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Hello, my name is Mark

I’ve been selling the magazine for around five years in Nottingham. I usually take my mum’s dog along with me, he’s a Pomeranian called Basil and he’s very popular with my punters. He’s really well-behaved. I also support Nottingham Forest but we’ve had a relatively disappointing season and didn’t even make the play-offs, and our local rivals Derby County are in the final! Read more about my story on page 46.

A HAND UP, NOT A HANDOUT
This magazine was bought by your vendor for £1.25 and sold to you for £2.50. They are proudly working, not begging. Buy it, take it, spread the word.

If you can’t get hold of a copy of the magazine on a regular basis, you can subscribe to receive The Big Issue every week: bigissue.com/subscribe
What to do this week in England and beyond

01 Set your compass for All Points East
Call it a festival, call it a series of one-dayers for alternative music fans of all persuasions, All Points East is a beast. The Chemical Brothers, The Strokes, Christine and the Queens, Bring Me The Horizon, Mumford & Sons and Bon Iver headline bills packed with first-class supports such as Hot Chip, James Blake, Dizzee Rascal, Kate Tempest, Kamasi Washington and The Raconteurs.
Victoria Park, London, May 24-June 2; allpointseastfestival.com

02 Back a nationwide campaign to say no to domestic abuse and sexual violence
UK Says No More is a national movement seeking to end domestic abuse and sexual violence in the UK. Backed by parliamentarians from across the political spectrum including The Big Issue’s founder Lord John Bird, their national awareness week is a chance for everyone to ask themselves the question #WhatICanDo? May 20-26, uksaysnomore.org

03 Urge the Bank of England to ‘unleash green investment’
Bank of England governor (and Big Issue fan) Mark Carney has already vowed to disclose the institutions’ climate risk. But a campaign by Positive Money is asking him to go further. More than 5,000 people have signed a petition asking for Carney to “decarbonise our economy” by stopping banks investing in fossil fuels. actionnetwork.org/petitions/bank-of-england-put-your-money-where-your-mouth-is-unleash-green-investment

04 Demand an extension to the deadline for EU citizens to return voter forms
The chaotic way in which Britain has entered into the European elections on May 23 means there is a real risk that many EU27 citizens will be unable to vote. The deadline for them to fill in the additional paperwork necessary to take part passed on May 7 – the same day on which the government finally confirmed that there would indeed be a vote. A petition is demanding the deadline be extended right up until election day – and that copies of the form are provided at polling stations. Add your signature now. change.org/p/hm-uk-government-extend-the-deadline-for-eu27-citizens-to-return-registration-form-uc-1
This week on...

How competing in the Street Cricket World Cup can be a life-changing experience

Expert Beth McColl on how to stay mentally healthy when using social media

Rebooting Doctor Who was a dream job for Russell T Davies – but he wishes his mum had lived to see it

Remember the Grenfell tragedy through a new book of essays, poetry and photography

With Grenfell’s second anniversary fast approaching, and the public inquiry ongoing, it’s vital to remember the shocking truths the tragedy exposed about casual disregard for life by authorities. New book Grenfell: Violence, Resistance and Response critically analyses the tragedy, and asks if our society can ever truly get past it. It features poetry by Ben Okri, photographs by Parveen Ali and written contributions by the likes of Phil Scraton and The Radical Housing Network. Published by Pluto Press, May 20

Step into a greener future with Po-Zu sustainable footwear

They don’t just look great and feel comfortable to wear, but better still, Po-Zu shoes are made entirely out of sustainable materials – from organic cotton to pineapple leaf fibre leather, wool, cork, and natural latex. They’re even put together without glue. Buy a pair in The Big Issue Shop now.

bigissueshop.com/vendor/pozu

Sign the petition against Public Space Protection Orders in Birmingham

Birmingham City Council is the latest authority to carry out a consultation on the orders, which could end up criminalising rough sleeping. Campaigners also plan to lobby the council on May 21. Sign up and show your support:

Explore London’s secret waterways

Everyone has heard of the Thames – but what about the Effra or the Westbourne? Secret Rivers explores London’s lesser-known waterways looking at how they’ve shaped the city over the centuries – and why many have been largely lost.
Museum of London Docklands, May 24-Oct 27; museumoflondon.org.uk

See the largest exhibition of Manga to take place outside Japan

From Akira to Pokémon to cosplay dress-up, Manga is a visual narrative art form that has inspired a multimedia global phenomenon. The single biggest exhibition of Manga ever to take place outside of its native Japan will explore its origins, development and hugely influential cultural crossover through rare comic books, artworks and interactive video and gaming displays.
British Museum, May 23-August 26; britishmuseum.org

Visit Wales’ book town for literary extravaganza the Hay Festival

From award-winning authors to top artists and musicians and global policy makers and innovators, Hay welcomes another array of great minds, from Ian McEwan to Stacey Dooley, Michael Rosen, Stephen Fry, Maxine Peake, Paris Lees, Keir Starmer and The Big Issue’s own Lord John Bird.
Hay-on-Wye, Powys, May 23-June 2; hayfestival.com

05

06

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09

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20-26 MAY 2019
It’s not just the young who struggle

I agree with the article about the older generation being blamed increasingly for the economic problems of the younger one. We’re not to blame. I’m retired and I’m on a basic state pension topped up with pension credits and housing benefit. I’ve never owned a house in my life – I’ve always rented – so I have no collateral. I currently live in a senior-living complex, also rental.

Last year our county council sent round a questionnaire setting out several ideas for saving itself money. One of them was to charge pensioners 50p per journey – even though we have bus passes. That sounds reasonable. After all, what’s 50p in this day and age (and 50p return)?

However, we have several edge-of-town housing estates and our local hospital and big supermarkets are also on the edge of town. This means that many people who do not have their own transport and are reliant on buses to get around (like me) have to change buses in town and, therefore, it’s £2 per trip. If they have to pay £2 each time they go to the hospital – especially if they have to go several times or are visiting someone – that soon mounts up. We’ve heard nothing more of this – so far – but it’s still hanging over our heads.

Yes, I feel sorry for young people who are struggling financially but we also had to struggle and most of us didn’t have “the bank of Mum and Dad” to rely on because our parents either didn’t have the money to spare or told us to fend for ourselves because they’d also had to.

Caroline Andrews, email
Know your workplace rights
In the letter headed Age Concerns [Platform, May 13-19], C Hopper asks if readers are aware that you have to be in a job continuously for at least two years in order to be able to sue your employer for ageism at work. But you don’t.
The right to sue if you are discriminated against because of your age kicks in even before your employment starts. You can sue an employer for discriminating against you on the grounds of age if, for example, a vacancy ad contains ageist language. The same applies for the other forms of “protected characteristic” – disability, race, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, religion or religious belief, pregnancy and maternity. If any reader is being bullied for one of these reasons, they should check out their employer’s grievance procedure or contact Acas or the CAB for support.

Elizabeth, Finsbury Park, London

Hard cell
How encouraging to learn of the work of the charities that give hope to those in Brixton Prison [Author feature, May 6-12]. The imprisonment of offenders has the dual purpose of punishing wrong-doing and restoring them to honest citizenship. A fixaton with the first aim and calling for harsher punishment never solves the problem of crime without also working on the rehabilitation of the offenders.

If the good work was to be copied in every other prison in the country then the continued crisis in the prison system would be ended.

A major fault of the system is the lack of long-term continuity. Prison governors and government ministers do not stay in place long enough to learn their jobs. Prisoners are shuffled from one prison to another to make room for the input of new offenders with no thought of enabling them to complete the courses on which they were working that would help them on release. Many improvements are really obvious but never happen because ‘we have always done it this way’ – and made a mess of it!

Bill Allen, High Wycombe

NI probes must be equal
I have read with interest that:
Conservative MP Johnny Mercer has announced he is going on strike and will not vote with the government on any issues other than Brexit.
In a letter to Theresa May, seen by The Sun [former Army officer Mercer] said that while he is not resigning the Tory whip, he is withdrawing his support until the prime minister scales back controversial investigations into former members of the British military.

Many of us were aware that as part of the Good Friday Agreement process many of those on both Unionist and Republican sides of the “war” were given an effective amnesty against prosecutions.
If that is the case then surely members of the armed forces should be treated no differently.
However if members of the British Armed forces are subject to serious investigations, then equity must be applied and those – both Unionist and Republican – paramilitaries should be subject to the same level of investigation and potential prosecution

I think we all recognise that an amnesty was needed to bring those involved in the conflict to the peace table, a brave decision by any government. So let us apply the principle equitably and pray that those parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly show the same courage and judgement to compromise to return devolved government to Northern Ireland to the benefit of all.

Cllr Steve Radford, President of The Liberal Party

EDITOR’S LETTER

Is it time to take back control or not?

When is renationalising OK? When the current Conservative government do it.
Last week the probation service was brought back into public ownership. The running of the service in England and Wales had been part-privatised just five years ago by the then-Justice Secretary Chris ‘impossible to fire, regardless of my failings’ Grayling. He was warned back then that it was a bad idea.

Announcing the significant reversal his most recent successor David Gauke said: “The system isn’t working”. The ill-conceived project will cost taxpayers around £500m. That’s essentially £2m of public money torched a week. Every week.

It’s not the first time something that had been publicly-owned but went private needed bailed out by the public. Last June, the East Coast Main Line train service failed and was taken under government control – for a third time. The Transport Secretary was sanguine about it. He said operators Stagecoach and Virgin Trains had failed because they “got their bid wrong”, like they were school children making a silly mistake in their GCSE maths mocks.

The Transport Secretary overseeing the tender process and the subsequent renationalisation was Chris ‘yes, it’s me again, a Zelig of institutional failure’ Grayling.

But when is renationalising not OK? When the Labour opposition propose it.

There is an ongoing debate about the intentions of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell to bring a host of utilities and big banner services back to the government. This is, of course, because of the insistence that Corbyn is Stalin in an ill-fitting suit, keen to wreck total havoc on the nation and seize lands and private property in a wholesale civic putsch.

The fear is that his renationalisation plan will mandate buying back private companies, not at what they are valued at now, but at what they were initially sold for. And this would leave thousands of small investors financially destroyed and pension schemes tattered.

The picture is, of course, much more complex than that. Look at water companies. The British public are broadly behind public ownership of water. A YouGov poll ahead of the last general election found 59 per cent in favour of it. Take Thames Water, the UK’s biggest water company with some 15m customers. Amongst its biggest owners are the Kuwait Investment Authority and the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority. These profits are not remaining in Britain to boost small-time investors.

And the other irony is that other nations are good at state ownership. Look at France. EDF is one of the biggest energy providers in the UK. It is owned by the French government.
None of this is to wave a flag for major Corbymonic renationalisation. Rather, to consider alternatives. There is much to be said for looking for a social enterprise solution to some parts of public ownership. That way investment could be protected without profit chasing at any cost. It means things necessary for all our daily lives could be future-proofed in inventive ways.

And better to get on it now before any more Graylings.

Paul McNamee is editor of The Big Issue
@paulmcmnamee Paul.McNamee@bigissue.com

There is much to be said for looking for a social enterprise solution to some parts of public ownership.
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Sky’s the limit for Street Cat Bob

Street Cat Bob’s animated alter-ego is heading to the Sky Kids app after the broadcaster ordered 20 new episodes of the cartoon.

Bob's toon turn graced The Big Issue cover last April when four episodes were released, with a further one added at Christmas.

Now Bob's new 90-second adventures, aimed at pre-schoolers, will form part of Sky's subscriber-only content on the app.

The news has been a big hit with Bobites. Elizabeth Reardon added: "Very sweet and cheeky just like Bob! Kids will love it."

Organ donation campaign hero dies while waiting for new heart

Jim Lynskey was just 23 but played a huge role in increasing awareness of donor shortages

Inspirational organ-donation campaigner Jim Lynskey has died at the age of 23 just months after he spoke to The Big Issue about his battle to receive a new heart.

In February, we featured Jim’s story of how he was living with a heart pump as he joined a 300-strong queue of people awaiting a transplant.

The heart pump enabled Jim to live with "no pulse" even if he had to plug himself into the mains every night to allow the batteries to recharge. It was complications with this technology that led to his death last week.

But in his short life, Jim played an inspirational role in changing minds about organ donation and the shortage of donors. His goal was to start a conversation with his Save9Lives campaign.

As he told us earlier this year: "I am really grateful for this heart pump, which is keeping me alive essentially, but there is a burning frustration amongst many patients that we can't have a human heart that brings so much more quality to your life."

It’s tragic that Jim, from Redditch in Worcestershire, will not live to see deemed consent for organ donation arrive in England as it will in spring 2020 when Max and Keira’s Law comes into force. A similar bill passed stage two of its progression through the Scottish Parliament earlier this month, while Wales approved their own opt-out law in 2013.

Comic book kingpin serves up solutions for hometown

Kingsman and Kick Ass creator Mark Millar has swapped comic book pages for tea and cake as part of his ambitious plans to turn his hometown into a "destination”.

The latest scheme he has cooked up to help the Townhead estate in Coatbridge is the Rainbow Family Café, which opened its doors with free food last weekend, with hopes for it to become a community hub on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday afternoons.

The comic book legend, alongside wife Lucy, has spent the last few years investing money from the sale of his Millarworld company to Netflix to help restore the town to its former glories, including holding Comic Cons stacked with Marvel talent.

And he told The Big Issue that he has bigger plans to serve up in the North Lanarkshire town to lift it out of the economic problems that have dogged it in the last 40 years.

"There seems to be a really good market for it and every penny from it will go into the community – we’ll essentially give money away to start it up and then it will become self-sustaining," he said.

"My plan is to make Townhead a destination. I want to have movie premieres for my films there. I want to have comic-cons, I want to have festivals, I want it to become a destination in a way that it never even was in its glory days."

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Are Brits really having less sex because of Netflix?

HOW IT WAS TOLD

It’s somewhat ironic that the streaming service that spawned the suggestive “NUDGE, NUDGE, WINK, WINK” meme ‘Netflix and chill’ is so often said to be the cause of plummeting libido and dwindling sex lives. But here we are.

Firstly, in late March it was *The Washington Post*, with a study that made its way on to the BBC Three website.

Then, in April it was *The Wall Street Journal*, which claimed that a steamy night in has been replaced by a visit to the scroll hole.

Enter May and it’s a case of new month, new study. This one had a wide reach — being published in the majority of the UK press, starting with *The Sun*’s “NO SEX PLEASE. Young Brits are having less sex than a decade ago because they’re too busy watching Netflix, study finds”.

*Mirror Online*, *Mail Online*, the *Daily Star* and *Express Online* all followed the next day, pointing the finger at Netflix for its impact in the bedroom, while *The Daily Telegraph* blamed smartphones solely. The story also made waves abroad, with CNN and *New York Daily News* in the US getting in on the act as did news.com.au down under.

Their stories came from a peer-reviewed *British Medical Journal* study that used survey data from almost 35,000 people aged 16 to 44 and was carried out in 1991, 2001 and 2012.

They reported that women were most likely to report having sex three times a month in 2012, one fewer than the four times a month in 2001 and 1991. For men, they were most likely to report having sex three times a month across all three years.

At the top end of the scale, the number of people having sex 10 times a month or more dropped sharply, from 19.9 per cent of men in 1991 down to 14.4 per cent two decades later.

But is streaming to blame?

FACTS. CHECKED

No – or at least not in a way that this study can prove.

Netflix and streaming are not mentioned in the study at any point and there is a pretty simple explanation for that. The final year of data used for the survey — 2012 — coincides with the year that Netflix first launched in the UK and Ireland.

That was back in the heady days when the little-known competitor went head-to-head with Amazon’s Lovefilm — yes, they used to post out DVDs back then.

It would be pretty unfair to lay the blame at the door of Netflix at a time when they could only dream of the 10 million UK subscribers they now boast.

Phones, of course, are a different story. But this cross-sectional study only reports the raw data on the frequency of relations and, therefore, any analysis into the reasons behind it is speculative.

The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine’s Professor Kaye Wellings worked on the research paper and does allude to the “busyness” of life in her assessment.

“We observed that a commonly mentioned explanation for having less regular sex than they might like was exhaustion,” she said. “The women went to bed, they said, to sleep. The theme resonates with the growing literature on ‘busyness’ – the increasing pace of modern life and the challenges facing what has been termed the ‘U-bend’ or ‘sandwich’ generation.”

She added: “Any explanation for the possible decline in sexual frequency must be conjectural and no single explanation will apply to all social groups.”

It seems these reports have jumped in front of the science and have been a bit premature to pin the blame on Netflix. It will take a more up-to-date study to test that particular theory.

Until then, buckle up for the new series of *Black Mirror*. 

Illustration: Miles Cole
EXHIBITION • EVENTS • FILM SCREENINGS

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EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR
ou cannot avoid our dutiful attachment to the past. The past is all about us, either as ancient, dirty, planet-destroying fossil fuel, or as political values and postures that are as obnoxious as the toxic waste we use as fuel.

Extracting energy from the defunct forests of prehistory seems not dissimilar to our insistence on taking up all the old moralistic thinking and recycling it as new. So you could say our cars are driven by toxic waste and our current thinking is toxic; unable to reach consensus and always in pursuit of the baddie.

The environmental degradation of the last 60 years has been unprecedented—we’ve been eating away at our own life support systems at a rate unseen in the past 10,000 years. From the time we generally accepted that burning and slashing forests and combating shite was bad news for us all, we began to destroy on an even higher level. The general and gradual improvement of our thinking around race and gender, sexual and liberal freedoms — unheard of in recorded times — coincided with toxic levels of life-threatening proportions.

In short, manufacturing and despoliation went hand in hand with our growing liberality.

Our concern about seemingly everything, from the blue-nosed whale to the destruction of indigenous peoples and their language, has therefore come at an enormous cost. You might even say it is because of consumerism and its attendant pollution that we have got more caring — which we wouldn’t have done without the vast freedoms and improvements of our lives as consumers.

That our sense of powerfulness and need to intervene in the at times justice-free world grows from our power before the marketplace. Our widening ability to buy more and more of capital’s junk has made us strong enough to complain.

How many of us now would buy coffee or tea that didn’t have a trail of stickers on it showing contented pickers and a rainforest coffee mug. It was formidable, the level of energy! You could blame Liberty’s but they sell stuff. And they obviously realise that all that face stuff brings in the real bucks. Like the billionaires they largely only make the crap we crap ourselves over if we can’t get our hands on it.

And this crucible of destruction coincides with our increasing concern for justice and freedom. They go hand in hand, it would seem to me.

The old telling-off politics is rotten and a destruction because we are all elements in this destruction. And the sooner we invent new politics and new thinking around turning round pollution and getting rid of the energy we devote to blaming, then the sooner will we bring the future a future.

The more we wreck, the more we seem to care
Joris Lam’s big idea to cut air pollution changed life in Amsterdam neighbourhoods for good. He invented TreeWifi, digital birdhouses installed around the city which pushed people to work together for cleaner air. They were rewarded with free wireless internet when sensors embedded in the birdhouses detected significant improvements.

Lam, by his own admission, was no high-flyer in school. “I was the worst student in the world,” he laughs. “I got kicked out of high school and dropped out of university in the first year.” He fell into entrepreneurship when he realised he needed an outlet for his creativity, but struggled to cope with the school system and authority.

When he was 20, Lam launched his own company making video content for apps. “I somehow shamelessly approached these huge companies as a kid making videos with my mum’s camera, and talked my way into work,” the designer, now 28, recalls. The business grew steadily for four years, hired employees, and Lam was on to a winner in the digital media sphere. But he wanted to give education another shot, so in 2015 he left the company and applied for art school.

Part of the application was a required portfolio of design ideas. Lam had always been passionate about the environment, he says, and was interested in the idea of making a complex problem easy to understand and tackle. He felt vindicated when he discovered that Amsterdam only measured air pollution in 14 places across the whole city at the time. This was how he came up with TreeWifi.

But the art school wasn’t impressed and Lam was rejected. “They thought I was absolutely mental!” he laughs. “I really believed in it though. So I put the art school dream behind me and built a prototype — it wasn’t functional, I didn’t have the skills, but it looked good enough to get people excited about it online. The project really blew up and I was able to fund a start-up through grants and crowdfunding.” Specialists were keen to get involved, and at its height Lam was managing a team of 20 scientists and developers.

Lam led TreeWifi to partner up with Vodafone and T-Mobile to provide a robust wifi network. Each was installed with something similar to a sim card, and when air pollution dropped the birdhouses would glow green and function like a mobile phone hotspot. The team developed an app, too, which allowed locals to see their local air quality levels in real time — and compete with neighbouring streets.

“People were really inspired by the idea that you could do something about the environment yourself, and it helped that it wasn’t as doom and gloom as a lot of talk around environmentalism is,” Lam says. “Even though we are facing extinction… It’s the reality, but it can be paralysing to think about it in that way. TreeWifi seemed to strike a chord with people who wanted a more fun way to engage with environmental issues.”

A key part of Lam’s project was the hands-on approach he and his team took. “When installing the birdhouses in a neighbourhood, they would then work closely with the community to help them make small but effective changes — like developing a car-share system for them, or making public transport information more accessible.”

It was, the designer says, a big thing for communities to have direct access to their own air quality data. “It made the whole issue much more democratic,” he says, and felt the model was vindicated when local authorities pushed back against his initiative.

“The data exposes some inconvenient truths about cities and how regularly they flout the legal air pollution limit. We saw instances where the council would say they were going to build a new road or install new parking spaces, and a building of people would say ‘Wait a minute, everyone in this block has asthma already.’ Authorities can’t dismiss those concerns as easily when locals have the proof that they are objectively right.”

As a result of that pushback, Lam decided he needed a wider set of skills if he was to take TreeWifi global like he wanted to. Aged 24 at the time, he open-sourced the design so that others could build their own version at home. And, again, he applied for university.

Four months ago, Lam graduated from Teesside University with a master’s degree in digital management (the admissions department liked TreeWifi so much that they invited him on to the course even without an undergraduate degree). He learned how to confidently bring an innovative project to the world, he says, and is armed with all the skills he wishes he’d been able to bring to his previous projects.

Now based in the UK, Lam has been doing consultancy work on sustainability across Europe and China. He has also been working on maps of cities around the world built from digital Lego bricks. They’re hooked up to environmental data on the internet and use coloured lights to show the local air quality levels in real time. But that’s just for fun, Lam says. Or it might just be the building blocks for his next planet-saving plan.

Interview: Hannah Westwater
@hannahjtww

FIND OUT MORE
treewifi.org

NAME: Joris Lam
PROJECT: TreeWifi

IN BRIEF: His creation, TreeWifi, is a network of digital birdhouses which monitor the air quality and provide free internet to neighbourhoods that reduce their local air pollution. Lam and his team installed the birdhouses around Amsterdam and worked with communities to take realistic steps towards cleaner air — even in the face of disgruntled local authorities.
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the big picture.
This wooden fishing boat was designed to carry 15 crew. In April 2015, it capsized and sank in the Mediterranean with an estimated 750-1,100 migrant men, women and children on board, most of them locked in the hull. There were 28 survivors.

The tragedy was on an unfathomable scale. But is it art? This uncomfortable question has been the focus of debate after the boat was included in this year’s Venice Biennale.

No stranger to provocation and controversy, the art festival is being accused of exploiting migrant deaths, while others argue it highlights the exploitation that led to the tragedy. Artistic director Ralph Rugoff said: “It’s one thing to see an image in a newspaper or on television but when you confront the physical thing, you have a whole other group of sensations. You feel it is a different way; you’re processing the information in a different way, hopefully that leads you to think in a different way.”

Swiss-Icelandic artist Christoph Büchel is behind ‘Barca Nostra’, which means ‘Our Boat’ in Italian, though his team emphasise the art work is not the ship itself but the reaction to it from viewers, politicians and the media.

The Italian government raised the vessel in 2016 for bodies to be removed and identified. In April it was released to the Barca Nostra team, with a chain of Italian politicians helping to cut through red tape to have it displayed on one of the world’s biggest stages. Key in the process was Sicilian councillor Sebastiano Tusa, who made a phone call to get permission to move the boat just before boarding the Ethiopian Airlines plane that crashed in March, killing all on board.

There are long-term plans for it to be placed in a “garden of memory” in Sicily. Meanwhile, Italy’s right-wing government has closed ports to migrants.
when I was 16 I was just a stupid big tall kid with bad acne riding my bicycle around LA. I was 6ft 3in. I had bad posture. I wore glasses. I had a big shock of dark hair. I was thin. I dressed Ivy League – buttoned-down shirts, corduroy pants, saddle shoes. I wanted to be a rich kid. I was going to the library a lot, and reading, and stealing things out of stores, shoplifting books and sneaking into movie theatres.

I grew up very poor on the edge of a wealthy neighbourhood in LA called Hancock Park. There were a great many groovy daughters of privilege. They went to a private school called Marlborough and I spent a lot of time perving on them, afraid to talk to them. I used to go around peeping in windows. I was fixated on Hancock Park because it was affluent and clean, and my dad and I lived in this crummy pad with our beagle dog. She urinated and shit all over the place. When the few friends I did have came over, they’d be hit with the smell, and practically run back home. I love dogs but I wouldn’t let a dog shit on my rug.

My dad was older – it was just him and me – and he was in bad health. He was a bullshitter, one of the world’s biggest liars. He would spin handsome tales of his friendship with Babe Ruth and other sports heroes. When I was a child I undiscerningly believed everything he told me. Then when I got older, at some point I just shut down on him. He was pathetic. This man with all his gifts, who should have been someone in life, and led a saner life, a more coherent life. I went through a gradual process of disillusionment. He was old and infirm, a big smoker, three packs a day. I was anxious to get away, just be somewhere else on my own.

I think it’s often specious to point to a single traumatising event, such as my mother’s death. [Geneva Odelia was raped and murdered when James was 10], and say that’s when the die was cast. ‘That’s when he went off the rails!’ I was no prize before my mother was killed. I was full of shit. I don’t think I was particularly intelligent – I’ve never scored well on intelligence tests. I think imagination and the will to create are more important than intelligence. I think I write well because I loved to read, and that was always my chief means of escape. The only thing I did well as a boy was reading – crime stories, detective novels, true crime. Ed McBain. My reading matter changed in the summer when I was 10, in the immediate aftermath of my mother’s death. So I started out reading The Hardy Boys, nice mysteries. But then I became interested in the psychological aspect of crime.

I got kicked out of school for misconduct, then I got kicked out of the army. I did a lot of drugs and drinking. I was immoral. I was sinful and I was lazy. I have a strong religious sense, I knew what I was doing was wrong. I had a strong moral undercurrent running through my body but it was always at war with my selfishness and my desire for what I want right now. You can point to the pathology of drink and drug addiction but it was wrong and I knew it was wrong. I never blamed anyone else. It was the Sixties, everyone was blaming The Man. ‘You gotta blame The Man.’ I never blamed The Man, I always wanted to BE The Man. I wanted to have the power. I wanted to be the president and have a wife and a dog and some good-looking clothes and a nice big bulletproof limousine that I would be driven around in.

In 1975 I started caddying at the local golf club. And that got me enough money to get myself a cheap pad. I got kicked out of Hillcrest Country Club when I hit the son of a member, and then I went to Bel Air Country Club. And I earned a living. That’s when I started getting the idea for what would become my first novel, Brown’s Requiem. I wanted to be a novelist, at first for all the wrong reasons. I thought a published writer would get a boss pad, groovy threads, lots of girlfriends. But then I got the idea for the first novel and it took me over. Suddenly it wasn’t about being a big cheese. It was, I have to tell this story. I was sober by then, my head had cleared. I was making friends. I started writing the book on January 29 1979. I wrote it standing up, leaning against my dresser in my hotel room.
The 16-year-old me would be surprised how diligent, meticulous, and deliberate I’ve become. How impatient I’ve become with profligate behaviour. I credit three good ass-kickings by the LAPD for turning me around. I love the LAPD. They’re a hard-charging, shit-kicking police department. They’ve got a lot of bad press for that but I admire them for it. The last time I mouthed off to a cop he hit me so hard he probably killed all my ancestors. I haven’t stolen a paper clip since then.

Helen Knode has probably been the best influence on my life. She was my second ex-wife for 11 years, then we got back together. I’ve moved to Colorado since I got back with her. She got me to church—I’m a Christian. She’s forbearing, she’s supremely intelligent, much more than I am. She’s published two novels herself. She’s more fair-minded than I am. She has taught me tolerance. I like people from a distance.

If I could have one last conversation with anyone from my life of course it would be my mother. For the life of me I can’t recall her voice. She was from Wisconsin. If you’ve seen Fargo you’ll remember the funny way those people talk in Minnesota. That’s the way people in Wisconsin talk but my mother didn’t talk that way. Or she broke the habit if she ever did talk that way. She was educated. I would be very, very interested to hear her voice. I wonder...you know, people recorded their voices on a record in a booth back then. I wonder if my mother ever did that and if she did, and I heard it, would I recognise her voice? I don’t know.

If I could go back to any time in my life it would be about a month after my father’s death. I was cut loose from the army in Louisiana and I went back to LA. I had $1,500 in my pocket. I broke into the apartment I had lived in with my father, which was locked up because we didn’t pay the rent. There were three of his uncashed security cheques there, so I forged his name and cashed them at a liquor store. Giving me $1,800. I was 17 and on the loose in LA, and looking for trouble. I was like the mad scientist, heh heh heh. I was free.

James Ellroy’s new novel This Storm is out on May 30 (Cornerstone, £20)
Interview: Jane Graham @janeannie
For more interviews see bigissue.com/letter-to-my-younger-self
the age of protest.
The European election looks set to be a protest vote. Depending on your side, in Britain this protest will come because of a denial of the democratic mandate resulting in the refusal to implement the Brexit referendum decision, or alternatively, because the ongoing push for Brexit at any cost is one that could ultimately cause massive economic and social damage.

Across Europe, this vote looks set to rupture former orthodoxies. The old language of self-identity—left, right, centrist, conservative—has been rendered almost obsolete. The populist right is gaining, frequently driven by elite interests masquerading as the voice of the formerly trammelled dispossessed. The shape of the EU legislature could be very odd within weeks.

There is a febrile atmosphere around. And lies and disinformation move in great unseen subterranean webs, like a sort of supranational Japanese knotweed that can spring forth in great clumps doing untold damage to what a heartbeat ago felt like the soundest of foundations.

And milkshake. Who knew that milkshake would become the weapon of choice in the new onstreet culture war, a sweet lactose refusal to buy snakeoil from the hucksters.

But what next? In Britain, so far, we can protest. While there are some ongoing online tropes that mean anybody challenging abuse can be labelled unpatriotic or some sort of enemy of the people, we don't yet get thrown into jail for standing up. That said, there is an increasingly emboldened gang of self-congratulatory toe-rag misogynists online and off, so what can we do?

Schoolkids showed that taking to the streets gets their voices heard in the battle to fight climate change, a battle nobody can ignore. But onstreet protests may not be something everybody can do.

After the election, as the plates keep shifting and the angles change, what is the way to protest? How can voices cut through?
"We have to stand and fight on veracity"

Billy Bragg – Musician

The Big Issue: You wrote a pamphlet...

Billy Bragg: Some of my favourite writing has been pamphlet size – *The Lion and the Unicorn* by George Orwell, *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine. The idea of a polemical essay is still very strong in European politics, France in particular. There's a great tradition but we've lost it. Bottom line, I'm a communicator. Whether it's a song, doing a gig, writing a pamphlet, talking to you now, give me the opportunity to offer a different perspective.

You have been involved in political protest since the Red Wedge collective in the 1980s. What has changed since then?

In the 1980s, music was the only social medium we had as young people. Music had a vanguard role in youth culture. It told us our cynicism. In order to get to grips with the big issues of the day we almost need a better world.

All other debate is increasingly polarised. How can that be fixed?

In order to get to grips with the big issues of the day we almost need a new language. It's trying to set some framework for the discourse: simple, fundamental principles that are neither left nor right, like freedom, equality and accountability. There are some things missing in our political discourse. These are issues around veracity: when you put something on the side of a bus, it's got to be true. Transparency, where does the money come from? We need to be asking those questions. But to get to that place we have to suspend our cynicism.

You write that freedom has meant different things at different times to different people. What do you think it means today?

I think the American idea of freedom has come to dominate, the idea of freedom as the unfettered self, being able to do whatever you want. If everyone did that it would be ruinous for society. In some ways, democracy was invented both to allow people to express their views but also to put limits on that so there is a balance between the individual and society. Freedom has many faces. When the face of freedom is emancipation everyone is in favour, but when it starts to veer off towards impurity—that's what Nigel Farage is expressing when he refuses to answer Andrew Marr’s questions—that’s the gateway to tyranny.

Is Farage channelling Trump?

Trump has brought that, 'I can say whatever I want and you can't challenge me’ idea to the fore of our politics. Farage is starting to represent that being introduced to UK politics and we have to resist that.

How?

By holding people to account. Before the Second World War the British were trying to develop radar so they could see the bombers coming. Accountability is like our radar. Our radar against authoritarianism. There's already too much anger in our discourse. We've got to find a way to respect people that disagree with us and deal with it when we’re challenged. There will be people who question you. You shouldn't respond to those with anger, you should respond politely but disagree with them. By being civil you're being accountable.

What about combatting people who play on populism like Tommy Robinson or Carl Benjamin, who jokes about raping MPs?

There are a lot of different ways of doing that. There are people who double down when you catch them and then you have to look at other ways you might be able to hold them to account. Sometimes that’s through an online campaign to show what they’re saying is untrue or abusive. Or there’s milkshakes. The aim with accountability is drawing a line and say this is not acceptable. It’s not acceptable to joke about raping a female MP.

But that confirms their followers’ belief that the ‘establishment’ is against them...

Victimhood is a form of deflection, avoiding uncomfortable truths. This is the Trumpian agenda trying to come to British politics. It’s the same with anti-Semitism in the Labour Party. I’m not only after Carl Benjamin’s arse, I’m after anyone who thinks they’re a Labour Party supporter and thinks it’s OK to use anti-Semitic tropes. They need to be challenged just the same. We have to stand and fight on veracity.

In udder news

Tommy Robinson was hit twice in two days

You say populism has “little to offer the left-behind other than the visceral thrill of payback”. What are the long-term consequences when that influences elections?

What are the policies of the Brexit Party? What is in their manifesto? There’s nothing there. If the Brexit Party really wanted to serve the people who voted for Brexit there would be a lot of stuff about bringing capitalism to heel, giving people more agency in their lives. They don’t want to change the system, they just want to be in control. The take back control slogan is a manifestation of people’s sense that they have no agency over their lives. Power is exercised very far away, their lives are not reflected in the decision-making process.

Why have people been pushed to extreme ends of the political spectrum?

This is down to agency as well. Let’s take for instance the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party. I re-joined the party and voted for him because he said he was going to give members the right to make policy. There is a really great opportunity to have agency. At the other end of the spectrum, the EU referendum had a clear outcome, Leave/Remain, so a lot of people who had never voted before voted for Brexit because there was something they knew they would get. Both Corbyn and Brexit are manifestations of people wanting more agency. People are voting against the centre, and accountability is a way to bring that to them.

The Three Dimensions of Freedom by Billy Bragg is out now (Faber & Faber, £6)

Interview: Steven MacKenzie @stevenmackenzie
If people think I’m capable of bringing down a government that’s quite a compliment

Gina Miller – Campaigner, Remain United founder

Gina Miller is either a selfless saviour or a destroyer of democracy, depending on your political stance. She emerged post-Brexit referendum when she brought the weight of the High Court against the government, fighting to stop Article 50 being triggered without Parliament’s approval. She won. The vicious abuse she received from the public thereafter reached such intensity that Miller and her family were placed under police protection. But now she’s back to make every vote count in this week’s European parliamentary election – a proxy People’s Vote.

The 54-year-old business owner’s top tip for sticking it to the establishment might be a first: she wants you to vote Liberal Democrat. Or, if you’re in Scotland, SNP; Plaid Cymru in Wales. It’s part of her tactical voting model, designed to block Brexiteers from Brussels.

Research commissioned by her via Remain United suggests the Brexit Party could take nearly 40 per cent of votes overall. The campaign claims no political allegiances, but its stance on the EU is clear: “If Brexiteers represent us for the next five years, they’ll destroy our place in the EU from within,” Miller says.

Other polls put Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party at 30 per cent, compared to Labour’s 21 per cent and the Tories’ 12 per cent (which would be the party’s worst performance in a nationwide election since 1834). Miller’s model makes recommendations to people on how to vote based on the most popular pro-EU party in their region.

“I call myself a transparency campaigner,” she says. “I’ve always felt the most important thing is that the general public have the ability to make an informed choice and they should be told the truth. Only then can we confidently make decisions for the country. It’s something we’re missing in the political sphere.”

The complex transferable vote system of the European election can put smaller parties at a disadvantage. There are five parties to split the Remain vote, according to Remain United – they don’t count Labour as one of those — which, combined with the expected low turnout, could give the Brexit Party and UKIP a boost. Miller thinks that could impede the UK’s ability to navigate a soft Brexit or revoke Article 50.

Instead of basing predictions on the 2014 EU election, Remain United is working from real-time polling – and an algorithm to factor in the Brexit Party and Change UK.

Miller explains: “Some people say they can predict when you’re falling in and out of love before you know. We’ve used that tech and we’re tracking how people are falling in and out of love with political parties.” Even the week before the election, Miller and her team watched voters shift allegiance in real time.

Miller’s fight hasn’t been without consequence for her and her family. She remains under the protection of an anti-terrorism squad; the threats of death and violence she received after launching her High Court case in 2016 have continued ever since.

It’s a pattern. “A strong woman of colour is seen as a threat,” Miller says. “If people think I’m capable of bringing down a government, that’s quite a compliment. But it’s a really sad thing. When I do school speakings, I look at the girls who might grow up to hear the same kind of abuse as me, and I let them know you have to stay strong. Other people don’t have the ability to diminish you like you think they do.”

Remain United published its first data this month and is set to release the most up-to-date figures on May 21. It is, Miller says, protest by data – levelling the playing field.

She explains: “I’m not interested in the small politics. I’m more interested in the data, the bigger outcome. It’s time the people had a respectable, pragmatic, unbiased force like Remain United. One that empowers them to go out and get what they want.”

Interview: Hannah Westwater @hannahjwt

I’ve never been to a protest – it’s not something I’d ordinarily do

Nick Cuthbert – Big Issue vendor

Nick Cuthbert  Big Issue vendor Nick Cuthbert into the media spotlight when protests arrived in Truro.

Nick was selling the magazine outside M&S at Lemon Quay in the Cornish city near a rally for UKIP’s Carl Benjamin when opposing protesters clashed after Benjamin nearly fell foul of a flying milkshake.

The ensuing scuffle on May 10 was caught on camera and went viral on social media, showing Nick appearing to push away a protester while dressed in his Big Issue tabard.

But the 54-year-old insisted that his intervention wasn’t political and was instead an attempt to halt the violence.

“I didn’t see the milkshake being thrown but I saw an 18 or 19-year-old kid pinned to the floor and a man was kicking him in the head,” Nick told The Big Issue. “So I stepped in and pushed the man off and said, ‘You can’t do that.’ I’m amazed he didn’t kill him – he had steel toe-cap boots on and the boy couldn’t do anything about it because he was stuck on the floor. It was a horrible situation.”

Benjamin, known as Sargon of Akkad in online circles, has been on a tour of the south-west of England with far-right hype man Milo Yiannopoulos as part of his European election campaign.

After kicking off in Truro, one drink struck his campaign bus in Plymouth before he was doused with another in Totnes. And there were alleged scuffles between protesters in Exeter.

However, Nick had no interest in either the political candidate or the protest when he intervened in Truro.

“I’ve never been to any protest – it’s not something that I would ordinarily do,” he said. “It wasn’t political. Whether it was a political rally or not, I probably would have done the same. I didn’t really think about it.

“I’ve never voted so whatever the party, it doesn’t make any difference to me anyway.”

But there has been plenty of support for Nick, who is not facing any police action, in the wake of the incident.

“I’m being absolutely inundated with ‘well dones’ from people,” he said. “Even people I don’t recognise have been coming up to me.

“I was inundated with free coffees the next morning from all the way through the town and people wanted to shake my hand. No one’s come up to me and said anything bad about it.”

Interview: Liam Geraghty @Lazergun_Nun
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‘Protesting online is nothing that the government fear – protest should always be in person and not virtual’

Mark Millar – Comics legend

Mark Millar is unusual for a Brexiteer.
A staunch socialist, the Scottish comic book legend most identifies with Jeremy Corbyn in supporting the left-wing and an EU exit.

Millar’s own protest vote for Brexit in 2016 was not a symbol of dissatisfaction with immigration – as has been the subject of debate in some EU elections clashes and campaigns – but was instead done for “democracy and renationalising the railways.”

It’s with a certain annoyance that he feels like this protest has been hijacked in recent times.

“For me, it is quite irritating that the right have hijacked Brexit,” he says. “But anybody who remembers before 1988 knows it was always the position of the left, of people like Tony Benn. It’s kind of been hijacked by the right and that’s annoying and also at the same time it has become about immigration which is nothing to do with what left-wing people voted for for Brexit for.

It was to do with democracy and renationalisation as opposed to immigration, which is something we actually need.”

Despite that experience, he will be heading to the polling station on Thursday still certain that it is the best place to settle pitched political battles.

Social media has increasingly become the forum for hot takes, acting as a sounding board to show your disgust or support for parties and politicians and find like-minded keyboard activists – or debate those who don’t share a viewpoint, often with virulently.

But that has not swayed Millar, who prefers to log off to make his political point.

Having previously mobilised against the second Gulf War, he is split on how much pounding the pavements accomplishes. Millar is sure that both marching and voting carry more weight than an anger-filled tweet.

“One thing that has really struck me recently is how protesting online is a complete waste of time,” he says. “Imagine this, if the government saw a million people walking down the street they’d be quite frightened but if you see something get a million likes then you’re not going to call out the army! I think we’ve been diverted over the last 10 years to social media, to something that is essentially meaningless.

“I like that people have become politicised but I just think that they’ve gone in the wrong direction to do it. It’s nothing that the government fear – I think that protest should always be in person and not virtual.”

Interview: Liam Geraghty @Lazergun_Nun

‘The language of protest, whether that’s about free speech or equality, has been appropriated by the far right’

Peter Pomerantsev – Author

Writer and academic Peter Pomerantsev wants to take down the online troll factories that are telling lies. The author of Nothing is True and Everything is Possible spoke to The Big Issue about how everyone can play their part in stopping bots seizing control of elections, public health and the web.

The Big Issue: How can people fight back against disinformation during elections?

Peter Pomerantsev: There has been a boom in communal fact-checking. Social media is great for that – you find a disinformation story that’s trending and you can take it to a fact-checking organisation, who will likely have built some sort of rapport with the platforms, and will push for the story’s exposure to be upgraded or downgraded accordingly. [Full Fact is the UK’s leading independent fact-checking charity.]

What’s the difference between identifying fake news and watching out for news biases from publication to publication?

Take the Russian campaign during the American election. A lot of that disinformation wasn’t malicious. It’s not the content which is the main problem, the deceptive part is the way it was being amplified. You should look at the campaign itself and see if it’s being pushed by people who are genuine. That’s very hard to do at the moment without a digital forensics specialist, so we need to push the big social media platforms for transparency.

If we can see why we’re targeted by certain online content, and we can see the mechanics of how the story’s being pushed, we gain an understanding of the overall architecture of the campaign. That creates much more discerning readers and internet users.

What are the main challenges for internet users who want to get involved?

There’s a lot of trivial misinformation that’s actually pointless to fight because they’re small parts of a bigger campaign. Understanding what the dangerous bits of disinformation are is tricky. There’s a temptation to go for the easy stuff. Recently there was a great story, it was satire but you would’ve thought it was true: that Donald Trump believes suicide bombers deserve the death penalty. And fact-checkers spent a long time pulling that one apart, they had to hammer home that it was rubbish. Secondly, we need to undermine the financial system that promotes disinformation. Advertisers put their content on disinformation sites because it’s a cheap way of getting to their audience. If we can erode the financial incentives, I think that would help a lot. But the reality is that we’re always going to live with this.

Trolls and bots will sometimes attack individual users. What does that behaviour tell us?

It’s a pattern that we’ve seen country to country — marginalised groups really take the heat of these campaigns. Women in particular are targeted. I’ve heard different explanations: like that there was all this lying under the surface and the internet allowed it to bubble up. But when you’re a bully, you pick on the people with less power than you.

How is the relationship between online communication and protest likely to evolve?

So many movements are set alight on social media now. Disinformation campaigns try to get inside protests and manipulate them. The language of protest has been appropriated by the far right. Tommy Robinson crusades for freedom of speech. Or far-right movements in Europe who call for women’s rights. The language of the left has essentially been hacked by these groups, which puts us in a really confusing position.

This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality by Peter Pomerantsev is out on August 1 (Faber & Faber, £14.99).

Interview: Hannah Westwater @hannahjtw
Shinaayo Owoola, 14, recently took part in a groundbreaking project to produce a very special kids’ magazine. It was a collaboration between The Big Issue and Southampton FC’s Saints Foundation – and this is Shinaayo’s story.

‘Sharing this story with readers means a lot to me’

“I can remember being five years old, living in Lagos, Nigeria. What a lovely city it was. Every day I would get up at 6am, have a wash, brush my teeth and get ready for school. At 7.25am, I am at school ready to start my lessons. There were no shops around it, so there was no pit stop on the way to pick up snacks. I looked forward to the weekend so much. It meant I would not have to see my strict and scary teachers. That’s not to say I was a naughty kid. I just didn’t like my strict teachers who obviously wanted the best for me.

In Lagos almost every child was always out on the streets playing football or playing out with friends if they weren’t in school. You can walk out of the house and there will always be people you could play with. Moving to England meant making friends wouldn’t be as natural as back in Lagos.

Lagos was a real fantasy, with the streetlights and the cars and music playing from everywhere. The streets have their own identity, kids playing out, music and people getting on with their life. The food stalls would make anyone drop what they were doing and rush over to get something delicious.

Lagos streets on weekends felt like a carnival with street parties and live music from every corner. Children would be bouncing up and down as they did not have to see their strict teachers and parents. I liked to treat myself to a Nigerian sausage roll – equivalent to having a bacon or sausage butty from Greggs. I know how much people in England love their bacon and sausage butty with a cup of tea. Mine was sausage roll with super malt, every Nigerian kid’s favourite meal.

In order to have all these privileges, I had to make sure I respected everyone around me. In Nigeria, to the way I will speak to anyone older than I am. Greetings when walking into a room with adults had to be genuine, anything less would be classed as an insult. The last thing you want to do is make a family member upset – your favourite auntie can be your worst nightmare. So making sure you were always polite was (and meant you might even get a present or a little pocket money as they left).

I will forever be grateful for my childhood living in Lagos. This shaped me into the man I am today. Life in England was not as smooth as I hoped it would be. As a young boy from Nigeria, I did not know eveninherited some of this British slang into my vocabulary. I laugh at myself every day because I am slowly becoming more of a Brit. The sad thing is that I am the only Nigerian in my year so there’s no one who can relate to my childhood memories. Sharing this story with readers means a lot to me. Lagos will always be part of me and I am forever grateful for the foundation and memories I created there. I no longer fear teachers since moving to secondary school here. And I was lucky to work with Saints Foundation, which has given me the opportunities to do some amazing things in and outside of school.

I have a good relationship with all my teachers here. They remind me of my teachers back in Lagos—hard-working teachers who only want the best for me. And in England, I can share jokes with my teachers and have a laugh with them.

My family is the best, they have allowed me to grow and become the person I am today. My journey is just starting and I am looking forward to what is ahead, in Southampton and beyond.

Shinaayo also interviewed Saints player Mario Lemina, who grew up in Gabon.
Shinaayo wrote this piece for The Big Issue’s Southampton Teenage Takeover, a special free magazine produced for – and by – schoolkids in the city. It was the latest innovation from The Big Issue’s partnership with Saints Foundation, which started in 2017 when we produced a matchday programme that was sold by Big Issue vendors at St Mary’s Stadium at the first home fixture of the season.

For the Southampton Teenage Takeover we handed over control to 12 amazingly creative youngsters aged 13 to 15 from five high schools across the city. They came up with the ideas and wrote the pieces themselves. The unique mag included a day out on the town with Southampton boss Ralph Hasenhüttl, a behind-the-scenes tour of a cruise ship and a special investigation into the city’s ‘pengest’ fried chicken spots. As Greg Baker of Saints Foundation said, surely a career in journalism beckons now for these talented kids?

saintsfoundation.co.uk
Support a Big Issue vendor to become a rising star today

My name is Bill and I was a vendor in Bournemouth for 6 years. I never thought I’d be selling the magazine but I’m so glad The Big Issue family was there for me.

After 4 years of non-stop work, I had a nervous breakdown which resulted in me having to leave my job. Not only did I lose my income but as it was a live-in job, I also lost my home.

With nowhere to go, my dog Chloe and I set off along the South Coast. We found a cave to stay in but it wasn’t long before we were moved on. By the time we reached Bournemouth we were ill, exhausted and out of money. But after being persuaded to sell The Big Issue by another vendor, everything changed.

I built up my micro business selling The Big Issue and before long I was promoted to Vendor Coordinator. The team at The Big Issue Foundation were so efficient, friendly and understanding. They’ve helped me see a doctor, get treated for Hepatitis C, supported my move into my own place – twice – and even organised a check up with a vet for Chloe.

I’ve taken part in several accredited courses and regularly spoken to nursing students at Bournemouth University about my experiences of living on the street. I’ve spoken on stage in front of 300 people at The Big London Night Walk kick-off, before walking the 13.5 mile route.

After selling the magazine for 6 years, in April last year I landed a job as a brewery tour guide. Less than a year later in March 2019, I won the BH Stars Rising Star Award for my work at the brewery. Thank you so much for helping me get here; thank you so much for not letting me give up.

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EXHIBITION

Displayed outside One Church Brighton until the end of May as part of the Brighton Fringe programme, Unframed Lives is an exhibition of photography by people who have experienced addiction, homelessness or the impoverishing effects of austerity. It sees participants respond to the self-chosen theme of hope.

First-time photographer Rita contributed this piece titled For Sarah. “The idea is that my sister is holding onto hope and hasn’t lost it,” says Rita. “She’s still looking forward. This was the first time I had seen my sister after she had suffered a bereavement. The photography project has given me inspiration to be creative and motivation to keep moving forward.”

mybrightonphotoproject.com

UNFRAMED LIVES
An exhibition by MyBrighton & Hove Photo Project

The work on this page is created by people who are marginalised. Contact street.lights@bigissue.com to see your art here. To see more and buy prints: bigissueshop.com
At least half the profit goes to the artist.
Plastic waste has been found on the deepest of seabeds. Dr Alex Rogers says time is running out to protect this alien and wonderful underwater world. The ocean is the largest ecosystem on Earth with a volume of 1.3 billion cubic kilometres of water and reaching nearly 11,000 metres in depth at its deepest point, the Challenger Deep in the Marianas Trench, in the western Pacific. This trench was first discovered by HMS Challenger in what many regard as the first modern oceanographic expedition, which set out from Sheerness in December 1872.

Since the Challenger expedition, we have learned much about the ocean, how it circulates, how it regulates the temperature, weather and atmospheric gases of the Earth and about the basic distribution of life within it. However, the further and deeper we go from the shore, the less we know. Only three people have visited the bottom of the Challenger Deep (including movie director James Cameron) compared to 12 who have visited the Moon. Much of the deep ocean we have never even seen, let alone studied, and we have mapped less than a fifth of the seabed.

My own exploration of the ocean has taken me to the North Atlantic, the Indian Ocean and the Antarctic. I have dived to two miles below the surface of the Indian Ocean in a submersible that more resembled a space capsule than most people’s idea of a submarine. The absence of breathable air, extreme pressure and cold make the ocean a hostile place for human life, and the technological demands of exploring the deep make even the simplest scientific observations difficult. Yet life thrives even at the greatest depths.

The lights of the submersible on my dive revealed sheets of black basalt, cast into ropey piles as part of the process of creating new seabed. Everything was coated in a thin covering of bright white sediment, resembling pristine snow, and there to welcome me was a large red shrimp gently swimming up to investigate this alien visitor from above. It looked like another world, with no evidence that humans had ever been present.

Almost every time I have explored new places in the ocean, the expedition has returned with many new species, everything from seaweeds to a new species of yet crab that occurs in piles around hot springs in the deep Southern Ocean, known as hydrothermal vents. I have also seen evidence of the destruction humankind has brought to the ocean.

On underwater mountains in the Indian and Atlantic oceans, the cameras of remotely operated vehicles – robots we use to survey the sea floor – have revealed deep-sea coral reefs obliterated by bottom trawls. These have been deployed in the deep ocean hunting for species like the orange roughy, a fish that lives for 150 years and unsurprisingly has proved vulnerable to overfishing. Some deep-sea corals have been found to live for over 4,000 years and one sponge to 11,000 years old: they are slow growing and slow to reproduce, so the ability of such ecosystems to recover from fishing damage is very limited.

Even around the UK we have seen dramatic changes in our coastal seas. The English Channel and the North Sea are seeing an increase in warm-water fish species such as horse mackerel, anchovy and lesser weaver fish. Species we associate more with cooler waters such as cod, mackerel and sand eels appear to be moving north. Species never previously recorded in British waters have appeared more and more regularly over the last few decades, including exotics like the short-nosed seahorse. However, along with this increase in the diversity of our species, fish are becoming smaller, and fish stocks less productive. There have already been clashes between countries over who has the right to fish stocks which are moving north, most notably mackerel.

Whilst the news about the ocean has been extremely gloomy there are reasons for hope. Marine species can bounce back in spectacular fashion even after they have nearly been driven to extinction. I have seen some of these species myself: most notably the Antarctic fur seal, nearly exterminated for its dense pelts by the end of the 19th century but now thriving around the island of South Georgia in the South Atlantic where there are about four million individuals.

The ocean also has not suffered from the same levels of extinction as land ecosystems. However, if we are to avoid a global-level extinction event in the ocean, there is no room for complacency. In the final chapter of The Deep, I outline measures we need to take collectively as nations and we as individuals can take to turn the ocean around from decline to recovery; changing our diet; avoiding single-use plastics; trying to reduce our use of household goods that contain harmful chemicals and buying sustainably caught fish.

We can also teach ourselves about the ocean, what life it contains and why it is so important. Maybe consider joining an organisation that is working on ocean conservation. Ocean degradation is a big issue for all of us and everything we do can contribute to creating a healthy ocean and ultimately a healthy planet.

Deep and meaningful

Illustration: Joseph Joyce

The Deep: The Hidden Wonders of Our Oceans and How We Can Protect Them by Dr Alex Rogers is out now, (£20).
The here and now

There’s more to this haunting tale of trauma-inducing time travel than meets the eye, says Jane Graham

The opening chapter of Sandra Newman’s fourth novel The Heavens sets the scene in a number of ways.

In the rarefied glow of a late summer New York party illuminated by tea lights, two spontaneous, attractive people, pregnant with happy expectation, begin to fall in love. The night is one of “receptive postures and parted lips; such an easy blessedness, like ascending a staircase into the air”.

The heady intoxication of this evocation is typical of Newman’s sumptuous, multi-layered novel, in which both the writing and the characters shimmer and spin; sometimes joyfully, sometimes in a panic. The tone changes as different voices take hold of the narrative – the contained Jay McInerney-like mixture of elegance and awe gives way to the splintered prose of a chaotic mind. But what sustains is Newman’s brilliant gift as an artful wordsmith who never loses her cool, despite the numerous psychological states her novel seeks to convey.

The Heavens is billed as ‘a story of love complicated by time travel’; strictly, you could describe Jenny Erpenbeck’s unforgettable The End of Days in the same way, and in that case too, the suggestion of light whimsy would be highly misleading. It begins in new millennium New York, in a utopian America in which the president is an environmentally savvy woman leading her country in a time of unity and optimism. Kate, a bright and beautiful artist, has nightly dreams in which she is Emilia in 1593 England, mistress of various members of the Elizabethan court and friend of unknown playwright Will Shakespeare. The country is battling the plague, and Emilia becomes committed to her super-heroic mission to save the planet.

The charmed modern world inhabited by lovers Kate and Ben begins to alter each time she awakes, seemingly due to her actions in the dream. The results are increasingly alarming, as America becomes more troubled and divided. Yes, it sounds like intriguing hokum, but make no mistake, this is a profound, serious novel, whose initial brio feels in hindsight like a delicious pink puff of candy floss too sweet to be fully consumed, quickly discarded to shrivel in the rain.

Some readers have lost patience with the novel’s perpetually shifting perspectives and time zones, regularly re-set according to the augmenting ‘holes in the fabric of Kate’. For me, it maintained its intrigue and growing sense of tragic horror almost until the (slightly weak) end. Newman is a clever and sophisticated writer; she enjoys introducing what look like clichéd portals to hoary tropes (such as references to the gleaming Twin Towers in summer 2001) so that she can confound your expectations. As an imaginative illustration of the ungraspable, self-fixed and sometimes perversely magical symptoms of mental illness, this haunting, pervasively sad novel hits a particularly vulnerable nerve.

Corby writer Andrew Cowan made a big splash with his 2002 debut, coming-of-age tale Pig. His new novel, Your Fault, is just as good as that touching, insightful book. It begins with the adult Peter reminiscing with his two-year-old self, comparing how he once saw things and how he sees them in hindsight, with each chapter moving the story on a year. His parents’ troubled marriage, his gradual understanding of the fallibility of adults, his young self’s guilt and confusion as he navigates his way into teenagedom – all are portrayed with intelligence, honesty, and great tenderness. If clarity of recollection is an art, Andrew Cowan is a master.

@Janeannie

Illustration: Matt Peet

Top 5 Stereotype-Smashing Kids’ books

01 Ghost by Jason Reynolds
The first in Reynolds’ Run series, Ghost is an affecting novel about a young boy who must conquer memories of a traumatic experience, prejudice and reroute his life before it’s too late.

02 The Boy at the Back of the Class by Onjali Rauf
A heart-warming story of a group of nine-year-olds in a London school who work together to reunite new classmate, Ahmet, with his family, providing a child’s perspective on the refugee crisis and demonstrating the importance of empathy and kindness.

03 High Rise Mystery by Sharna Jackson
On the hottest day of the year, sisters Nik and Norva (the UK’s first young black female detective duo) use suspicions and smells to lead them to a horrible discovery on their south-east London estate. One of their favourite residents is dead. The heat is on, as the duo race to find out who did this – and why.

04 El Deafo by Cece Bell
This beautifully illustrated, personal graphic novel recounts the author starting a new school with a huge hearing aid – at her previous school, every child was deaf. Suddenly she’s different. This is an inspirational handbook for turning ‘weaknesses’ into strengths.

05 Un Lun Dun by China Miéville
Zanna and Dinah are drawn to a funhouse-mirror version of London following strange goings on centred around Zanna – a blue-eyed ‘chosen one’, destined to save the city. However, tropes are quickly subverted and stereotypes are smashed.

Illustration: Matt Peet
INTERVIEW

It’s Aladdin’s turn for a live-action remake. Navid Negahban tells Gregory Wakeman that in playing the Sultan he’s breaking free of Middle-Eastern typecasting.

Disney’s fixation with adapting animated masterpieces into live-action box office smashes sees them turn to 1992’s Aladdin, adapted by director Guy Ritchie.

Much of the early reaction to the movie focussed on how blue – or not – the genie, played by Will Smith, was. Yes, after years of waiting for a prominent black character in a mainstream Disney film, people complained that he wasn’t blue enough.

But regardless of the merits of the movie, it’s already a landmark when it comes to a big-budget production with a largely Middle-Eastern cast.

In Hollywood, the fact that Middle-Eastern actors tend to get typecast is not lost on Navid Negahban. Best known for playing Osama bin Laden archetype Abu Nazir in Homeland, in a post-9/11 America Negahban has had to portray similar characters in both CSI: New York and Lost, while even parts in The West Wing, Charlie Wilson’s War, Sleeper Cell, American Assassin, American Sniper and Iz Strong have all been tied into conflict in the Middle East.

That’s exactly why the part as the Sultan in Aladdin was so alluring. Negahban is well aware of the impact it could have. Despite the growing call for more diversity in film and television, Negahban believes this change is only happening “slowly”.

“I think platforms like Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, YouTube, they are playing a huge role in all of these changes because they allow Hollywood to see how hungry the audience is to learn about different cultures and see different stories from different parts of the world,” he says.

“I remember at the beginning of my career it was very difficult, especially in Hollywood, to break the mould. To come out and say, ‘Hey, look at me. I’m not just a Middle-Eastern man. I am a father. I’m somebody who has fought his entire life to survive and to get where he wants to be. And there’s no difference between me and the guy who was born here in America.’

“The reality is that if you look deep inside yourself, what you find inside is that your soul doesn’t have a nationality, your soul doesn’t have a gender, colour, religion. It just happens that I was born in Iran, the other guy was born in America. To play a father it doesn’t mean that he has to be an all-white American.”

Did he ever get offended or dejected at repeatedly being offered such similar roles?

“All I was feeling was that they don’t know any better. I never got offended. They just weren’t able to see or imagine. I don’t mind playing a villain or antagonist in a project. I feel that we as artists are...”

Noughty but nice

A second adolescence has led to Lucy Sweet devouring episodes of Gossip Girl for comfort. And she can’t get enough

As a hormonal mature woman nearing the end of her biological usefulness, I’m going through a second adolescence – crying, slamming doors, fancying boys and generally being a spotty arsehole. Unfortunately this version of teenagerhood has none of the redeeming features of your actual teens – you don’t have your whole life ahead of you and the next stage of your development doesn’t involve sex, freedom and new beginnings; just medication, the death of your loved ones and an increasingly unreliable pelvic floor.

Still, all of this late-onset angst has to go somewhere, so I’ve posthumously taken to watching all six seasons of Gossip Girl as a way to mourn my youth. I was too old for Gossip Girl when it first came out in 2007, and I am far too old for it now. The cast featured gorgeous, dewy-skinned people with improbable names that sounded like small villages in the Cotswolds – Leighton Meester, Blake Lively, Chace Crawford – and ironically, they’re all too old for it now as well. Still, I’m finding comfort in it, for some reason. It’s not even that crap. Actually, yes, it is crap, but there’s something very enjoyable about watching TV that was made when Motorola flip phones, The Strokes and brightly coloured knee socks were all the rage. In one scene, Lively actually PUTS HER PHONE IN THE BIN, which today feels like the height of subversion.

What makes it perfect TV for the tired and jaded heterosexual perimenopausal woman is that it won’t bother your grey matter at all and all the guys are good looking with great abs. Really, after a busy day of wrestling with mortality, this is all I want – nostalgia, a predictable plot, something nice to look at and no spoilers, because everyone stopped watching it about 10 years ago and I’m probably the only person over 40 who is watching it on Netflix.

Anyway, I doubt that you care, but it’s about a bunch of rich Manhattan schoolkids who do rich kid stuff, like going to debutante balls and bitching about each other. And inevitably, there’s a family who are from the wrong side of the tracks. This family is so poor they live in a huge airy loft in Brooklyn with their incredibly attractive dad, who is an art gallery owner and Nineties rock star. Can you imagine the indignity? Anyway, their every snog, sleepover and social faux pas is detailed by the anonymous Gossip Girl who has a totally mid-2000s blog. It is the very definition of chewing gum for the eyes, and I love every superficial moment of it. I know I can’t go back, because I was never there in the first place, but it’s helping me get through this awkward phase. Who knows? Maybe by the time I get to the last season, I’ll actually be a grown-up.

All six seasons of Gossip Girl are available on Netflix at lucytweet
“Your soul doesn’t have a gender, colour, religion’

Pure genie Negahban as the Sultan in Guy Ritchie’s live-action Aladdin

responsible to tell the stories that are as close as possible to the truth.”

Negahban’s biography sets him apart from his peers in the industry and especially from many of the characters he has played. Born in Iran, he grew up during the revolutionary war with Iraq, in which many of his friends died. At that point, he left Iran as a refugee, moving to Turkey, then Bulgaria, before making his home in Germany.

But not only did Negahban remain a “goofball” throughout all of these travels and tribulations, he always made sure to soak up experience like a sponge.

“I knew it would all become useful. Everything I have gone through, it humbles you,” he says.

“I realised what’s important is just this second. And what is important is the people who are around you. You have to pay attention to whatever is happening around you. Because that next moment they might be gone, or you might be gone.”

Even on Aladdin, Negahban speaks of learning from the “pure heart” and “innocence” of director Ritchie, who the actor insists has imbued the film with the necessary energy not only to do justice to the original but to make it stand alone as a spectacular family adventure.

“Guy would run around the set and jump in and try to feel each character and do what they would do. That created a safety net because he would help to guide us through.

“It was his energy. He can’t sit still. The fire is always burning inside. He is always jumping up and down. When the storyline got deeper and became more emotional, especially with the father-daughter relationship between the Sultan and Jasmine, he personalised the whole story. He feels everything that he is directing.”

As well as Aladdin, Negahban recently wrapped the third season of Legion. He plays the Shadow King/Amahl Farouk who is, of course, the baddie but he is also the first ever Marvel character to speak Farsi. It’s not a whole new world, but the industry is better reflecting the one we actually live in.

Aladdin is in cinemas from May 24
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Hot under the collar

Instructional tennis videos pulled together into a new film show the genius of McEnroe in its fiery glory, says Simon Brew

Any Given Sunday, the 1999 film from director Oliver Stone, was one of the more notable American football – and sporting – movies of that particular decade, not least for the way it was shot: The camera was taken on the field into the middle of the action, and it’s the film at its most arresting as a consequence. Thus, while critical opinion was a little divided, there was pretty unanimous praise for the presentation of the sports matches themselves.

But then there aren’t many films that leave you pondering just how people go about filming sport. Yet – somewhat surprisingly – Julien Faraut’s documentary does just that. Surprising, because it’s entitled John McEnroe: In the Realm of Perfection and that not unreasonably leads most to suspect that they’re getting a feature about the combustible Wimbledon champion of the 1980s. Yet that’s not this film. In fact, McEnroe isn’t directly involved here, there are no talking heads, and there’s no fresh footage.

Instead, there’s archive material, a lot of it being shown for the first time. It’s footage that was overseen by Gil de Kermadec, who historically worked with INSEP (the French national sports institute) to prepare tennis instructional videos. His eye was on how to teach the game, rather than watching it, and the 16mm grainy footage he shot mainly reflects that. This is all set up and introduced early in the film, as we learn that throughout the Seventies and Eighties, de Kermadec filmed extensive coverage of the French Open at Roland Garros, and collated a series of films that looked to teach the technical side of tennis to those who watched them.

We also quickly learn that he became fascinated by one of the players he filmed. As such, of the many hours of footage sat in film cans to be re-examined, a high proportion was of solely John McEnroe on a tennis court. Not his opponent. Not the full match. Just McEnroe in the viewfinder (as well as the spectators behind him), and it’s engrossing to watch. We get to see close-up footage of his playing style, his infamous court-side arguments, and at one point, it’s even explained how he became the inspiration for actor Tom Hulce when portraying Mozart in the 1984 Oscar-winning movie Amadeus.

But also, we’re taken into the practice of capturing film footage. McEnroe’s tetchy relationship with on-court photographers isn’t helped by the noisy film equipment de Kermadec uses, and the film lays that bare. It’s married to voiceover that argues just how close to the edge of things McEnroe pushed his character.

Things go more conventional as the film moves into its final third. Here, it zeroes in on the epic 1984 French Open final between McEnroe and Ivan Lendl, and it’s the closest the film comes to behaving as a traditional sports documentary. To that point, it’s been as much a fascinating dissection of filmmaking as a tennis production, shot with the eye of someone not necessarily interested in the result. Inevitably, when it starts playing straighter, some of that impact and insight is lost, but In the Realm of Perfection has long forged an individual identity by that point.

☆☆☆☆☆

In the Realm of Perfection is in cinemas from May 24.
Simon Brew is the editor of Film Stories. @simonbrew
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The can-can do man

Claire Jackson is joining the high-kicking celebrations for Jacques Offenbach’s 200th birthday

You may not have heard of the composer Jacques Offenbach, but you will certainly know at least one of his pieces.

Offenbach, whose 200th anniversary falls this year, wrote the energetic melodies associated with the can-can, that high-kicking dance famously linked with exposed pantalooned, French music halls and the Belle Epoque. The music comes from a scene in Offenbach’s operetta Orpheus in the Underworld (1858), although it was originally written for a dance known as the Galop. Offenbach’s music is widely celebrated in programmes this season, particularly in the composer’s native Germany and adopted home country, France. (He was born ‘Jacob’ and changed his name to Jacques, as well as writing most of his stage works in French.)

As part of the commemorations, Buckinghamshire-based Garsington Opera hosts the UK premiere of Offenbach’s operetta Fantasio (June 14–July 20), alongside productions of The Bartered Bride, Don Giovanni and The Turn of the Screw. Fantasio tells the story of Princess Elsbeth, who is about to enter into an unwanted arranged marriage. We find the princess distracted and grieving over the death of her favourite court jester. Outside the castle, a commoner called Fantasio has fallen in love with Elsbeth. He adopts the identity of the jester to gain access to the royal inner circle, ruining the planned wedding – but at a cost. The operetta – a humorous, light-hearted type of opera, for which Offenbach is credited as creator – has elements of farce, and Garsington’s director Martin Duncan has underlined the comedy in this brand new show, with a fresh English translation by Jeremy Sams.

Curators elsewhere are keen to show that they can do the can-can, too. This summer’s Last Night of the Proms (September 14 at London’s Royal Albert Hall and broadcast live on BBC Radio 3) includes the overture to Orpheus in the Underworld, performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo. English National Opera is staging the full operetta (October 5 to November 28), which promises to transport London Coliseum audiences to a hedonistic, party-filled Underworld. Sign me up.

While Offenbach was inspired by fairytale and fantasy (Orpheus and the Underworld is based on the ancient story of the titular character and Eurydice, who is fooled into taking Pluto, ruler of the Underworld, as her lover after her new marriage to Orpheus is broken through tragedy), modern-day composers seek inspiration in more unlikely subjects. Composer Robert Reid Allan’s latest work is based on school PE lessons (even typing those last few words evokes a visceral reaction at the memory). Physical Education, scored for actor, video and ensemble, revisits the school gym (a place almost as terrifying as the cross-country field) and the various emotions it provokes – from a fond reminiscence of sporting success and pride in team work to the shame of those less talented and chronically self-conscious (hi there). The work also comments on the similarities between music and sport, noting their physicality and the real-time pressures of concerts and matches. Allan is composer-in-residence with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (BCMg), who premiere the piece at Birmingham’s CBSO Centre, conducted by Tim Anderson (June 21).

@claireiswriting

ALEXANDRA DARIESCU PLAYS PRELUDES

In classical music, a prelude is a short piece that is often used as an introduction to a more expansive work. The pieces are regularly grouped together to form collections, becoming an independent work in their own right (who says classical is confusing..?). Pianist Alexandra Dariescu has recorded various collections of preludes as part of a series for enterprising independent label Champs Hill, including works by Chopin, Shostakovich and Szymanowski. Dariescu’s third and final instalment focuses on Parisian preludes from the early 20th century written by French composers Lili Boulanger, Fauré and Messiaen. It’s great to have the slight – but exquisite – Boulanger prelude; Lili is a composer who has received greater attention since the centenary of her death was marked last year. The piece offers a taste of what might have been, since the composer died at 24, unable to fulfil her clear potential. And Dariescu is a highly impressive artist.

Alexandra Dariescu’s Complete Preludes Vol 3 is out now on Champs Hill

Photo: Bettmann/Getty

Pants on fire
Without Offenbach there’d be no can-can

ALEXANDRA DARIESCU PLAYS PRELUDES

In classical music, a prelude is a short piece that is often used as an introduction to a more expansive work. The pieces are regularly grouped together to form collections, becoming an independent work in their own right (who says classical is confusing..?). Pianist Alexandra Dariescu has recorded various collections of preludes as part of a series for enterprising independent label Champs Hill, including works by Chopin, Shostakovich and Szymanowski. Dariescu’s third and final instalment focuses on Parisian preludes from the early 20th century written by French composers Lili Boulanger, Fauré and Messiaen. It’s great to have the slight – but exquisite – Boulanger prelude; Lili is a composer who has received greater attention since the centenary of her death was marked last year. The piece offers a taste of what might have been, since the composer died at 24, unable to fulfil her clear potential. And Dariescu is a highly impressive artist.

Alexandra Dariescu’s Complete Preludes Vol 3 is out now on Champs Hill

Photo: Bettmann/Getty

Pants on fire
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Photo: Bettmann/Getty

Pants on fire
Without Offenbach there’d be no can-can
Keep this on ice

If life as we know it ends tomorrow, there’s a secret vault deep in a Norwegian mountain protecting humanity’s vital documents. Steven MacKenzie peeps in.

Two hundred metres inside a mountain in the high Arctic, the darkness and silence is suffocating. In this diseased mine on the Svalbard archipelago, halfway between the Norwegian mainland and the North Pole, lies the Arctic World Archive, described as “a safe repository for world memory.”

As we become increasingly connected and ever more information about our lives is stored online, privacy, security and the threat of data corruption are growing concerns. That’s where this archive comes in, an off-grid storage facility that aims to act as a cultural time capsule.

And you don’t get much more off-grid than this spot. The Global Seed Vault, which aims to preserve the planet’s biodiversity lies a few hundred metres down the access road that twists around roaming reindeer. It’s in the -20s outside and not much warmer in the labyrinthine tunnels of a mine that ceased production in 1996. But while measures have been put in place to prevent further tunnel collapses, is the data safe? We’re not allowed to enter the archive itself, but the door’s ajar…

“The archive is just a container at the moment,” says Ragnhild Utne, who helps run tours of the mine. “But it will eventually be turned into a secure vault with proper doors – safe in the permafrost on Svalbard with no need for electricity.”

Digital preservation specialists Piql are behind the project and deputy managing director Katrine Loen Thomsen sheds light on what’s behind (almost) closed doors.

“Information is incredibly valuable and the loss or theft of it is a major concern,” Thomsen says. “When data is stored online it can only be protected to a certain point – no system is completely secure. That’s why we believe in offline storage for irreplaceable information – it can’t be hacked or changed!”

Data is stored in binary code on purpose-built piqlFilm, which can last for centuries. Helpfully, instructions about how to extract the data are provided should our descendants come across the vault in centuries to come.

If they can find it, Svalbard’s location was chosen because of its remoteness but also because the Norwegian-governed island has a demilitarised status.

“This makes it politically very stable and this is important in an era of cyber warfare,” Thomsen says. “Security of the archive is managed by our partner, Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani (100 per cent owned by the Norwegian government) and they are very well equipped to ensure the

security of the vault.”

So who is using the vault? Believe it or not, clients from more than 15 countries include many national governments.

“The archive holds all types of content including constitutions and other governing documents, historical treasures, master artworks, contemporary music and art, architectural drawings, scientific discoveries to name just a few,” Thomsen explains.

“Time poses the greatest risk to data. Having copies in the Arctic World Archive ensures that if every other copy is lost due to technological obsolescence, technical failure or some other disaster, the information is never lost.”

“There is some suggestion that governments are starting to store state secrets here. Is that true?”

“No, that is not correct,” Thomsen says. “Governments do not store state secrets in the archive.”

“Would you tell us even if they were?”

“If it was intended to store such information we would never have talked to the public and the press about the existence of such an archive.”

Alongside documents from the national archives (but no state secrets) of countries including Brazil, Mexico and Norway are digital versions of cultural treasures. To celebrate the European Year of Cultural Heritage, a vote was held in 2018 to choose more items to be digitally preserved, a showcase of the best that humanity has to offer.

Winning artefacts included a Gutenberg Bible, Rembrandt’s The Night Watch, the blueprints of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, details of the Higgs boson breakthrough and, randomly, Music for the filmed Generation by The Prodigy – the only music from our age that apocalypse survivors may get to listen to.

The only significant cultural artefact that’s missing is a copy of the most remarkable magazine that has ever existed, The Big Issue. How much would it cost to put these pages into storage?

“We charge a yearly fee, however we don’t publish our prices publicly,” Thomsen says. “If you have a project in mind, let us know and we can discuss how we can meet your needs.”

piql.com/arctic-world-archive/
@stevenmackenzie
A whole new ball game
Say goodbye to pain, and hello to stronger arms and wrists

without wanting to sound like your doctor, have you got stiff, sore, or ‘clicky’ wrists? A lack of flexibility and mobility in the shoulder? Elbow pain each time you shake hands or lift something heavy? If this all sounds painfully familiar, then you could be one of the 40% of people under the age of 50 who suffer from repetitive strain injury (RSI) of the upper limbs - a painful, highly debilitating condition that affects the shoulder, elbow and/or wrist. It’s usually caused by unintentional habits we pick up: driving a car with wrists bent at awkward angles; tapping on a keyboard for hours each day; lifting heavy weights or playing your favourite sport without warming up properly; or any one of the millions of repetitive movements we make during the course of our lives. Overuse can cause painful inflammation of the tendons that connect the muscles to their joints. Fortunately for sufferers, it’s an affliction that can be alleviated over time, particularly with the use of a Powerball. It’s a pocket-sized gyroscopic wrist exerciser that you simply pick up and spin to experience immediate relief of RSI symptoms.

Powerball generates up to 60 times its own weight in non-impact gyroscopic resistance. There’s no battery or motor inside; all force created comes from rotating your wrist in slow, rhythmic circles. At those slow speeds, Powerball produces soothing resistance that is a world-class solution for carpal tunnel syndrome, tennis and golfer’s elbow, tendonitis and rapid healing of broken bones in the shoulders, arms and wrists, offering pain relief and reduction of overall recovery times. The faster you spin, the more force it generates. After you fully recover from any injury, or if you simply want to develop stronger forearms and powerful grip for your favourite sports pastime right now, you spin Powerball fast for 60 seconds several times daily to isometrically exercise your entire arm with powerful, measurable results. A Powerball is the perfect gift for any age or fitness level, and will help anyone to become pain-free and strong from fingertip to shoulder. Pick up a Powerball and start spinning today.

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News from the Intrepid Shepherdess

Passé Plastic and the Cat Who Got the Cream

My household uses a lot of milk. I drink a lot of tea as do all the folk who help me here on the farm. My dogs love milk and I claim to make the most delicious milk tart in Devon – a richly satisfying teatime treat considered a South African national treasure.

But increasingly I have found myself hugely uncomfortable with the process of having to put large plastic milk containers into the weekly recycling. Last week I decided: enough. So I signed up for the local dairy to deliver twice weekly – in bottles that I will wash out and return to Bob the milkman.

This morning was the first delivery and I was filled with childlike joy as I opened the back door to find the bottles waiting for me. It took me back to the way I grew up in Johannesburg but with a difference. In a pique of utter indulgence, I asked Bob to deliver unhomogenised full cream Jersey milk. And he did. As I write this, the bottles are squatting, as yet unopened, in the door of my fridge; the 3 inches of thick yellow cream at the top of the bottle temptingly visible. Am I going to shake the bottles before opening? Not a chance!

I am going to carefully extract the cream and ladle it onto a rhubarb crumble which I intend to make later this afternoon. Not all of it mind you – a couple of tablespoons or so will go to Jenga, the little grey cat who really appreciates the good things in life. Don’t all cats?

But what about the other things we buy all of which are packed in plastic? On the day our cottage guests check in, I prepare for them a plate of freshly cut fruit, something they hugely welcome on their arrival. But with the exception of the melons, oranges and pineapples, absolutely everything is packed in plastic. Why can’t I buy my blueberries, strawberries, grapes and nectarines in brown paper bags? What do we consumers need to do to convince supermarkets that we want change? Some of my friends say they have stopped buying fruit packed in plastic. But does that message get to the supermarket decision makers? I fear not.

There has to be a way but in the meanwhile I need to go into the garden to pick some rhubarb....
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Emily@chainofhope.org or call Emily on 020 7351 1978 alternatively visit
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One in every 100 babies worldwide are born with heart disease

Chain of Hope is a children's cardiac charity which runs an International Child Referral Programme. We
provide vital treatment to children from countries where there is little or no access to cardiac care. We
bring children to the UK for surgery and we are looking for volunteers to help care for the child and their
guardian whilst they are in London.

Do you have a spare room in your home to host a child and their guardian?
Do you live within 1 hour of central London?

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Do you live within 1 hour of central London?
Volunteer Opportunities

LONDON OFFICE – OUTREACH VOLUNTEER

Salary: unpaid position – will cover travel expenses (up to Zone 6) and lunch up to £3.50 per day

The Big Issue produces a publication that is sold on the streets by people who are not only homeless, but also insecurely housed and/or are vulnerable adults. This provides them with the means to earn a legitimate income, build self-esteem and regain control over their lives. You can help vendors to determine their own paths towards a better future.

The London Big Issue office is looking for a reliable, motivated and enthusiastic volunteer to assist with outreach from our office based in Finsbury Park and around central London.

This role involves assisting on the counter serving our vendors, booking sales pitches, taking payments and outreach work. You must also have flexibility to turn their hand to any of the general office tasks that are required, reporting back to the office staff and assisting with any ongoing projects.

This is an opportunity to transfer your skills to an interesting environment where you can make a real difference to people’s lives. The ability to get on with people and cope with challenging and lively situations is crucial and a sense of humour and patience would also be useful.

An understanding of the practical and emotional needs of vulnerable people along with a commitment to the social objectives of The Big Issue is essential.

*The Big Issue is striving towards Equal Opportunities*
To win a Chambers English Dictionary, send completed crosswords to:
The Big Issue Crossword, second floor, 43 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 1HW by May 28.
Include name, address, phone and issue number.

CRYPTIC CLUES

Across
1. Precise remedy (8)
2 & 22. Drink greeting football team (4,4)
8. Some low rite explained in legal document (4)
9. Is able to have performed before second half of July in a frank manner (8)
10. South African youngster putting on mayonnaise (5,8)
11. One is back on a continent (4)
13. Not the best batsmen to follow (4)
17. Boring tool that’s potentially shocking (8,3)
20. Slavering footballer? (8)
21. Common sense, it’s nearly worthless! (4)
22. See 6 Across
23. Put in a difficult position, like a rook on board (8)

Down
1. Patrol reassembled at the entrance (6)
3. It could wound a girl (7)
4. Stood opposite refurbished café with Dutch leader (7)
5. Satisfied with what is inside (7)
6. Couples from Paris (5)
7. Relax again before Easter (6)
8. Discriminatory measure (7)
9. Russian tea urn (7)
10. Earning potential is within striking distance (2,5)
11. Length of rope (5)
12. Fibre Bill and Cyril manufactured (7)
13. Formula for praising the girl (6)
14. Draw everybody to the river (6)
15. Ongoing; Scored, 17 Adhere; 19 Clove (6)
16. Disheartening gadget in the kitchen (5)

QUICK CLUES

Across
1. Distribute (5,3)
6. Walk through water (4)
8. Wide boy (slang) (4)
9. Reject (4,4)
10. Welfare service (5,2,6)
11. Misery (4)
13. Food (inf.) (4)
17. Dissenter (13)
20. Ornamental chain (8)
21. Heraldic green (4)
22. Rock to and fro (4)
23. Drench (8)

Down
1. Occur (6)
3. Rotate (7)
4. Suffer (5)
5. Put ball back into play (5,2)
6. Triangular-shaped block (5)
7. Proceed slowly (6)
12. Completely perplex (7)
14. Russian tea urn (7)
15. Next day (6)
16. Liveliness (6)
18. Cheekily confident (5)
19. Group of eight (5)

SUDOKU

3 2 4 9 8 1 7
6 2 6 8
5 4
3 7
8
2 9 2 6 5
3 7 6 9
4 5 7 1 2 8 9 3
2 8 9 3 4 7 5 1 6
1 3 6 8 9 5 2 4 7
7 2 4 9 5 8 6 3 1
2 8 9 3 4 7 5 1 6
1 3 6 8 9 5 2 4 7
4 5 7 1 2 8 9 3
2 8 9 3 4 7 5 1 6
1 3 6 8 9 5 2 4 7
I used to work as a packer at a pork farm. It was alright but I got laid off and I haven’t had a permanent job since. It was really hard. I was sofa-surfing at my mum’s or with friends but luckily I never ended up sleeping rough. I used to just sit on the street watching my friend sell The Big Issue until one day he said, “Why don’t you do the Issue, Mark?” That was five years ago. I went along and signed up and I’ve been doing it ever since.

I was scared on my first day. I thought, are people really going to stop for me? Am I going to make any money? Then I worried about people I knew seeing me and I thought, I’m going to be ashamed. Then after a couple of days I realised I was doing this for myself, nobody else. And I didn’t care what people thought. I got a tabard and a regular pitch and I began to get some regular customers and everything started going really well. People were nice but you still get the odd person who will say, “Get a job”. Well, this is a job.

I’d really like to move closer to my mum. She’s also here in Nottingham. I take her dog out with me when I’m selling the magazine, he’s called Basil and he’s a Pomeranian. My customers love him. He behaves really well on my pitch, he’s one of the best dogs in town. He’ll do anything I say. I don’t have any pets of my own though, I like living alone. Just me, myself and I.

In the future I’d like to do sports physiotherapy or something around that but I struggle with my reading and writing. That pulls me back. It’s an ambition that I’ve had for a long time though because I love football. Nottingham Forest are my team but they haven’t done too good this year. We finished ninth. One of my regular customers, Dave, took me to a few matches this season and hopefully next year I’ll be going a few more times.

When I was at school in the Eighties they didn’t know nothing about dyslexia. I’m in the worst four per cent but I didn’t get any help. It was horrible and it changed the way I felt about learning. It made me just not bother. You find different ways to cope though. I taught myself how to so-called read. I used to go past signs and ‘read’ them. Guessing. I’d walk past a parking sign and think, “Parking. Right, how do you spell that?” And you keep on saying that, “How do you spell parking?” That’s what you have to do to get by in life when you have dyslexia. When people ask me what’s in The Big Issue I just have to say that I don’t know because I struggle to read. I don’t want pity but I’d love to read a book or a comic one day. It’s just too far away from me at the moment.

My mum’s been supporting me for years. She and my sisters and I are a pretty close family. I had three sisters but in 2017 one of them died. Oh gosh, it was tough on all of us. First our friend died and then my sister. Her name was Teresa and she was only 44. So that’s why I want to be closer to my mum now.

Interview: Sarah Reid
Photo: Lee Ballard
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“Overall, I found the information in this course very useful. It covered all the main areas that anyone interested in working as a proofreader/copy editor would need to know.”

Shazia Fardous,
Freelance Proofreader and Copyeditor

“This is an extremely helpful course both for those starting proofreading and for those who, like me, need to be reminded of everything we have forgotten. Above all, I thoroughly enjoyed the tone of voice of the author – he writes with authority but manages to keep a light touch.”

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