down under in 1996.

BEST MAN
Just a few months before his wedding, Prince William wrote an exclusive article about how homelessness is a subject close to his heart. In it he said: “Charities, churches, governments and other bodies can all help with the basics – a roof under which to shelter from the elements, heating and security – but without hope, an individual cannot rebuild a life. “And for there to be people with no hope living right alongside us is surely a blight on our societies. That is why the work of the restorers of hope – street papers such as The Big Issue, my own charity Centrepoint and other organisations and individuals who care – so inspire me. They give homeless people the tools with which to rebuild their confidence and, ultimately, their lives.”
ANOTHER WILLIAM EXCLUSIVE!
Sophia Kichou became homeless at the age of 18, sleeping in a hostel before getting support from Centrepoint. There she met Prince William and told him about her dream of becoming a journalist and the prince agreed to an interview with her. William joked about the “interrogation”, hoping Sophia wouldn’t “Paxman” him. She had a more subtle technique, leading him to talk about life as a young father, the time he slept rough with Centrepoint and how he wants to end youth homelessness. Since the interview, Sophia has continued her journalism studies and served as an intern at Westminster.

CORNISH TEA
Back in 2016 the Duchess of Cornwall paid a visit to Social Bite, a social enterprise cafe in Edinburgh that employs and trains homeless people. Camilla chatted to George Whyte, a Big Issue vendor in the city, over a cuppa.

RED CARPET TREATMENT
When the story of Big Issue seller-turned-bestselling author James Bowen made it to the big screen, the Duchess of Cambridge was first in line to see the film at its world premiere. Bob even let the duchess stroke him.

CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT
A new, but vaguely familiar, Big Issue vendor appeared on the streets earlier this year. This mural by graffiti artist Loretto shows the Queen with that familiar feline, Street Cat Bob, selling magazines in Fitzrovia, central London.
Join Team Tommy’s for the
Prudential RideLondon–Surrey 100
and help save babies’ lives

1 in 4 parents are left devastated by miscarriage, stillbirth or premature delivery. Tommy’s funds vital medical research dedicated to preventing these complications and saving babies’ lives.

“I’ve ridden for a charity every year and Tommy’s was by far the most friendly, helpful and communicative!” Simon

“Thank you Tommy’s for allowing us to ride for you. We all had a blast and your cheerleaders were great!” Pramit

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tommys.org/ridelondon

VIP treatment for all £30 Team Tommy’s cyclists with the loudest cheers, quality cycling top and support every step of the way!
THE ROYALS, THEIR WEDDING AND THE HOMELESSNESS ROW

Vicky Carroll explores the controversy that put rough sleepers front and centre in Harry and Meghan’s wedding story

When Harry and Meghan announced their nuptials would take place in Windsor, with tens of thousands of tourists and well-wishers expected to descend on the quaint Thameside town for the occasion, the last thing anyone anticipated was a right royal row over homelessness.

Simon Dudley, leader of Windsor Council, was pilloried in January after saying many of the town’s beggars are not homeless, or if they were homeless they were “choosing to reject all support services” making it “a voluntary choice”. He blamed rough sleepers and homeless people for rubbish accumulating on the streets, and lamented that “the whole situation presents a beautiful town in a sadly unfavourable light”.

Rather than propose investment in measures to prevent people falling into homelessness and proactively deal with those who are already homeless, Dudley requested Thames Valley crime commissioner intervene and demand officers use the power of the law to clear them off the streets ahead of the celebrations.

Controversy duly exploded and Prince Harry, who since childhood has shown support for homeless charities through his mum Princess Diana’s support of Centrepoint, and Meghan, a renowned human rights activist and equality campaigner, became embroiled in the uproar over callous treatment of people already marginalised by society and most in need of help.

Murphy James, project development manager with Windsor Homeless Project, was stunned. “I was shocked that the leader of the council could make such a sweeping statement,” he admits. “And to bring the royal family into it, when it quite literally has nothing to do with them, is also shocking. The royals aren’t allowed to be seen to be political so why should the politicians bring the royal family into their arguments?”

James points to Harry and Meghan’s visit in February to Social Bite, a social enterprise cafe in Edinburgh which trains homeless people in catering, as a clear statement of where their sympathies lie on the matter. “I think that really spoke volumes,” he says. “Rough sleeping in Windsor has not increased, contrary to Cllr Dudley’s claims, insists James. “We have continually had between 10 and 15 rough sleepers since Windsor Homeless Project opened in 2009. The problem has not increased, but because they have gone from the parks to the high streets, they are more visible and people perceive that as homelessness being on the rise.”

This bucks national statistics, however. Crisis estimates that 300,000 – that is one in every 200 – people in the UK are homeless, with rough sleeping in England increasing by 50 per cent in the last five years. Figures compiled by The Guardian estimate that deaths among rough sleepers have more than doubled in the last five years, from 31 to 70 a year – which is believed to be a substantial underestimate. Based on recent records, the average age of death for a rough sleeper is now 43.

If Cllr Dudley’s comments were ill-judged – leading to a vote of no confidence (which he survived) – there was a silver lining of sorts. The issue of homelessness and the need for compassionate solutions was propelled front and centre of public debate, and demands for action gathered momentum.

Back in Windsor, Russell Brand – friend of The Big Issue and campaigner on addiction and rehabilitation – suggested the council donate a house to rough sleepers as a wedding gift. And a Change.org petition rallied hundreds of thousands of people behind calls for the council to offer a “long-term solution for these people, including safe and secure accommodation and health advice and support,” rather than shipping them out.

The petition has amassed more than 320,000 signatures and in mid-February Cllr Dudley was strongarmed into meeting its creator Holly Fishwick.

“The meeting was fairly productive and I was pleased that Mr Dudley seemed open to some of the ideas I suggested,” she wrote in The Big Issue. These included secure storage for people to leave their belongings in, a marketing campaign telling the public how they can help, potential use of council grants for voluntary organisations in the borough and reintroducing travel warrants, so that rough sleepers in Windsor can access support services in Maidenhead. But she added: “This all seemed very encouraging, however Mr Dudley was keen to let me know that the Rough Sleepers and Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy has been repealed and that two separate papers would replace it; one dealing with support for rough sleepers and the other with anti-social behaviour. I’m hugely concerned that the latter report is still going to be used to try and cut down on rough sleeping in the area.”

Rough sleeping of course should end – nobody should be without a home, and The Big Issue vociferously backs policies that back prevention. But, as Fishwick learned: “The more you look at it the more complex homelessness is. Anyone can become homeless at any time. Prevention has to be the long-term solution.”

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Vicky Carroll explores the controversy that put rough sleepers front and centre in Harry and Meghan's wedding story
Every week our Street Art page showcases work by marginalised artists. We asked four of them to illustrate what the royal wedding means to them.

David Tovey spent six years as a chef in the army and cooked for the Queen at Windsor Castle. After leaving the military, he ran a restaurant until suffering a stroke in 2011. A series of health problems including cancer and a heart attack followed, leading to homelessness and a suicide attempt. “Art is one of the best treatments for trauma,” Tovey says. Today he is a rising star in the art world and has founded the One Festival of Homeless Arts.

“I’m hoping this picture will help change perceptions of the homeless. To have Meghan and Harry selling the magazine is to highlight that anyone, and I truly mean anyone, can become homeless. It’s also to highlight that a huge number of people become homeless after a marriage break-up, not that I wish that upon Harry and Meghan.

“I’ve been extremely lucky since getting off the streets. Art has given me the power to change my life and to also help others. I could never have done any of this without the help of a stranger who saved my life on a park bench.

“You see, it only takes one person to change another person’s life. Gavin saved mine and look at what I’ve achieved since that day. Imagine if everyone helped one person from the streets, I wonder what they would all achieve.

“This is an invitation.”

davidtoveyart.co.uk  onefestivalofhomelessarts.com

Two decades ago Geraldine Crimmins suffered a breakdown that led to her losing her house, two businesses and become addicted to drugs. She turned her life around after enrolling on an art course and is currently artist in residence at Old Diorama Arts Centre, London.

“I’m not a royalist myself but some people love the royal family, it doesn’t matter if they’re homeless or not. I used to live on the streets around Victoria, there’s an awful lot of soldiers sleeping rough and they’re very pro-royal.

“They’re a modern couple. I think they’re well matched. From a woman’s point of view, she’s given up a lot to marry him – her freedom. The press is already trying to torture her with her family but I don’t think they’ll be pushed around. They will run their own lives and be respectful. They’ll make a good team. I think they’ll be good for PTSD and homelessness.”

geraldinecrimmins.co.uk
John Sheehy was born in Ireland in 1949 and emigrated to London in the 1950s. He has experienced periods of homelessness and suffered mental health problems. His artistic output spans painting, sculpture, printmaking, photography and poetry.

“I painted these portraits of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle from the heart. I feel warmth and kindness coming from both of them. I admire the royal family. I remember Prince Charles coming to visit us at Crisis Skylight about 16 years ago and I have been told they buy The Big Issue regularly. I’m looking forward to the big day. I want to wish them tons of good luck wishes and a long life.”

johnjosephsheehy.com

After losing her eyesight in a car crash a decade ago, Jo Adamson turned to The Big Issue, becoming one of Glasgow’s most familiar faces. She has no sight out of her left eye, and describes her right eye as a “constant misty blur”. She stopped selling the magazine when she moved into her own flat four years ago and is now a full-time artist. Today her bedroom doubles as her studio.

“I still struggle to see but I use bright-coloured wax, which reflects in the light, and get very close to the paper. I was tempted to do them looking silly but I thought, no, let’s keep it sensible because it’s a royal wedding. It’s a risky thing being married. Hopefully they’ll be happy.

“I’ve got page boys and flower girls, but because I was putting so many people in it was hard. I was thinking of putting Prince Charles with big ears and but it was too wee to be able to do that. I’ve not actually done Charles and Camilla, I feel they’ll end up looking like horses, do you know what I mean? It’s hard to portray them nicely. I was just trying to keep Harry ginger-haired, cheeky but romantic. And Meghan is used to stardom and I think that helps, because who would take on that life?”

twitter.com/JoSunshineArt
‘IT’S A REAL OCCASION SO YOU HAVE TO CELEBRATE’

Big Issue vendor Easton has been letting his customers know for weeks that he can’t wait for Harry and Meghan to tie the knot – he’s had the ceremonial flags out on his pitch. The 64-year-old has been hanging flags on his trolley at White City Tube station in London and insists he will be heading to the nearest street party on the big day.

“This is not something that happens every day,” says Easton, who has been selling The Big Issue for over 10 years. “And in my lifetime I have been lucky enough to experience it three times with Charles, William and Harry. It’s a real occasion so you have to celebrate it and I’ll be going to a street party to do that.

“You can see that they are happy together and he makes her laugh and she makes him laugh so I think it’s great. It’s a happy thing for me and we have to rally around them and encourage them.”

‘I’M REPRESENTING SOCIAL ENTERPRISES EVERYWHERE’

“When I got the call and the letter I thought it was a joke!” says Pamela Anomneze, who has been invited to Harry and Meghan’s wedding. Pamela, originally from Nigeria, has been with Studio 306, which supplies products to The Big Issue Shop, since its launch in 2009. A project manager, she considers herself to be the “scaffolding” of the community interest company, which specialises in high-quality ceramics, jewellery, sewing craft and screenprinted products.

Its studio in Haringey, North London, helps disadvantaged locals by offering a creative space for those who are recovering from mental illness. Here they can rediscover forgotten skills, develop new ones and boost their confidence within a working environment.

Pamela was nominated to attend the nuptials by the regional Lord Lieutenant for her tireless work with Studio 306 and the local community. She has enlisted help from her Studio 306 colleagues in choosing the perfect outfit: “I’m representing so many people there, the studio’s collective, social enterprises everywhere, Haringey, The Big Issue Shop. So I needed a little help picking something to wear.

“I’ve chosen an Afro-English gown, it’s a beautiful flowing gown in royal blue and of course some beautiful handsome silver jewellery made right here in Studio 306. I feel it’s an outfit that truly represents me.

“I’ll have a Studio 306 necklace and earrings to match and I’m hopeful after the wedding more people will be aware of the jewellery and the work we do.”

And although we won’t know what Meghan will be wearing before she walks down the aisle, keep an eye out in case she has accessorised with a piece from Studio 306’s collection, available from bigissueshop.com!
The Electricity of Every Loving Thing

An unexpected path

When Katherine May felt she needed space from being a mum she took radical steps. It was while she was walking she made a discovery which changed her life.

I am 40 years old, and I spent most of my life so far believing that I knew myself.

Not in any grand, philosophical sense – I make no claims to enlightenment. But until a couple of years ago, I would have confidently claimed that I was a sociable, capable and very ordinary woman, who perhaps fell prey to depression and exhaustion every so often. But then, doesn’t everybody? Most of all, I would have been utterly certain I wasn’t autistic. After the birth of my son, though, I was forced to confront the truth that I might have got it very wrong.

For a start, I wasn’t coping with motherhood at all – the noise, the chaos, and all the painful moments of social contact that I was supposed to seek out. I began to feel that my brain couldn’t work properly if I didn’t get enough time on my own. I needed to be able to obsess over the things that interested me, to achieve the deep sense of flow that gave me peace. With a small baby around, that wasn’t happening, and it was making me sick.

I needed to do something radical to reclaim my own head space, to get as far away from other people as I could, and to tire myself out in the hope that my mind would quieten too. Having walked some sections of the South West Coast Path before, and adored its wildness, I decided that now was the time to tackle the whole thing, one weekend per month.

I’ve since realised that this encapsulated the kind of thinking that gets me into trouble: an impossible, unaffordable mission, planned on a whim, and constructed around my own needs without really thinking how anyone else would fit in. But at the time, it felt like an absolute, undeniable necessity. I had to do this in order to find myself again.

It turned out I was right. Yes, it was a logistical nightmare of cheap hotel rooms and six-hour drives, often attempted on a Friday night after work in ill-humour. Yes, I was monumentally unfit and poorly equipped, and I nearly drowned in the incessant Devon rain. But the process of walking did something magical to me. It let me refile all the information I had on myself, and join a whole lot of dots.

When, three months into my walk, I heard an autistic woman on the radio, I was monumentally unfit and poorly equipped, and I nearly drowned in the incessant Devon rain. But the process of walking did something magical to me. It let me refile all the information I had on myself, and join a whole lot of dots.

When, three months into my walk, I heard an autistic woman on the radio, I recognised myself with a fierce certainty. I had been living in a world I didn’t understand, and I was beginning to make sense of it.

Learning that I’m autistic has been transformative. I don’t expect people to change the way they treat me – and my expectations of receiving basic kindness and respect remain just as high as ever – but instead I’ve changed the way I treat myself. I used to push myself too far, forcing my way through situations that overloaded my senses and left me panicky and upset. Since my diagnosis, I’ve learned to pace myself better, and to say no to events and opportunities that will do more harm than good.

But the greatest thing that’s changed is my own understanding of autism. I had bought into the same stereotypes as many others: that autistics are humourless, unfelling, and ‘other’, obsessed with maths and fixed systems. I now understand that our feelings are often lost in translation, and that the challenge of dealing with endless sensory overwhelm means that we’re often shattered by everyday life. I also understand how diverse autism is, and that I – creative, warm, funny and, yes, sociable in the right conditions – fit in.

I don’t think I could have learned any of it without my time in the wilderness, soaking in the awe-inspiring beauty of the South West Coast Path. But now I know something else, too – that my autism gives me the huge privilege of experiencing that beauty in infinite depth and variety. I am finally grateful for what I am.

“This since my autism diagnosis I’ve learned to pace myself better”

Since my autism diagnosis I’ve learned to pace myself better

The Electricity of Every Loving Thing by Katherine May is out now (Trapeze, £16.99)
LESS/MISS LAILA, ARMED AND DANGEROUS

The great escape

Jane Graham is moved by the fears of an insecure novelist and thrilled by a fast-paced satire of modern India

S an Franciscan novelist Andrew Sean Greer’s fifth novel Less arrives on this shore with a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction already under its belt. But anyone expecting a sensational tour de force will be disappointed – the charms of this light-footed, melancholy novel are soft and subtle.

Greer’s comic tale centres on his titular hero Arthur Less, a mid-ranking middle-aged novelist “too old to be fresh, too young to be rediscovered.” Requiring an excuse not to attend his ex-boyfriend’s wedding, he decides to attend every literary event he’s recently been invited to. The invitations themselves bear witness to his “subterranean stature” – a number aremotivated by his previous relationship with a much better-known poet. But an itinerary which spins him from New York to Japan, taking in Mexico, India, Italy and an expedition across the Sahara Desert, excites his novelist’s imagination and soothes his profound fear of being alone when he turns 50.

Less is a nuanced, delicately sketched example of someone whose life has been dogged by feelings of inadequacy simply because he has long allowed such feelings to dominate his life. He dwells on the things he didn’t do, the decisions he didn’t make, the chances he didn’t take. He feels he’s “the only homosexual to grow old” – rather like beautiful women, Greer suggests, gay men are only of interest to society when they’re young, lithe and gorgeous. He has left no imprint on the world, and is defined by the things he lacks; a poet tells him he is like a person “without skin”. But that sensitivity and vulnerability is what also makes him such an engaging literary host.

Greer’s easy, rollicking prose floats along on a raft of delightfully pithy sentences whose epigrammatic nature only occasionally threatens to veer into John Green YA territory. There are laugh-out-loud moments but Less is not the hapless butt of a smug joke. As he travels, he notices things; he aches, he suffers profound pangs and regrets. His insights are often worthy and thought-provoking, and his blindfold to his own little acts of courage and adventure make them ever more touching. This is a sincere and romantic novel, which gets deeper the further in you go.

The brilliance of naming your anxious, insecure middle-aged hero Arthur Less must also be acknowledged. (Amis and Self must be kicking themselves). This bears numerous fruit beyond the obvious pun and ream of metaphors related to diminution and inferiority. Arthur is Less the man and Less the writer, devoid of a Mister, and of Art. A man whose name diminishes everything sharing a sentence with him – everyone looking for Less, wanting Less or caring Less. The restaurants providing for Less, the clothes, chairs, and beds made for Less. Dignity decrees that I avoid the most obvious pun of all, but rest assured, Less is... most awfully good.

Delhi-based Manu Joseph’s Miss Laila, Armed And Dangerous is a more dazzling affair, equally as funny and wise. This sharp, witty satire of splintered modern India, a terror hunt set in the aftermath of a Hindu nationalist election victory, has gone down a storm in Joseph’s native land, and is now rackimg up a fervent international fansbase. It has the breathless pace of a Hollywood car chase, a dry, clever humour worthy of Aaron Sorkin, and the heavy heart and soul of Marquez. A thrilling novelistic entry point to the hierarchies, power-plays, comedies and tragedies of contemporary India.

Words: Jane Graham @janeannie
‘I can’t leave her, because I am her’

It’s a strange thing to say about playing a jailed cop. But as Scandi thriller The Bridge ends, Sofia Helin tells Malcolm Jack it’s time to leave the dark side

O
ne of them wears leather trousers and drives a classic green Porsche, the other prefers jogging bottoms and tends to take the bus. Brilliant, mysterious and blunter-than-a-bag-of-hammers Malmö police detective Saga Noren is in most ways the polar opposite of Sofia Helin, the loungewear and public transport-favouring actor who plays her. Now that they’re parting ways as the final season of Scandi crime drama supreme The Bridge airs on BBC Two, it’s as much with a sense of release as it is grief for the Swede.

“I’m actually relieved,” admits Helin over the phone from her home in central Stockholm, in a voice that elicits a much more natural warmth than that of the icily spoken Saga, whose Asperger’s-like condition renders social etiquette difficult. “I’m so happy and proud over the last season,” she continues. “People ask me if I miss her and I can’t. I mean, if I missed her I would just start being her,” Helin lugs. “I can’t leave her because I am her.”

Over seven years and four seasons of Saga’s journey through the violent, sinister, seedy underbelly of Swedish-Danish relations at either end of the Oresund Bridge connecting the two countries, Helin’s character – one of the most affectionately drawn and performed in recent TV history – has, she admits, “infected my way of behaving”. To have entered the mind of a person with Asperger’s, and routinely experienced what it’s like to live in oblivion of the unspoken nuances of everyday interactions, is to have peered down a deep well of loneliness in her own soul. Often clenched of body and furrowed of brow, Saga bore a heavy physical as well as psychological burden on Helin.

In a suitably sinister beginning to the final season, we first meet her locked up in prison awaiting a verdict after being framed for murdering her own abusive mother. As she instance when she’s masturbat---ing when her mother-in-law is in the same room.”

As we bid farewell to Saga and to The Bridge, it’s worth considering how much the crossing that gives the show its name has changed since the show first began. Once a powerful symbol of Scandinavian unity and ingenuity which could be traversed with ease, passport free, since 2016 amid the European migrant crisis, it’s become a barrier to many where ID checks are mandatory for all and crudely improvised steel fences divide train station platforms at the Malmö end. It’s a situation that Helin laments deeply. “I think it’s so sad that it’s changed like that, and what was previously a symbol for unity and for possibilities for freedom is now the control station,” she says. It’s one of the reasons why themes of migration and identity loom large in The Bridge’s final season.

“Who are we to judge and say that some people can be let in and some people cannot,” questions Helin. “Who are we to say who is good and who is bad now? That’s a very important thing to keep talking about I think.”

Working with the global charity WaterAid, which has seen her travel to Cambodia with her two children to observe how taps and toilets can create lasting change for villagers along the Mekong River, is just one way that Helin is keeping busy as she enters the post-Saga phase of her career. Rumours that Saga and The Bridge might return for a movie one day are already circulating, but she won’t be drawn on them. “In this format it is complete, and it’s fantastic the way it is,” Helin insists. “Of course we could continue. But it’s also important to be able to stay proud of what you do and to feel that this painting is complete, leave it.”

“In this format...” Can I read anything into that particular choice of words? “No you can’t!” she laughs. “But you never know what happens in life.”

The final season of The Bridge airs on BBC Two on Friday evenings at 9pm; all previous seasons are available on iPlayer now. Sofia is also supporting WaterAid’s Water Effect campaign. wateraid.org

Words: Malcolm Jack @MBJack
Repressed into action

It’s the early Sixties, and a honeymooning couple nervously get ready to consummate their marriage – but things don’t go quite to plan

On Chesil Beach opens with a young couple on a romantic stroll along the gravel bank of the Dorset coastline of the film’s title. It is 1962, and the man and woman, both in their early twenties, are talking about rock ’n’ roll music. Their conversation concerning the chord progression of a rock standard is pretty square – these kids have no idea about the social and sexual revolution that rock music is about to usher in. “Sexual intercourse began,” the poet Philip Larkin wrote, “in 1963/ (which was rather late for me)/ Between the end of the Chatterley ban/And the Beatles’ first LP”.

That’s a whole year away for Florence and Edward, the couple earnestly discussing musicology on a windy seafront, but it could be a lifetime. An intelligent, handsomely crafted and sometimes very moving adaptation of Ian McEwan’s 2007 novella, the film is on one level a terrifying time-capsule of the era of restraint and repression that the Sixties did so much to overturn.

Florence (Saoirse Ronan) and Edward (Billy Howle) were married earlier that day, and are now beginning their honeymoon in a posh coastal hotel. Two waiters bring room service to their honeymoon suite. Florence and Edward will later confess that they are both sexually inexperienced, and will approach the bed at the far end of the room with mounting trepidation.

But from the outset there is an atmosphere of nervous anticipation, of awkward formality. The waiters pick up on the young honeymooners’ anxiety – and greet Florence and Edward’s fumbled attempts at intimacy with the smug innuendo of an English seaside postcard.

Unfurling in the shabby grandeur of this hotel suite, then on the windy beach outside, On Chesil Beach charts Florence and Edward’s disastrous first day of marriage. The film is a nuanced, excruciatingly unblinking depiction of a young couple overcome by a fear of physical closeness (and Ronan and Howle are both terrific in these difficult roles).

Flashing between their wedding night and the heady days of their courtship with nimble sophistication (editor Nick Fenton does fine work here with debut movie director Dominic Cooke), the film depicts a time when sex education for young folk like Florence and Edward was a secret enterprise. Florence reads a ‘how to’ manual with disgust in the privacy of her family bathroom: in the climate of whispery shame that defines post-war England of the time, sex seems as exotic a commodity as the strange green vegetables with a foreign name whose appearance on the dinner table confuses Florence’s father (they are mange tout, by the way).

Florence and Edward’s uneasy approach to the prospect of consummating their marriage is exacerbated by their different personal circumstances, which the film worries away at with absorbing sensitivity.

There are subtle differences of social standing between the couple, and Florence’s choice of Edward earns the snooty disapproval of her mother; Edward’s own mother (poignantly played by Anne-Marie Duff) is mentally ill, which has trained her son to adopt a certain detachment to troubling situations. Even more unsettling is Florence’s childhood history with her father, a darkly exploitative relationship which the film refers to fleetingly – but which reverberates through it like the aftershock of a trauma.

On Chesil Beach is an ambitious film, and it largely works thanks to the exquisitely pitched performances of Ronan and Howle. An epilogue involving prosthetics and the kind of gushing sentimentality that the film mostly avoids is one the few mis-steps, but that disappointing final note aside, this is an assured, affecting drama.

On Chesil Beach is in cinemas from May 18

Edward Lawrenson @EdwardLawrenson
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OUT AND ABOUT

IN BLOOM
This week is mainly one of contrasts – of the beauty of the outside world versus the cultural charge of events that can only happen indoors. First, the exterior. The Chelsea Flower Show (May 22-26, Chelsea, London; rhs.org.uk) is the horticultural high-water mark in the capital each summer, where you can stroll blissfully through gardens that are closer to works of art. You can see what is possible with a trowel, some patience and a keen eye on the seasons – either being inspired to make your fingers green or merely standing at the borders turning avocado with envy.

A bit further north in the capital, Regent’s Park Open Air Theatre (May 17 to September 15, Regent’s Park, London; openairtheatre.com) is back with al fresco entertainment as we race expectantly into the summer. Over the coming months are performances of Peter Pan, The Turn Of The Screw, As You Like It, Little Shop Of Horrors and Dinosaur World Live – so an eclectic mix. Just pray the weather holds out.

The Urban Village Fête (May 20, Greenwich, London; wearurbanvillage.co.uk) has little in common with a traditional fête and instead has Gilles Peterson in charge of the music and Robert Elms in charge of a series of talks. Plus, there are food vendors, art workshops and a marketplace.

Now, the interior. Photo London (May 17-20, Aldwych, London; photo london.org) takes over a large chunk of Somerset House for a third year, where leading galleries showcase their best in show, emerging galleries and photographers get an important new platform, there are talks and it all culminates in a series of awards for the best and most exciting new works.

Museums At Night 2018 (May 16-19, various locations, London, Brighton, Ipswich and more; museums at night.org.uk) lets you explore museums and galleries after the sun has gone down, with activities and talks to take you through the witching hour and into the morning.

Eamonn Forde @Eamonn_Forde

TV

Break-in good
Money Heist might have a rubbish name, but it’s a great show

Money Heist is a terrible name for a TV show. Especially one that is actually about a money heist. I mean, it would be fine if the show was a romantic comedy set in an aquarium. Then the name would sound clever and cryptic. As it is, calling Money Heist ‘Money Heist’ would be like calling The Sopranos ‘Gangster Men,’ or Coronation Street ‘Northerners In A Pub.’ It leaves little to the imagination. But Money Heist is a Spanish drama that, in its home country, is actually called La Casa De Papel which, obviously, sounds much cooler. What does that literally translate as? There is no way of knowing. But knowing those Spaniards, it probably means something dead romantic and mysterious. So I guess the only person to blame for the shit title is the in-house translator over at Netflix, who are the otherwise clever bastards who decided to bring this show to a British audience.

Because the title is the only shit thing about it. The premise is simple: a tweedy criminal mastermind going by the name of ‘The Professor’ recruits a super-group of eight maverick criminals to rob the Spanish Royal Mint. The team is comprised of various experts (the tech wizard, the master forger, the charmer, the violent wild card) each of whom go by thematic code names (Rio, Berlin, Moscow, Denver). Their plan is devilish and meticulous; but, of course, the unexpected happens, mistakes are made and best-laid plans end up in tatters. In other words, it unashamedly embraces all of the familiar tropes of the genre.

And why not? We all love a heist movie: the tension, the action and the high stakes are all built in. And it is easy to root for the sort of criminal whose only ambition is to get rich quick – not at the expense of other individuals but of huge, faceless institutions.

The cavalier spirit of the men and women at the heart of Money Heist is impossible not to love. Of course, they muck things up along the way – it would struggle to go beyond two episodes if everything went according to plan. But career villains never really want things to go too smoothly.

About 20 years ago I got to know Bruce Reynolds, the leader of the Great Train Robbers who held up the Royal Mail money train in 1963. After the robbery he was on the run in South America for five years before getting bored and coming home to effectively turn himself in. For men like that, meaning can only be derived from constantly experiencing life’s biggest highs and most sickening lows. For men like me, watching thrilling Spanish dramas on Netflix is quite enough.

Seasons 1 and 2 of Money Heist are available to watch on Netflix now

Words: Sam Delaney @DelaneyMan
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The Big Issue Foundation addresses the fundamental issues attached to social and financial exclusion by working with individuals who have made the first step towards working themselves out of poverty through selling the magazine.
I hear those voices that will not be drowned”. The phrase is cut out of Maggi Hambling’s giant scallop shell sculpture that sits on Aldeburgh’s pebbled beach. The words are taken from Peter Grimes, Benjamin Britten’s opera that is set in The Borough, a fictional fishing village on the east coast of England. In addition to Grimes, Britten wrote handfuls of choral works and, famously, The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra. But perhaps his most significant legacy lives on in a corner of East Anglia: the Aldeburgh Festival of Music and the Arts.

Aldeburgh Festival (June 8-24) was first held in 1948, during a period of post-war austerity. Its early instalments were modest, but the event established a reputation for world-class concerts from the outset, thanks to Britten’s connections and curatorial flair. Contemporary music was championed and audiences were encouraged to try challenging, eclectic programmes. That spirit continues today; it was at Aldeburgh that I – like many others – first discovered the experimental oeuvres of Harrison Birtwistle, Oliver Knussen and Elliott Carter. It’s also the only place I’ve attended a concert where ear plugs were recommended (a late-night performance of Antoine Brumel’s Missa Et ecce terrae motus, newly rendered by Russell Haswell).

The last few years have seen Aldeburgh’s programming become increasingly adventurous. In 2013, Britten’s centenary year, organisers showcased an extraordinary production of Peter Grimes, held on the beach, complete with Spitfire flypast. In 2017, I was lucky enough to attend then-artistic director Pierre-Laurent Aimard’s performance of Messiaen Catalogue d’Oiseaux with recitals held at times and venues to celebrate the birds the music represents. (This involved a concert at 4.30am – another first.)

“The coast is clearer

Benjamin Britten’s legacy to a small corner of England is the Aldeburgh Festival. Despite an international following, it remains true to the composer’s vision of arts for all.

While this year doesn’t have the quirky performances of previous editions (for example, the show given to an audience on rowing boats in Thorpeness Meare last year), the programme is as exciting as ever. Like many classical events, Aldeburgh is celebrating the centenary of Leonard Bernstein; there are concerts dedicated to Britten’s link with America (the composer spent time in California writing film scores). Unlike many classical events, however, Aldeburgh Festival has a focus on the flute thanks to artist-in-residence Claire Chase, who, in tandem with fellow residents, violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja and conductor John Wilson, has curated strands of the festival. There’s also a much-anticipated premiere of Emily Howard’s new opera To See The Invisible on the opening weekend.

Britten, his partner Peter Pears and colleagues wanted to create an event where internationally acclaimed artists came to the east of England, not solely London and the South East, and for local audiences to experience the same level of artistry that was on show in larger cities. Although Aldeburgh’s audience is now international, organisers work hard to ensure that concerts are accessible for the people the festival was made for. This year, for the first time, £10 tickets are available for every performance, in addition to the free events.

Aldeburgh is one of the few places where, for me at least, it is possible to dampen the Grimesian internal monologue and restore factory settings.

The 71st Aldeburgh Festival takes place from June 8-24
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A patient’s experience of The Mental Health Act 1983
Please help us find

Thomas Everson - Glastonbury, Somerset

Thomas has been missing from Glastonbury in Somerset since 9 April this year. He is 30 years of age.

Thomas, please call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support whenever you feel ready.

Sabrina Arika - Luton, Bedfordshire

Sabrina went missing from Luton on 4 August 2015. She was 16 at the time of her disappearance.

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Jason Salt-Perce - Stafford, Staffordshire

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Akeem Fashogbon - Fulham, London

It’s nearly 20 years since Akeem went missing from Fulham, aged 32. The image on the left is an age progressed photo of how Akeem may look now.

Akeem, please call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support whenever you feel ready.

Phil Nicol - Southwark, London

Phil went missing from Southwark on 1 March 2018. He is 47 years old.

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Beata Koguciu - West Bromwich, West Midlands

Beata was last seen in West Bromwich on 30 April this year. Beata is 22 years of age.

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The Big Issue Crossword (1307), second floor, 43 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 1HW by May 22. Include your name, address and phone number.

Issue 1305 winner is Mike Williams from London

Issue 1306 solution

CRYPTIC

Across – 1 Ginger nut; 8 Moth; 9 Athletics; 11 Oyster; 12 Brunei; 13 Electron; 16 St Helena; 20 Meagre; 21 Redder; 23 Furnished; 24 Vied; 25 Spare tyre.

Down – 2 Interest; 3 Galena; 4 Retrieve; 5 Unc; 6 Sorter; 7 Charon; 10 Synx; 14 Examiner; 15 Overbear; 16 Strive; 17 Hedged; 18 Lief; 19 Basset; 22 Bump.

QUICK

Across – 1 Aristotle; 8 Bray; 9 Smokeless; 11 Shogun; 12 Fixing; 13 Infernal; 16 Adjudged; 20 Dingle; 21 Belief; 22 Diligence; 24 Bait; 25 Smuggling.

Down – 1 Conspicuous; 2 Burdened too much; 3 Sikkim; 4 Obliging; 5 Loss; 6 Aragon; 7 Hymnal; 10 Shoe; 14 Fiddling; 15 Anglican; 16 Auburn; 17 Jalopy; 18 Deed; 19 Unwell; 22 Film.
Mark Richards, 43
CARDIFF OFFICE MONDAY & SATURDAY, QUEEN STREET TRAIN STATION IN THE AFTERNOONS

“People have a lot of misconceptions about Big Issue sellers”

ABOUT ME...

FOOTBALL CRAZY
I play for TBI office for Street Football Wales. It’s open to anybody either to come and support or sign up to sell The Big Issue.

SUPER SUBS
If you don’t have a regular vendor you can call 01202 586848 to take out a subscription, or if you’d like a corporate subscription for your business, get in touch on 02920 026418.

I’m in an employment programme here at The Big Issue sending magazines out to subscribers. They’re people who don’t have regular vendor near them and the companies that support us. Every Monday I come into the office for six hours and I put the magazines into envelopes, personally sign each one and send them out. We also send them out internationally so I frank those and get them in the post. My subs go all over the UK and to places like France, Australia and Japan.

I also spend an hour in the office on a Saturday as that’s when the magazines come in, so I help to get the delivery ready for the next week. I’ve gained other experience over the last year too in IT, I’ve passed a health and safety course and I’m a first aider. If I can get my NVQ I’m hoping to go into IT.

I’m from Cambridgeshire originally and I moved out of my parents’ house when I was 24. I did a lot of travelling, sofa-surfing and rough sleeping, and eventually I thought, the only place I haven’t tried is Wales – and I’ve been here since ’92. When I first came to Cardiff I used to shoplift or sit on a street corner begging. I thought the only way I could sort myself out and earn a bit of respect was to sell The Big Issue. That was about three years ago now.

As well as working in the office here, I also sell the magazine at Queen Street Station in the afternoons. I’m always polite to members of the public. People have a lot of misconceptions about Big Issue sellers, they think we get the magazines free which we don’t. Say I sell 18 in a day I have to run back to the office, get more magazines and carry on selling. People can be horrible sometimes. I once asked a man if he’d like to buy one and he just said to his wife, “I’m glad my daughter’s not doing this”. Or they say, “Get a proper job”. I tell them I have got a job.

I’m not sitting beside a cash machine asking you to help the homeless. Some people shout at you, some swear, some spit. They turn their nose up at you. My regular customers make up for those people.

I’m making improvements in my life. I’m in private accommodation now and. I get paid every four weeks for the work I do on a Monday. I used to be on Jobseeker’s Allowance but I haven’t claimed that for over two years. I’ve got a regular income and something to get up for in the morning.

Interview: Sarah Reid
Photos: David Wagstaffe
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