

Scottish Child

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Child-Friendly Edinburgh

SPARKY Feature

Men Working With Kids

Women's Writing

Brazil's Street Children

someone to talk to
ChildLine in Scotland

Scottish Child



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'JOCK TAMSON'S BAIRNS'

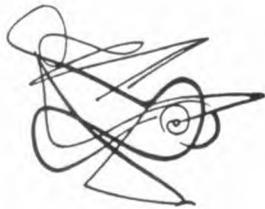
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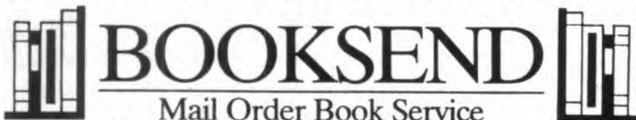
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What Can You Say?

Remember 'Pindown'? One of the things about a magazine like SCOTTISH CHILD that comes out every two months is that we sometimes 'miss the story'. So it was with Pindown. Children living in some Staffordshire Children's Homes were being punished by being put in rooms on their own, in their night-clothes, with nothing to do as a way of 'teaching them a lesson'. The news comes out, and the practice is universally condemned. Before you know it, it's over. Isn't it?

Remember Orkney? Whilst children were in care as a result of the allegations of sexual abuse on South Ronaldsay, the papers and TV were full of stories of the pain of adults deprived of their children. Lessons must be learnt, we were told, so an enquiry is set up. The result of the setting up of the enquiry is that public debate is stifled and the existence of widespread child sexual abuse can be, if not denied outright, then put to one side. To keep mentioning its existence, as evidenced in social work records up and down the country, is considered rather morbid. There is an enquiry. It is all being looked at. There is no need to worry.

In this blink-and-you've-missed-it culture we live in, or rather under, events are presented to us as isolated incidents, seemingly unconnected with each other, with no past and no future. It becomes difficult, quite literally, to speak about things. For most of us, the big decisions affecting the world we live in are taken elsewhere, by people who don't even 'speak our language'.

Anyone who actually watched Alan Bleasdale's 'G.B.H.' will remember the chilling scene where Michael Murray pleads with his mother to tell him what his father, who died before he was born, was REALLY like. She does not refuse to talk about him, just mouths meaningless facts that tell him nothing, until he 'regains his composure' and continues on his own meaningless way.

That's the cost of allowing yourself to be shut up, of accepting that your own experience is unimportant - things lose their meaning, become disconnected. And in our culture, where a few well-heeled pundits talking to each other constitutes 'debate' of important issues, it is hardly surprising that to most of us things sometimes appear to be out of our collective control. We get meaningless facts, but we don't get reality.

Take Pindown. When it was 'revealed' that children were being

subjected to the deprivations that Pindown involved, there wasn't a paper in the land supporting what went on. These kids were the goodies for a while. You might have got the impression from all this that such punishment is unusual, that children do not, everyday, at home and in institutions, get grounded, humiliated, and abused. After all, Pindown was exposed.

But what has changed as a result of this 'scandal'? Is there widespread questioning of the idea that unhappy children should be punished? Are people being encouraged to examine their own attitudes to such basic issues as punishment, control, fear and so on that Pindown highlighted? Not a bit of it. It was a story - and now it's not.

In this issue of SCOTTISH CHILD we let the fringe elements, the poor, the unheard, the unusual, the young, the controversial, the ones who don't get listened to - the majority of us in fact - have a say. We visit ChildLine to get an insight into the work that organisation does with children who, so often, have no one to listen to them apart from the counsellor at the other end of the phone. We publish a review by Joe McGrath, a long-term prisoner, of SCOTTISH CHILD's book INSIDE: RETHINKING SCOTLAND'S PRISONS where Joe makes the point, important to us all, but perhaps particularly to those inside the prison system, that we must learn from our history if we are to avoid repeating it.

We look at men working in children's centres, women writing, children trying to cope with day-to-day life in a 'child-friendly' city. And we welcome a new diarist, Anna Fawkes, as she battles with the DSS for enough for her and her son to live on - while still finding time to brush sand from between tiny toes.

This issue of SCOTTISH CHILD is the first in three years not to have been edited by Derek Rodger. Derek took over the editorship of the magazine in the summer of 1988, having been a member of the editorial group since autumn 1986. During this time he has played a key role in the magazine's development, in terms of its greater influence, improved content and expanded circulation. Derek has now decided he wants to move on and we wish him all the best for the future. ■

Colin Chalmers



Flourish Publications

Doing it for Themselves

FOOD

As Glasgow becomes home to yet more superstores and vast shopping complexes, one small, out-of-the-way shop in the East End of the city is thriving - the Cranhill Co-operative Shop.

The Cranhill Co-operative Shop lives up to its name. It involves the local community in working together to improve their quality of life. Tucked away in the midst of the sprawling housing estate, Cranhill Co-op has grown from an old table top and cardboard boxes into a well-stocked and organised premises in the local community hall.

The Co-op is staffed by local volunteers, is strictly non-profit making and supplies cheap food to a local community. Membership is only 50p a year, with special rates for families.

Essentially, basic foodstuffs and some extras are bought from a Cash and Carry and sold to the community through the shop. Although a mark-up may be necessary to cover expenses such as petrol, food is still much cheaper than at other shops, and also saves the trip into the city. No profit is made - any surplus cash is ploughed back into the shop.

Apart from the obvious benefit to the community of cheap, accessible food, Cranhill Co-op has also paid off in other ways. Stocking a wide range of fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as economical foods such as oats and lentils, the shop has gone some way to changing the eating habits of its members. Children in particular are persuaded to try something instead of sweets, often exotic fruit is sliced up to let children have a taste - it seems to be working, as the huge demand for kiwi fruit shows.

It's in ways such as this that the Co-op becomes a service to the people of Cranhill, and it's in this light that Ellen Kerr, one of the longest serving members of the scheme, would like it to be seen.

"We are not a charity", she stresses. "The Co-op gets people to help themselves. It gets people to share with each other to generate wealth within their own community. People become more responsible in relation to others. They improve the quality of life for their neighbours."

It is this atmosphere of co-operation and service that perhaps draws so many of the 500 or so members to the shop. People often say they are treated well here, treated differently than in ordinary shops.

"You definitely do get a better service here than in the other shops", says Mrs MacMahon, a regular customer of the Co-op. "It's

very handy, very cheap and very friendly." Elizabeth Vickery, another regular, agrees. "It all shows that if we work together we can get things cheaper. It's benefitting others as well as ourselves, especially the more vulnerable, like the elderly and one parent families."

The staff at the Co-op also believe their customers can get that little bit extra. "People can get basic essentials here at a reasonable price, but they can also get a blether, some company. There's time for people here." Ellen Kerr is not surprised that people feel welcome. "It's because they're part owners of the Co-op", she says. "The Food Co-op belongs to the people of Cranhill. It's theirs."

Meg Martin

Cleaning the Street

IMPERIALISM

On the streets of Brazil's crowded cities, hundreds of homeless children are being murdered - by vigilante groups, composed largely of off-duty policemen. It is called 'cleaning the street'.

Brazil has an estimated 7 million children living on the streets of its big cities, some of them as young as seven. Despite being the world's eighth largest industrial power, Brazil is a country of enormous poverty. These street children are forced into begging, prostitution and petty crime in order to survive purely and simply because of this poverty. Shopkeepers and others concerned with 'maintaining law and order' pay off-duty police officers to run 'clean-up squads' - these squads kill dozens of children every

month, beating and torturing many more.

The Brazilian government claims to be trying to stamp out the death squads, but there is precious little evidence of this. Reports of ON-DUTY police officers participating in torture, beatings and executions are frequent. As an AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL report has put it, "Poor children in Brazil are treated with contempt by the authorities, risking their lives by simply being on the streets. Their most basic rights are trampled on by the very people who should safeguard them".

Those who have taken up the plight of the street children are not much liked by those in power. Volmer do Nascimento, the coordinator of Rio de Janeiro's Street Children's Movement recently 'disappeared'. The minister of jus-

tice had withdrawn police protection from him 10 days before he was 'disappeared'.

So how has a country that produces so much wealth got to the state that it makes 7 million of its children homeless then starts killing them because they steal to eat? The answer is quite simple: its foreign debt. Brazil owes \$100bn to foreign banks, and has basically abolished education, housing and employment for a large section of its population in order to repay this debt. Those friendly looking financial institutions that associate themselves with lifestyles of freedom and choice in their advertising campaigns on our televisions make their millions out of the poverty of children in Brazil and throughout the third world. If the Brazilian government decided to feed and

house those 7 million children, it would be very bad business indeed for them.

And the third world is not as far away as it used to be. In Edinburgh a recent report by the Bridges Project and Edinburgh University concluded that it has already become impossible for many teenagers in Edinburgh to maintain a decent diet - they are starving on the streets. Shelter (Scotland) has estimated there are 10,000 homeless teenagers in Scotland. Meanwhile in London, where teenage homelessness is reaching epidemic proportions, the Savoy is hosed down through the night to stop people sleeping outside it. Only cleaning the street, you understand. ■

Colin Chalmers



THERAPY

Drama therapists are not too thick on the ground in Scotland. What are they and what do they do? As Colin White explains, he often has to clear away a few myths before he can begin work with a group or individual.

"People often think that drama therapy is role play. Or they have an idea that it is an explosive, powerful acting out of emotional situations, focused on events in one's past. It's possibly because of what has been shown of psycho-drama on television - the drama, the tears and the violence. But television gives a very unreal, sensationalist picture of what drama therapy is.

"The work I do is aimed at finding ways of highlighting the dramatic engagement between people **now** and of using our creative energies to transform our lives in whatever

way we want. To that extent I will use anything which taps into the energy of those I am working with. What I won't do is impose a therapeutic agenda on people. They must take responsibility for themselves and know from the outset that they need only reveal as much as feels comfortable. There will be no accusations about resisting 'higher truths' or not participating to the full. Drama therapy sessions must provide a safe place within which people can begin to show something of their concealed selves. There is always anxiety in these situations but the anxiety is not wholly bad. Provided it is not overwhelming, it can supply some of the potential energy to make things happen."

Although all creative activity - singing, drawing, dancing, speaking - is grist to his mill, Colin White emphasises the importance of the physical aspect of his work - "Take

up the posture of an old man and you begin to feel something of that in you. People are so constrained in the roles they play in their everyday lives. Drama therapy can free you from that. It lets adults play - at being something other than what they feel most of the time they are. They can begin to imagine other possibilities."

You might wonder why there are so few drama therapists around, since what's on offer sounds like something every tired worker, every school child, every prisoner, patient and parent could do with a dose of. The fact is that drama therapy reaches a tiny fraction of those who might benefit. Most of Colin White's work is done in groups - in community mental health groups, men's and women's groups and with children. But since it's not a statutory service provided by the local authority, in this barren era it needs a determined man-

ager who knows a bit about what drama therapy can offer to decide to use it in a group and to insist to those who hold the purse strings that money used in this way is money well-spent.

"When someone approaches a person calling themselves a 'therapist' there is often an underlying expectation that this person has the power to make you better. This is very true in drama therapy. It's as though the very word drama contains within it the image of the magician, who will weave a spell. But the spells are not mine. Drama therapy should help people to find their own magic, sometimes, though rarely, by creating a performance. More usually by a temporary escape from themselves which holds within it the possibility of other changes." ■

Rosemary Milne

Colin White can be contacted on 031-667 5455.

Scottish Child Workshops - Up and Running!

TRAINING

One of the needs that was clearly expressed at **Scottish Child's tears and protest event** this April was for further meetings and training on some of the subjects dealt with on that day. People wanted to discuss issues such as child punishment, sexual abuse, gender and so on in the way that these issues were dealt with at that event - openly, without the jargon and in groups that mixed people from different backgrounds. Well, it's happening. **Scottish Child** has already run its first two workshops and is taking bookings for its next two, one on child punishment the other on child sexual abuse, in September.

Adults who spend a little time thinking about what it was like being punished as a child are often amazed at how much they can draw on their own memories of childhood, the list they can compile of situations where they remember being punished. The workshop on child punishment helps people make the link between those recalled experiences and one's own present-day attempts to look after and educate the children of this generation. If that sounds like something you're interested in, you'll certainly want to come to our child punishment workshop.

Why is there so much interest and

concern about the sexual abuse of children? Is it intrinsically worse than other forms of abuse? The child sexual abuse workshop we run is not a therapy workshop - rather, the aim is to make links between the experience of sexual abuse and other kinds of abuse and unhappiness which all of us hesitate to talk about. How do we talk about painful feelings? How can we go about creating situations where people, including children, feel able to talk about their abuse? What are the obstacles to doing that, and how can we overcome them?

We were overwhelmed with demand for places at our sexual abuse workshop in June, so if it interests you, you are advised to book early for the next one. One special note - out of the twenty participants at the sexual abuse workshop in June only two were men and of these one was co-running the workshop - hopefully more men will come along next time!

The next child punishment workshop is on Friday 6th September and the next sexual abuse workshop is on Tuesday 10th September. To book, or for more details, phone 031-220 6502. ■

Rosemary Milne



Oliver Brookes



"It's my business and I'll do what I want with it" from Closure? - Story of the 'Craig

IN BRIEF

The impact of the **UNEMPLOYMENT** caused by the closure of Ravenscraig and Dalzeil steelworks is about to hit the Edinburgh International Festival in the words, dance and song of some of those most affected - the young people of Motherwell.

School students from Braidhurst High School in Motherwell are taking their play **Closure? - Story of the 'Craig** to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe during the last week in August. Written by the fourteen year old pupils themselves, it tells the story of how Mother Nature persuades the Ghosts of Ravenscraig Past, Present and Future to come down from the Ozone layer to try to show Sir Ebenezer Scholey the error of his ways.

The show is playing at the Across the Mersey Theatre, South Bridge Centre, Infirmary Street from August 26th to 31st. ■

Anyone want to **BUY A BABY?** If you do, **Scottish Child** have got a price list. It's from the 'Adoption Advisory Council' in New York, a rather chilling organisation that specialises in, well, selling babies. They have 'sources' in such places as El Salvador, Peru and Paraguay, where children can be bought by

U.S. adults with enough cash to buy them.

In El Salvador, for instance, the cost is \$13,500 per child - and the agency assures would-be customers that their man in El Salvador "Only deals with healthy children". He'll deal with all that boring red tape that gets in the way of a quick cash purchase, and can even arrange for the child to be escorted to the U.S. for an extra fee - "If you hate to fly, this is for you".

Peru is currently top of the charts for cheap and easy adoption - austerity measures introduced last August have plunged millions into abject poverty. The only commodities sure to find a good price are babies, currently priced at about \$9,000 each - though discounts are available if you buy two children at a time.

Another country that has recently offered cut-price babies is Romania (\$6,000, plus a one week stay). Welcome to the market-place: everything, but everything, is for sale. ■

There are at least 750 **TRAVELLING FAMILIES** in Britain, scattered throughout every region. Many of these families find difficulties gaining access to services and few agencies take their mobile life-style into account when planning service delivery. Although many District Councils have pro-

vided pitches for Travellers in line with the Scottish Office's target of 982 throughout Scotland, some District Councils have made no provision at all.

Action for Travellers in Scotland has just published an advice and information handbook specifically aimed at travelling families in Scotland. The handbook gives practical advice on welfare benefits, eviction from unofficial encampments, dealing with the law and access to health and education services. They have also published a handbook aimed at advice workers working with travelling people.

Action for Travellers in Scotland involves a number of agencies including Save the Children, Shelter, Women's Aid, the Scottish Child Law Centre and National Children's Homes. The group does not aim to represent Travellers but rather to identify gaps in services or discriminatory practices and to raise public awareness of the rights of travelling people. If you want to find out more, or get hold of either pamphlet, you can write to Kevin Byrne at Save the Children, 4 Bridge Street, Dunfermline KY12 8DA. ■

Anyone who was at the **TEARS AND PROTEST** evening event this April will remember the moving and angry reading given by Tom Leonard of his **Shorter Catechism**, a series of questions and

responses inspired by the Gulf War and in particular the role of the media in deadening opposition to it. Copies are now available for £1.95 from AK Press, 3 Balmoral Place, Stirling FK8 2RD. ■

Despite the warnings given by a number of aid agencies over the last year, Africa is now in the midst of **FAMINE**. International aid to famine-hit countries has been slow in arriving and in parts of Ethiopia and Sudan people are already dying.

Save the Children received an overwhelming response to its 'Skip Lunch' appeal in May, but it became clear during that appeal that there was a great deal of confusion amongst members of the public about the causes of this current famine.

Save the Children have now produced an easy-to-understand, 6 page report called **Famine Myths - Setting the Record Straight**. Dealing in a straightforward way with some of the myths perpetuated about third world famine - for instance 'Famine is caused by over population' and 'There's nothing you can do to avoid famines, they are inevitable'. The report is available free from Save the Children Central Information, Mary Datchelor House, 17 Grove Lane, Camberwell, London SE5 8RD. ■

We Care About Kids

If you've been in Edinburgh recently you've probably spotted **We Care About Kids** slogans appearing in the most unlikely places. Edinburgh District Council, in conjunction with local businesses, are staking a claim for their city to be seen as the most child-friendly city in Britain. **Alison Bell** asks some of Edinburgh's younger citizens for their thoughts

I spoke to Scott (12), Neil (10) and Kirsty (9) about what it's like to go by yourself into the town. Scott immediately shakes his head in resignation. "They think every person under eighteen is stupid, out to steal and out to cause trouble." Not a very good start.

"I was looking for toys for my wee brother's birthday," he continues, "and there was this woman packing shelves. She kept on working, but every time I turned round she was staring at me. Then she began talking to this other woman and pointing at me. Later, when my dad and I were at the till getting my Beano she smiles and says "Goodbye". But I knew she was glad to get me out."

"I like to have a good look around, but in most shops the minute you go through the door its "Where are you going, son?" It puts you off and eventually you go back out with nothing."

Neil nods his head vigorously in agreement - he knows the feeling too. "You try to be nice, say hello, say thank you, goodbye and everything, or say something dead obvious like (loudly) "I've just got my money here". It's got so bad now that I take my money out and hold it when I'm choosing something."

I ask if they have any advice for shops - their reply is simple. "Don't stare all the time", says Scott, "treat kids like you'd treat any other customers."

"I think they should think about children when they are making displays" says Neil, "a lot of things that interest children, they can't get to see properly. Some of the children in my class are quite small. I'm okay, I'm tall, but I've seen wee guys in a shop climb up to reach something and end up falling over."

I ask Kirsty if she agrees with Scott and Neil but she explains that she's only once been allowed to go to the shops on her own. After a moment she adds "It's really exciting when we go to Argyll on holiday, I can go out anytime then".



Julia Bayne

All of the kids agree that traffic in Edinburgh is a major hassle and I am reminded that unlike other towns there are very few traffic free areas in the city centre.

"You're not really used to being out alone, so

Princes Street is really scary. You couldn't get across it without the lights - but it's also exciting."

Hazards don't just come from traffic though. Neil points out that "Adults always let the old folk on buses first - then they push you out of the way and get on the bus before you. Posh people, snobs, they say "Oh Hey-lo", then they say "get out of the road sonny" or they tell you to be quiet."



There are other unexpected hazards, explains Neil. "Me and my pals were just fooling about at the bus stop and a man hit my pal. Then he grabbed him and pointed a finger in his face saying "You watch it". Fortunately our bus came soon afterwards. He was drunk. I hate it when drunks talk to you, you don't know what to do."

So is there anywhere that gets the thumbs up? Everyone has a favourite. "Some of the life-guards at the Commonwealth Pool are nice," says Scott, "really friendly. They give you the fast mats for the flumes."

"The Wimpy is okay" says Neil, "the staff are really polite to you and one time I got something free. Other cafe places can be really slapdash; I hate those places, I think it's because of the low wages."

I relayed some of these comments to Susan Hart of Edinburgh District Council's Women's Unit. I also asked her to give me a bit of background to the **We Care About Kids** campaign.



"Britain is such a child-unfriendly country" she said, "that it has taken a campaign to get people to even begin thinking about chil-

dren's needs and rights when going into town. The **We Care About Kids** campaign, however, had its origins not with children themselves, but with a survey of women in Edinburgh that the council carried out in 1989. This raised the issue of childcare, with an emphasis on integrating children into their parents' activities. Parents said that they and their children were "treated like dirt" in restaurants, shops and in the public services.

"So the campaign has always highlighted failings as seen from the parents' point of view and has focussed on very young children. Now we've come to feel this is too narrow a remit and we should expand it to take account of kids right up to the age of sixteen. Unfortunately there's still a lot we haven't even begun to tackle."

Things are improving though. "This year we did produce a **Summer Events for Children** booklet which has been distributed through schools and the council's own leisure and recreation venues."

But is the campaign likely to make any impact in those shops we've been hearing about? Susan Hart explains that a general awareness leaflet has been sent to many Edinburgh traders and there is the possibility of expanding that to a 'How to make your business child-friendly' training pack.

Isabel Willshaw, a mother of three children herself, is out to get companies to treat children as valued customers instead of pests. As Director of **Edinburgh Vision**, the marketing company, she is working in partnership with the council to persuade the dinosaurs of the Edinburgh business community that it is in their best interests to support the campaign.

Her main approach is to stress the spending power that kids can command. But, she says, there's more to it than that. "A city that values children values people. Children have a right to be safe and to be listened to". She continues "Edinburgh, right now, is not a child-friendly city, it's a place which disapproves of kids an awful lot. Why do decision makers in companies find it so hard to listen to children? Why are some of them so eager to dismiss the campaign or at best treat it with cynicism?"



Is it perhaps because they are all male and most of them are over fifty? That might be a factor, but according to Isabel even the younger ones seem to forget what it's like to be a parent - never mind a child - when they leave home and come into the office. "The campaign is an attempt to raise some kind of awareness in this group. But it's also an attempt to encourage

parents or grandparents to speak up, to demand that their needs and the needs of their children are met."

At this point I make a mental note that once again no-one is planning to ask the kids first.

So what has the campaign actually done so far? "It's been mostly about drumming up goodwill. All you have to do at present to join the campaign is put up a sticker, but the long term objective is to establish standards, perhaps initiating an award scheme, and improving attitudes all round. Eventually it is hoped they'll be a guide to child-friendly places for children both under and over five.



If the council are working on a scheme to permanently improve things, what happens at the annual Edinburgh Festival? "You mean the Fringe?" asks Scott, "We went to see a show about the planet once, with my mum, her friend and her friend's kids". What about the Children's Festival?. "That sounds really interesting - when is it? I never knew it was on."

The kids' total lack of awareness of the official Festival is understandable in the light of the Festival's children's programme "Nothing for kids as such", they told **Scottish Child**, "hasn't the Children's Festival just finished?"

Catherine Couper, the **Fringe for Schools** Project Officer, says there is a healthier attitude to children on the Fringe: "We want young people to have direct contact with performers of the highest standard. Now we have an advance booking brochure for schools and children's parties that goes out in June. It has sections for young people between the ages of five and eighteen."

With the fringe there is always an element of risk however. "As there are so many temporary venues its impossible to be sure that everyone is well treated. We say to box offices where there isn't banked seating: let kids have seats at the front so that they can get a good view. You have to take extra care when you're expecting kids along to your show."

It seems as though even when adults are well intentioned we act as if we are doing young people a favour by catering for their needs. It seems hard to accept that children are paying customers and a highly discriminating part of the public. Kids will spot insincerity a mile off, so any change of attitude has got to be for real. In fact it might be an idea to have a **We Listen to Kids** Campaign as well as the **We Care About Kids** one. That way, when we do take steps to declare ourselves child-friendly, we might be in a better position to know just what that means. ■

'Adults always let the old folk on buses first - then they push you out of the way and get on the bus before you'

talking to stran

ChildLine in Scotland

If any organisation springs to mind as one that children can turn to when they need help, it's ChildLine.

Colin Chalmers visited their Glasgow office to meet the people who answer the phone calls.



Oliver Brookes

"I don't want to tell my mum about the bullying because I'd be too embarrassed. But I really need someone to talk to. Please help me, because I feel like running away but I don't want to hurt my mum and dad because they will blame themselves. Please help."

"I don't have many friends round where I live and no one will listen... Sometimes I start to cry at night and cannot stop."

"We couldn't go to the funeral... I couldn't show my family the way I was feeling. I lie awake every night crying to myself as I can't seem to forget her. I can't seem to concentrate at school or even go out and enjoy myself. Please can you help me?"

It's letters like this - yes, ChildLine gets letters as well as phone calls - that give you some idea of what ChildLine is about. Children who need to speak to someone, and find there's no one there, now have ChildLine.

"Kids see it as their service - they see us as very much being on their side," says Margaret MacKay, the director of ChildLine in Scotland. "They see us as an additional friend. ChildLine's got that place."

It is perhaps one of ChildLine's greatest achievements that it has come to be seen by children so clearly as an agency that is on their side. And if the history of ChildLine's first year of operation in Scotland - before June 1990 all Scottish calls to ChildLine were answered in England - is anything to go by, then it's clear that such an agency has been much needed.

If anyone needs convincing about just how many unhappy, often desperate, children there are out there, they only need to talk to some of the volunteers working the 4 lines at ChildLine's Glasgow office. In its first full year of operation in Scotland, ChildLine got nearly 100,000 calls, 13,000 of them involving substantial contact between the caller and a ChildLine counsellor. Some might think that's a depressing figure; and of course if ChildLine wasn't there there wouldn't be that depressing figure. Just lots of desperate kids with no one to talk to.

But they do have someone to talk to - and they know it. "When we go round the schools," says Margaret, "primary and secondary, urban and rural, when you ask the pupils if they've heard of ChildLine there's not a child who hasn't. And in fact when you say "Can you tell me the number?" I would say about 7 out of 10 could immediately give you back "0800 11 11"."

That success hasn't come from nowhere, it's the result of a lot of hard work, and a lot of support from people who want to see ChildLine's work continue. Groups and individuals through-

ngers

out the country raise money for the project, companies and local councils give all sorts of help - Strathclyde Region have given ChildLine their offices free, and the place is full of desks and equipment that has all been donated. And at the heart of the operation are the dozens of volunteers who commit regular amounts of time to being available for the phone calls.

Anne Love, one of the volunteer counsellors, remembers how she got involved: "There were some articles in the Evening Times about ChildLine, and it mentioned that if you were interested in becoming a volunteer counsellor for them you could go to this meeting in the Grosvenor Hotel. I thought I'd go along, although I wasn't sure if it would be for me. I was expecting maybe a dozen people or so - there were 600 people there."

Margaret MacKay remembers that evening well: "It was Valentine's Day, and we kept having to move into bigger rooms as more and more people turned up. We were stunned at the amount of people that wanted to help - I'd been at meetings with volunteers before, but this was more like a Free Mandela rally, there were so many people!"

The parallel with a political rally is really quite apt - the work that ChildLine does has got a lot to do with power. Most of the children who phone up feel in some way powerless - unable to speak to anyone around them, unable to do anything about the situation they are in. ChildLine, quite literally, lets these children speak. And that can be of enormous importance to children who feel, usually with a lot of justification, that the world is against them.

"The response we get from adults is quite ambivalent," says Margaret, "on the one hand they think it's a good thing that you're there for other people's children when they're in trouble. But if it's your child saying 'I'll get ChildLine' it threatens your authority. We have to deal with that."

So what actually goes on at ChildLine, this organisation that seems to have a 'brand recognition level' up there with Levis and Coca-Cola? What do they do that gets kids telling adults "I'll get ChildLine" when they want to even up the score a bit?

Well, they listen. "We get calls about everything," says Marjory Brookes, another volunteer counsellor, "nearly every shift throws up something new. You think you've heard it all, then something new comes along."

Bullying, parents splitting up, relationships, bereavements - any and all of the problems kids face all the time. And of course a problem that

a lot of kids face is abuse - 21% of calls to ChildLine are about physical abuse and 16% are about sexual abuse.

"We want to encourage children to find some way out of the situation they're in," says Anne Houston, ChildLine's counselling manager, "in some way that they can manage. That varies, it may be finding an adult they can speak to, like a granny or their mum. Sometimes it can be resolved within the family. Sometimes it can be a teacher or a youth worker, it depends who's important to that child."

Anne Love thinks an important part of the way ChildLine works is that the child is very much in charge. "The child decides how long they want to talk for, and if they want to ring back. We don't put children under pressure. Sometimes eleven or twelve year old kids are being asked to make really hard decisions, like choosing between their parents when they are splitting up. What we can do is work with them to give them the confidence to talk to someone about it. We explore the problems with the child, and that can be very important if no one else is doing that."

To a lot of children it obviously is. "I've been working with one girl," Anne continues, "for about 5 months, and it looks likely she'll be calling back for some time yet. She calls every week - we have an arranged time when she knows I'll be on next and she'll phone then. Initially she'd speak to other people, but she's disclosed so much to me that she doesn't feel comfortable talking to anyone else."

"It's not for us to tell kids what to do," says Margaret, "the world's full of people giving you good advice - but you'll only take advice when it coincides with what feels comfortable and possible and might actually work."

For some of the children calling ChildLine, the help they get from them is enough to see them through. For instance about a fifth of the fourteen year olds phoning Childline are having problems with relationships or their sexuality - getting some information or reassurance may be just what they need. But in the case of physical and sexual abuse the question inevitably arises of where do you go from here?

Anne Houston is all too aware that there are no easy answers. "We can't wave a magic wand and make everything alright just like that, and we have to tell kids that. For instance you have to tell kids that social workers speak to your parents and ask them how they would feel about that. You sometimes get kids saying "Oh my dad is such a good liar, they're never going to believe me." Kids have to think that through. Kids sometimes have this magical thing "If I

talk to a social worker, they'll take me away and put me in care and I'll be safe," and we have to say what the possibilities are.

"If there's no one around who a child knows and feels would really support them, we certainly would be encouraging them to think about talking to other people. Sometimes we'd say "You might not understand what these people - social workers and so on - do; well, these are the kind of things they can do to help you change the situation you're in." Our experience is that if we push too hard, too fast children will either give us wrong information, like a wrong address, or they'll retract. We have to be awfully careful we're going at the child's pace, so they feel they have some control over what's happening."

'You know that you've done what you could, and you have to accept that there's a limit to what you can do'

"The whole thing is about being honest," continues Anne Love, "and if the kid asks what is going to happen when they speak to the social worker, speak to so-and-so, you have to be honest and say "I don't know for certain, but all these things could happen". And it's never straightforward. Kids tell us "I want it to stop, but I don't want dad to go away, and I don't want to go away either"."

The more you listen to the people who work at Childline, the more you wonder how they cope with that sort of stuff. It's easy being against child abuse in general - who isn't? - but what feelings are left after talking to a child who's on the phone while daddy's out for half an hour and tells you they can't take it anymore and they don't know what to do? How do the counsellors cope with that?

"Sometimes you feel hate, disgust, fury, contempt, a whole range of things," says Anne Love, "the other things that I feel, wanting to help the child and so on, I try to keep at the top. And I'm able to do that with the debriefings we get."

"You know that you've done what you could," adds Marjory, "and you have to accept that there's a limit to what you can do."

It's a point emphasised by Margaret MacKay. "We're one bit of a response to kids. We take pride in what we're doing well, but we can't

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**Working towards a
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Scottish Child September Workshops

Child Punishment - Friday 6 September
Child Sexual Abuse - Tuesday 10 September

The workshops will be held at the Scottish Child offices at 40 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh (5 minutes walk from Haymarket station). Each workshop costs £15, with some concessions available for £5. Workshops last from 10.00am - 3.30pm. Early booking advised.

Lunch, tea and coffee are included in the fee.

Please reserve me ___ place(s) at the child punishment workshop.

Please reserve me ___ place(s) at the child sexual abuse workshop.

I enclose a cheque/postal order for £___ made payable to **Scottish Child**.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

Please return to Scottish Child, 40 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh EH2 4RT.

take on the burden of feeling responsible for all the ills suffered by children."

One of the most obvious facts about ChildLine is the predominance of women counsellors - ten for every man. It's an imbalance that mirrors the calls to ChildLine (85% of children calling up are girls), and is typical of organisations dealing with children, care, feelings and so on - until you hit management level, of course. So what's happened to the new man? Are the differences between men and women in Scotland just the same as ever, despite all the hype and hullabaloo about changing roles?



"Some of our male counsellors," says Anne Houston, "have been worried about what other people think of them offering counselling in an agency like this which is linked so heavily to sexual abuse. There is a concern over what motivates a man to do that, unpaid, which doesn't exist for a woman. There's also the thing about feelings. I think there's still a lot of men who think that's not a male province."

"There's something about a lack of concreteness," says Margaret, "the fact that there isn't a nice tidy solution. It would be extreme to say that is about male and femaleness, but I suspect that that is more difficult for men in our culture to handle. If you are a counsellor at ChildLine you have to deal with a lot of uncertainties. Not knowing how much you've helped and those are difficult issues for men in our culture."

So there aren't (what's new?) loads of men manning the phones at ChildLine - but that's not to say that men don't support the work that's carried out. In fact ChildLine has enormous public support, almost paralleling - in the strange way these things often work out - the widespread nature of the private abuse of children that the organisation deals with - day in, day out.

"There's an enormous amount of care, concern

and willingness to make a commitment to work for kids out there," says Margaret, "the issue is how that is tapped into and harnessed. One of the challenges for public bodies in Scotland has to be how that is transformed into good work."

Those who work at ChildLine are all too aware of society's, to say the least, ambivalent attitude to children - great concern and love, but also blindness and abuse.

"Nobody," says Anne Love, "ever asks kids 'how do you feel about this?'" That's certainly my experience, the experience of people in here. You don't ask kids how they feel or what they want to do. You tell kids what they're going to do. The fact of someone on the other end of a phone asking them what they think about a situation can give some kids quite a shock."

"It would be arrogant of us," adds Margaret, "to say that we are the only people who think it is important to listen to children and let them have their say. Obviously that's not the case. But when kids are calling us about really serious matters and you hear adults banging on the door of the phone box telling them to hurry up, you wonder what all this talk about children's rights, the U.N. Convention, charters and so on is really worth. A lot of adults have an absolute conviction that they have rights that are above those of any child."

But that's something that's changing. And ChildLine is playing no small part in the battle - because that's what it is - to make society and the individuals in it take the needs of children seriously, and not flinch from what that means.

"The way it seems to me," says Anne Love, "we're in a transition stage where people are willing to recognise that sexual abuse and physical abuse does happen, but are not yet ready to come to terms with it. It happens out there somewhere, but it doesn't happen here. Maybe in another 20 years they'll be saying it could be happening to wee Jimmy next door or in my house." ■

ChildLine



0800 1111

*call free or write to
ChildLine, Freepost 1111, Glasgow G1 4BR
if writing please say if ChildLine can write back to your address*

SPARKY on the road!

"When we say the word 'ordinary' we do not exactly mean dull, or exactly like everyone else or standard, or even average. 'Ordinary' simply means having the opportunities and options that most people have. We live in a world where it is ordinary to have variety and opportunity and choice. It is ordinary to be special at least to someone. It is ordinary to have opportunity for parts of our lives to be special and different in ways that people value highly."*

During the summer months, the Sparky Dragonbus can be seen in the streets, schools and hospitals of Glasgow. Inside, disabled and able-bodied children play in an environment geared towards encouraging them to appreciate the 'ordinariness' of disability. Dolls lie around complete with callipers or mini-wheelchairs, while x-rays and hospital equipment are treated as ordinary objects to be touched and played with.

Since 1983 when the bus was first created, the Sparky project has worked towards the demystification of disability. The bus is not, however, the only part of the project. Working from the knowledge that the problems experienced by disabled people are really the problems of the society which discriminates against them, Sparky aims to bring about a change in attitude. The project works with children from a very young age, and with the adults who care for them, developing support networks between parents and providing training for workers and teachers. Children discuss and learn about disability through drawing and games which help them to understand and value their physical and intellectual differences.

The project also encourages publishers to use non-stereotyped images of disabled people, combatting the popular image of the 'cheerful' or 'plucky' or 'ill' person in a wheelchair, and stressing the need for people to see beyond the disability. People with disabilities have a right to the choices, respect and dignity possessed by 'ordinary' people. Sparky works towards making this right a reality. ■

Sian Bayne

**(From 'Ties and Connections: An Ordinary Community Life for People with Learning Difficulties', King's Fund Centre)*

Out in the SPARKY Bus







Playing Wheelchairs



MEN AT WORK

Nurseries and children's day centres have until recently been the undisputed domain of women. But things are changing a bit. Rosemary Milne found out how when she talked to four men working with under-fives.

Kenny, David, Neil and Donald meet once a month in a self-help men's group to talk about their work with children. They all work in children's centres for the under-fives in Lothian, although none of them has taken the conventional route of a nursery nurse qualification to arrive at this point. Going through the nursery nurse training to get a NNEB qualification is in their experience "almost unheard of for a man". They talk about the particular problems of being men in what most of us think of as a women's world of small children and young families. But they are insistent that their choice of job doesn't mean they are unusual men. They call themselves "ordinary men in unusual situations".

Kenny and Donald were residential social workers with adolescents before moving over to children's centres. Donald is clear about his motivation for the move: "Work with adolescents taught me that there's more sense in putting in the effort with young families, helping them long before the kids become teenagers". Neil was drawn to pre-fives work by a long standing interest in family work. Three out of the four hope to remain in children's centres in the longer term. Only David sees it as useful experience on the way to something else - in his case a qualification as an educational psychologist.

These men are very positive about the work they do, and the importance of having more men working in children's centres. Each of them can cite examples of men coming into the children's centre and being obviously - and agreeably - surprised to find a man around, often playing with children in the playroom. The initial reaction - "What are you doing here?" - quickly gives way to "It's nice to see a man around."

One of the added bonuses of having a male

worker around the place is that it can encourage men into the centres - men join in activities with the children that they might otherwise not get involved in.

A lot of the children who go to the children's centres these men worked in had no male adult staying in their home. For them, and for their mothers, having a dependable male presence around the centre can be a useful experience. "Because children's centres and primary schools are staffed for the most part by women," says Neil, "Some children in single parent homes reach secondary school before they have regular contact with an adult male. That's very unsatisfactory all round."

There is general agreement with Donald's view that "Men in our kind of work can be a great help to women who have only had bad experiences with men. By being willing to listen and help we can give women confidence to look for something better in their future relationships with men."

There is no doubt that these men see their work as worthwhile and useful - they seem to see themselves in a bit of a pioneering role in fact. "Because most of the work with under-fives is still done by women," says Kenny, "there is not really a role-model for us men to follow. You have to discover for yourself how best to work with under-fives. But by doing this you can also help the fathers who come in to the centre to see that it's okay for men to enjoy being with tiny children. They begin to learn how to handle them and play with them."

The effect of having male workers around seems to be a positive one for the children's parents - but what effect does it have on the predominantly female staff of the centres? The replies are a bit more qualified about this.

"Some women say they prefer working with a man because it means less of the bitchiness you sometimes get among women." In some respects the men enjoy special status with their female colleagues, and there is a recognition of the value of men and women working together with children. But there is tension as well.

Take the question of promotion. There are fifty-nine senior posts in children's centres in Lothian and there are currently six men working in children's centres in the region. Out of those six men, three are in some kind of senior post. All the group is adamant that promotion can be delayed for men just as much as for women. But to a woman this looks suspiciously like the same old story of men colonising women's terrain, and in the process taking over those positions of power and influence previously held by women.

These men believe that the present unsatisfactory career and salary structure of nursery nursing means anyone wanting to stay long-term in this area of work has to get into management to progress. But they are clear that they themselves are not simply concerned to 'get ahead'. They want to raise the overall status of nursery nursing, are keen to draw attention to the importance of work with babies and toddlers. Women nursery staff who feel frustrated and injured by the disproportionate numbers of men getting into senior positions may at least have cause to be grateful to them for this.

There are certainly some telling contrasts between the attitude of these men and that of women who have gained a toehold in professions previously monopolised by men. I am struck by how different this group is to women's support groups - there doesn't seem to be the same kind of self-doubt and questioning here. Seeing them together in their men's group,

it is impossible not to notice the confident tone in which they discuss how they see their role as workers with children and families. Confidence, fine; but there seems a greater tendency amongst these men than amongst some women's groups for this to turn into a lack of self-questioning. With this group, the problems seem to be 'out there' and not 'in here'.

'The initial reaction - "What are you doing here?" - quickly gives way to "It's nice to see a man around".'

I feel a strong sense of 'management', even from those who are not yet managers. If there are disadvantages in this - as some of their women colleagues would probably confirm - there are also great advantages. In children's centres catering specially for families in the most severe difficulties, there is a pressing need for solidity and dependability. What, in a nutshell, these men appear to represent in children's centres is the powerful but benign father figure who provides secure, non-threatening support to families and female staff.

That's certainly one way - and judging from the experience of the children and their families not a bad way either - of turning women-only units into mixed, male-female ones. But, like the group the men use for support, it tends to leave a good deal untouched, a lot of issues unaddressed. Things would certainly change a great deal if greater numbers of men started working with children. But they'll change with a vengeance when, if ever, young men leaving school make the nursery nurse course their chosen option of study. ■



Antonia Reeve

**new voices,
new writing**

the trap

a short story by
**Margaret
Elphinstone**

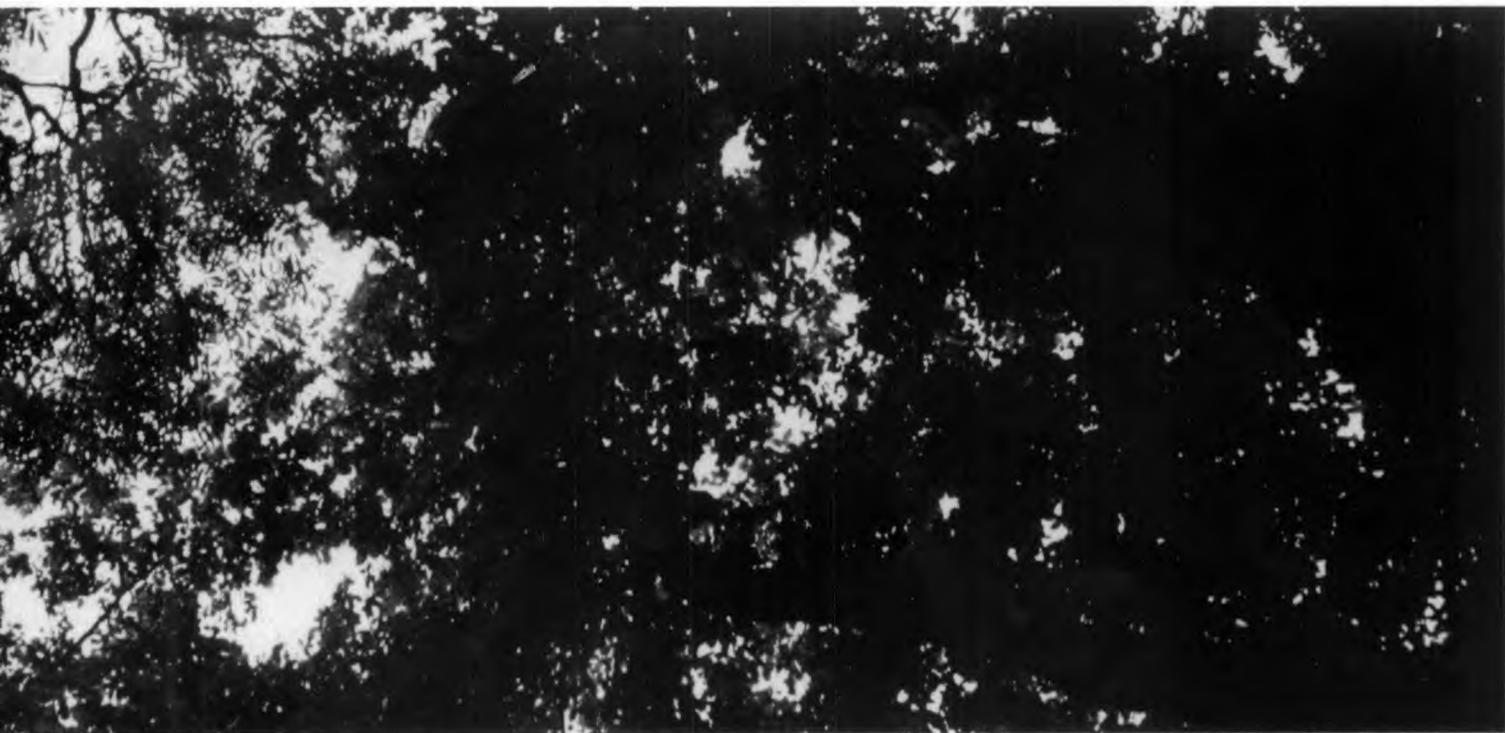


Lying on her back in the pony trap, she watched the sky float slowly past. She was wrapped in a rug that smelt of dogs, and under the rug there might have been hay. It was soft, and prickled a little when she moved. Looking up, she saw trees bent over her: two lines of trees leaning inwards in an archway that did not quite meet. Bare branches grew smaller, forked, and forked again, sprouting into a myriad of twigs, each one outlined against the evening sky. The sky moved slowly behind them, clouds drifting across the two ranks of trees, an evening sky, soft and velvet, blue growing thicker, empty. Then the new moon, sudden, caught in the branches of an elm; a gold brooch enmeshed in unbrushed hair. The elm receded, and the thin moon rose clear, clear as the clipping of hooves on the road. The trap bowled along, then lurched in a rut. The sky swayed, the trees steadied themselves, the pony's hooves clopped, the wheels rumbled. the invisible road stretched on for ever, and the moon never moved or changed.

●

She tried to slow down, but her car was too powerful, and habit was too strong. Hedges swept by, and the trees, just turning to green, were cut off from sight abruptly by the frame of the windscreen. She caught a glimpse of primroses above the ditch; then they were gone, and the budding hawthorn was gone too, and calendines and dandelions, untouched, unsmelt, untasted. The road rose and fell over small hillocks, tracing in huge bends the obsolete boundaries of ancient fields. She turned her wheel expertly, holding it at half past six, elbow casually resting against the door. the road was paved: forty years ago it must have been potholed and stony, white in dusty weather, and thick with mud in the wet. Now it was hard and brown, muddy in places where tractors had turned in and out of the fields, then thick with cow dung up to a farm gate. The farm was whitewashed stone, foursquare on a little hill, with a struggle of outhouses. She passed it at forty miles an hour. It reminded her of nothing at all.

She reached a hamlet: a thin straggle of houses and a red telephone box. She slowed down and saw the shop opposite, a Post Office and general store. She stopped and got out, slamming the



car door. Her car, which had been gleaming white when she left the hotel this morning, was now mudspattered and solid brown around the undercarriage. She glanced at it, and strode into the shop.

She had forgotten the name of the people, but somehow the name of the farm had stayed with her. Not consistently, but in recent months it had slowly surfaced again, along with other disjointed recollections, which told her little, but left her uneasy. Sometimes she would wake in the morning knowing she had dreamt of a time and place which hardly existed now in her waking mind. In the daytime there was nothing to remember, or at least nothing that could be put into words. Sometimes there were smells or voices, or the taste of forgotten food, and faint images would drift across her mind, intangible as the motes which swam across her eyes on summer days. To focus upon it was to lose it, but it had become impossible to ignore. And now there was this tour, which had brought her to the very country of her past. Hence this afternoon.

There was no problem about the farm. It was almost too easy. The woman in the shop drew her a rough map on the back of an envelope. While she watched, she felt a pang of apprehension, and a tightening in her chest. It seemed uncanny that the place should even exist. The people had gone. The woman had died, and only the old man was left. He stayed at the old folk's home in the nearest town. She watched the woman write down the address for her. It seemed quite unreal.

Then the road again. Only a mile and a half this time. The car did it in three minutes, bumping up the last hundred yards over a stony rise which ended in the middle of a cluster of buildings. She was growing used to these farms now, whitewashed and plain, always harmonious amidst their surroundings of small hills and woodland. This farmyard was still cobbled, with a stone horsetrough at one end. It was enclosed on three sides by white buildings, and on the fourth by a large metal barn with the remains of a stack of hay at one end of it. Beyond there was a silage pit, concrete and covered with black polythene. She stepped out of the car, and carefully traversed the mud that

lay between her and the back door.

A crescendo of barking broke out before she had passed the gate. She hesitated. No dogs appeared. Perhaps they were shut in. She went on cautiously, keeping her eyes on the open doorways that seemed to surround her. The interiors of the sheds and byres were dark and unwelcoming.

She stopped and pulled herself together. It was a new experience to be nervous, and she didn't like it. Or perhaps she disliked it because it was not new at all. Something she had forgotten was coming closer than she desired. She shrugged and told herself not to be foolish, then she continued to pick her way across to the door. She had thought she was wearing stout shoes suitable for the country. They looked woefully inadequate now, and her casual jeans and jacket looked far too spruce and clean. She hadn't thought of being embarrassed; it was not something she did think of these days.

She never reached the door. A woman appeared round the corner of the house. She was about her own age, she guessed, certainly no more than forty-five. She was dressed in muddy wellingtons, patched trousers, and a serviceable anorak, and she was carrying a bucket. She stopped short when she saw a stranger.

"Hello," said the newcomer, and her voice sounded high and southern, even in her own ears. She was peached precariously on a dry patch between two ruts. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but..."

"It's a dead end," interrupted the other.

"I'm sorry?"

"A dead end," said the farm woman, louder. "You can't get through. And there's no right of way either."

"There's no law of trespass in Scotland." It was the last thing she had meant to say, but her tongue was too quick for her. "Anyway, I was only trying to get here."

There was a pause. "There's nothing here," was the reply, unmistakably surly.

"I know. At least, I know it must seem so. I only

came to look." It seemed ridiculous to go on. Her whole errand seemed ridiculous at the moment, but she was a determined woman. Her whole career was witness to that, and she was not to be put off easily. "I stayed here once," she went on, just as if the other woman looked interested. "I was sent to stay here in the war. I think it was only for a short time, and I was hardly old enough to remember. But I'm in these parts at the moment, and just thought I'd come and have a look."

Another pause. "Well, now you've looked. And if you'll excuse me, I'm busy."

The visitor did not turn and go at once. She was not thickskinned, but life made her tougher than she once was. She wondered briefly if it was her clothes, her accent, or her smart white car, but she didn't really care. She hadn't come here to be liked. She wanted a closer look, that was all. She had still found nothing on this pilgrimage that she remembered. There had been no clues yet.

"Would you mind if I looked round for a little while?" No hope of going inside, that was obvious.

"You could go in the field, I suppose, if you don't let the bull bother you." The woman with the bucket abruptly turned her back, and disappeared into one of the black entrances.

The old people's home smelt of polish and disinfectant, and underneath that, it contained a whiff of old bodies. The nurses were brisk and helpful, and the sunshine poured in upon the row of basket chairs, every one inhabited. The old people had a vista of daffodils and roofs before them, with the loch beyond, and snow-capped hills beyond that. It all lay spread out before them like a proclamation, but perhaps they had seen too much, for they hardly seemed to be looking.

She didn't recognise the old man at all. He sat by the window, dressed in a washed out pale cardigan, loose trousers turned up twice, and felt slippers. She had been warned he was deaf, and their conversation was perforce carried out

S U M M E R T I M E

And The Reading Is F R E E

T h i s
Summertime
Virago Press,
Serpent's Tail,
Crocus and
Black Swan
are offering
the first

1 0 0
new Spare Rib
subscribers one
of these titles
F R E E!

Jay Loves Lucy by
Fiona Cooper
(Serpent's Tail)

Jay, comfortably single,
is turned upside down
when she falls in love.
But Lucy, divorced and
devoted to her son, has
never even kissed a
woman before...

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in shouts, which fell dully upon the roomfull of quiet people. No one took any notice as far as she could see. Only one or two women glanced at her, and she was disconcerted by the brightness in their eyes. Perhaps there would be gossip at the teatable after all.

He was deaf, but she soon realised with a slight shock that he was not at all obtuse. She was aware that she should not have been surprised by that, and at first was almost too polite, to compensate. It didn't seem to bother him.

"1940?" he said. "Let me think. We had one or two, you know, and then we got Murray, and of course he stayed. Made his home with us. A good boy, Murray. But there were one or two before him, I do mind that. How old would you be then?"

"I was four."

"Four." There was a long pause, and she began to wonder if the conversation was at an end. "Four," he repeated. "Ay, now I mind. A sad wee wain it was. I mind now. A sad mousy thing you were, and grat the whole time for your mammy. I mind that, now."

"My mother died. I never did go back to her."

"Is that so? I mind we couldn't make much of you. Maybe we should have bothered more, but there was too much to be done, and all the men away. Then Murray came, and he took to the farm right off. No folks left of his own, and in the end we just kept him. Adopted him officially. That was in '46. He still comes down from Glasgow, whiles. Still writes. He's a good boy, our Murray."

She took a deep breath. "I remember a pony trap. I think you must have brought me to the farm in a pony trap."

"That's right. We had the old trap then. I mind that now. Fetched you from the station, that's what we did. All of twenty miles. A long way for a tired wain, I reckon. You mind that, do you? Funny you should mind that. Such a wee thing, you were. Always greeting. And wet the bed. Had to borrow a rubber sheet for you. I mind that, now. Always hanging out the sheets, we were, and nowhere to wash but the old boiler. I mind the wife could hardly stand it.

That's what she said. If the wain spoke, she said. If she would be a proper wee girl, and speak to us, and maybe feed the hens and that, I could do it. But she won't show any interest in anything. Too feared. Feared even of the cockerel, you were. Always greeting. We did our best, mind, but the wife was always short of temper, though her heart was kind. We never had a bairn of our own, you ken, but when Murray came, she took to him right off, and so did I."

"I can't remember any of that. Only the pony trap."

"Funny you should mind that. You only stayed a wee while. A month or two, would it be?" He looked at her, as though seeing her for the first time. "So what happened to you, then? Have you a man? Are you married now?"

She paused. "No, I'm not married. I'm an actress. We're here on tour, so I just came over for the afternoon. It's been on my mind recently, you see. I can't tell why."

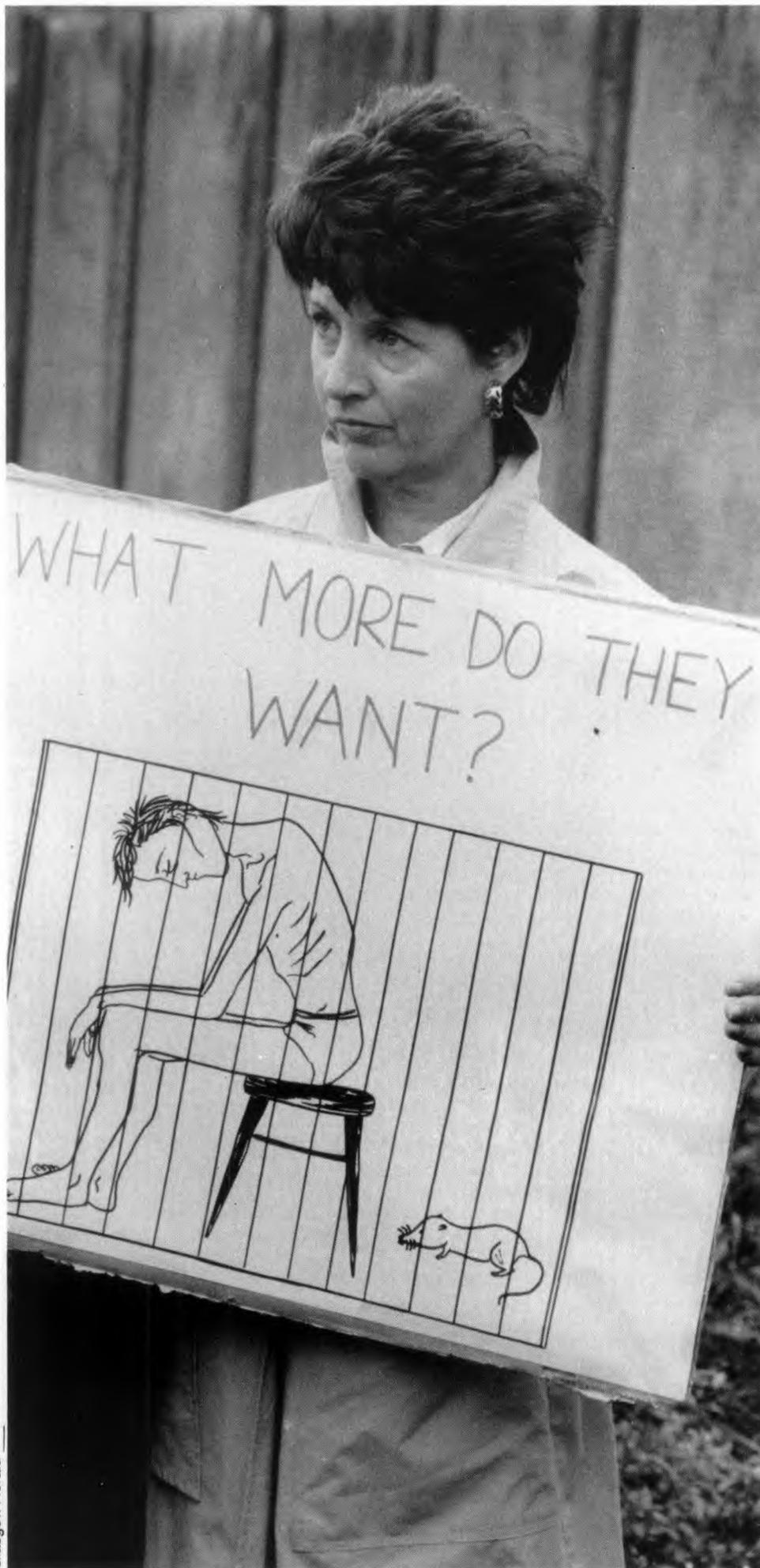
"Actress?" He was frowning. "I wouldn't know about that. Never went in a theatre in my life. You ken that? It's all lies, that stuff. All lies and illusion. Don't go to the public house either." He glanced at her again. "I did drink once. Too much. But the wife weaned me off that. It was the whisky. You'd not have known me, if you'd seen me then. Ay, she was a good woman, so she was."

There was another pause. "I'm sorry she died," she said awkwardly.

He made a stiff movement that was almost a shrug. "That's nature," he said. "Comes to us all, doesn't it?" He sighed. "So you're the wee wain I fetched that day in the pony trap. It was good of you to come and see an old man, so it was."

"No," she said, "Not particularly good. I only came because I remembered the pony trap. I never forgot it, though I only realised recently where it fitted in. You know what I mean?"

"Ay," he said. "I ken what you mean." ■



time for things to change

Following on from our review of *Inside: Rethinking Scotland's Prisons* by Andrew Coyle in the last issue of *Scottish Child*, this month we publish a review of the book by Joe McGrath, a long-term prisoner who has had eight years experience of the Scottish prison system - from inside.

In his introduction to **Inside: Rethinking Scotland's Prisons** Andrew Coyle writes that "Prisoners have been little changed by their experiences over the last 150 years". So it is perhaps rather ironic that in Coyle's book, covering the entire history of imprisonment in Scotland, the only individual prisoner mentioned by name is Jimmy Boyle, a prisoner who wrote and starred in his own chapter of penal history and was very much changed by his experiences.

What was it about his time inside prison that changed Jimmy Boyle? In **A Sense of Freedom** he writes about an experience at the 'dead-end' (the Peterhead cages) when he was being escorted by one of the 'animals' (Peterhead prison officers), and the escort remarked that he "had to get home to his wife and children". Boyle was suddenly stunned by the idea that this man had children - he says this incident changed the way he thought entirely. Or was it the Barlinnie Special Unit that changed him? There is an ambivalence in Boyle's book which could be misunderstood - what he does say quite clearly is that the Special Unit forced him to examine his past and himself; it opened up a whole new world to him, a world he had been unable to enter at some crucial period in his development because he had a history which, in his words, barred him from stepping out of the jungle to a better life.

In examining his history, confronting himself, Boyle was able to use the opportunities that the Barlinnie Special Unit offered him to change. It is surely no coincidence that the only two men I am aware of who have written books about their personal experience of the Scottish prison system - Jimmy Boyle and Andrew Coyle - both see positive change coming through an understanding of history.

As a prisoner serving 23 years I have had plenty of time to examine my own history - the history of my last 8 years in prison that is, over 5 on lock-down. Until recently, that was all the history I allowed myself to have, because at an early stage of my sentence I found that my history prior to Peterhead, prior to going inside, became irrelevant. For some men serving very long sentences at the dead-end it is necessary, in order to survive, to 'switch off' the past; to live for the day, rather than agonise over a history that becomes dimmer the further away it gets in the time tunnel of a long sentence.

I experienced the dead-end of our penal system from the inside at Peterhead, an experience of an insane reality. In solitary (2 years), 'semi'-solitary (21 months), and for 16 months in the 'open' regime of A Hall, I experienced and witnessed every kind of brutality. In these various regimes I have heard the wails of madness - men mutilating themselves; men being literally dragged away to Carstairs; men setting themselves and their cells on fire; men in solitary attacking half-a-dozen riot-clad warders with glass and sharpened toothbrushes. The majority of these young men would be about 25 years old and had been treated brutally as they graduated to Peterhead through the Young Offenders' system.

I do not question Coyle's qualifications as a grade one Governor, or his experience, up to

Peterhead, of prisons and what goes on in them. However I don't think anything could have prepared him for the madness and chaos of Peterhead when he came there to take over as Governor. This was the unimaginable, the myths become starkly real. A bit strong perhaps? Not in my opinion - I spent 16 months in solid solitary from March 85 to July 86, surrounded by 12 other cells, sometimes full to capacity, listening to the wails of the mad, the screams of the desolate and desperate. The cries of pain from brutally enforced violence, and pain just brutally enforced.

For what? This was nothing to do with justice, redemption, deterrence or rehabilitation - it was all about revenge. The revenge of the then Governor and his 'team' for the series of riots, escapes and over 18 hostages taken from 1984 until the time that Coyle took over.

The previous Governor talked at a Governors' conference in Dumfries in 1986 of a nationwide conspiracy by prisoners to close Peterhead. Even the press laughed at that, though they printed his views. In fact, the riots, escapes and hostage-taking involved young men, doing centuries of prison-time between them, who wanted to hit back at the system, not for better conditions, not for TVs in cells and so on - but for better treatment, a better quality of life. We had to riot for humanity and dignity, each individual - there were very few 'sheep' at the dead-end. All the 'nationwide conspiracy' theory did was buy time for the 'management' to test out various regimes, various theories, becoming so corrupt it was as if anything was permissible just to deal with the situation.

Andrew Coyle is a man of insight, compassion and humanity. He acknowledges the injustice and moral corruption there is in the prison system. I don't know if he was stunned by what he experienced on taking over at Peterhead, but he realised a new way had to be found. This was the background to the little publicised 1989 Peterhead Conference, attended by the brass of the prison system from Director down, researchers and academics and eleven staff - including basic grade - from the prison itself. There were also eight of us - hostage-takers, rioters and all-round bad guys. At the end of the conference everyone agreed that change was necessary, and although I'm sure some were only paying lip-service, we prisoners left feeling a great deal of optimism, believing that change was inevitable.

This need for change is the background to Coyle's book. He took on board everything that was said at the Peterhead conference - the need for individuals, and the system, to change. The ideas for how to bring about such change, ideas that came from all the participants at the Peterhead Conference, are contained in this important book.

Coyle understands the importance of understanding history if we are to be able to change the penal system. He recognises that in looking back we see what we have become.

Coyle clearly admires the man he refers to as the founding father of the penal system in Scotland, William Brebner. Brebner believed

that the duty of the courts was to punish offenders. He did not believe that a prisoner should continue to be punished while inside. Brebner's theory and philosophy of punishment was much respected - he trained staff in many establishments, and the Glasgow Bridewell, of which he was governor, was a model for other institutions.

1835 saw the first Inspector of Prisons, Frederic Hill, and the growth of central control - government policy became tangled in the theory and philosophy of punishment at the expense of the 'customer' or recipient. It could be said that the slide to injustice and corruption within the penal system thereafter was inevitable.

Coyle charts the unsavoury history of our penal system from healthy infancy to a decaying old age. He acknowledges injustice and corruption practiced under the banner of redemption, deterrence, rehabilitation or whatever. He seems to be asking, demanding even, for the system to reflect and acknowledge the illness within it. Confront your past - see what you have become.

In this book Coyle advocates a return to the earlier school of thought of Brebner, shaped and fashioned to the needs of today's society and culture. The prison system must start treating its 'customers' with respect (a term even liberals cringe at in relation to criminals), humanity and dignity. Don't pay lip-service to it - train your basic-grade officer to a professional standard, because on the landing or the corridor he is the man-manager. Give prisoners **real** opportunity and responsibility, not just the opportunity of earning a pittance while being immorally used and exploited. Give men the opportunity and responsibility of determining their own 15 years behind bars. Give men the opportunity of keeping their families intact, emotionally and financially.

Justice requires men to be deprived of their liberty - justice should not become injustice in carrying out the sentence of the court. Justice belongs to the people, and what is done is what the people condone - unwittingly, on the part of the disinterested majority, sadly enough. Coyle quotes Winston Churchill in the introduction to **Inside** as saying,

"The mood and temper of the public with regard to the treatment of criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilisation of any country."

For myself, at present in Shotts Unit, things have changed a lot, and very much for the better. On the other hand I am only one of 8 prisoners in this unit - there were 120 lock-down prisoners in Peterhead "rioting not for better conditions, but better treatment", as Coyle so rightly puts it in **Inside**. Perhaps it is only when "the mood and temper of the public" changes, and starts caring about the prison system that exists in its name, that there will be real change in the Scottish prison system. ■

Inside: Rethinking Scotland's Prisons is available direct from Scottish Child at a special price of £9.95, including postage (the bookshop price is £12.95). Please send a cheque or postal order to Scottish Child, 40 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh EH2 4RT.

INSIDE

RETHINKING SCOTLAND'S PRISONS

Andrew Coyle

Prisons in Britain, if they are news at all, are bad news.

With a significance for prisons everywhere, **INSIDE: RETHINKING SCOTLAND'S PRISONS** asks important questions about the way we lock people up. Andrew Coyle, who has worked in the Scottish Prison Service since 1973, examines the foundations of these troubled institutions and argues that the root of our prisons' instability should be traced not to the prisoners - but to the system in which they are held.

INSIDE...

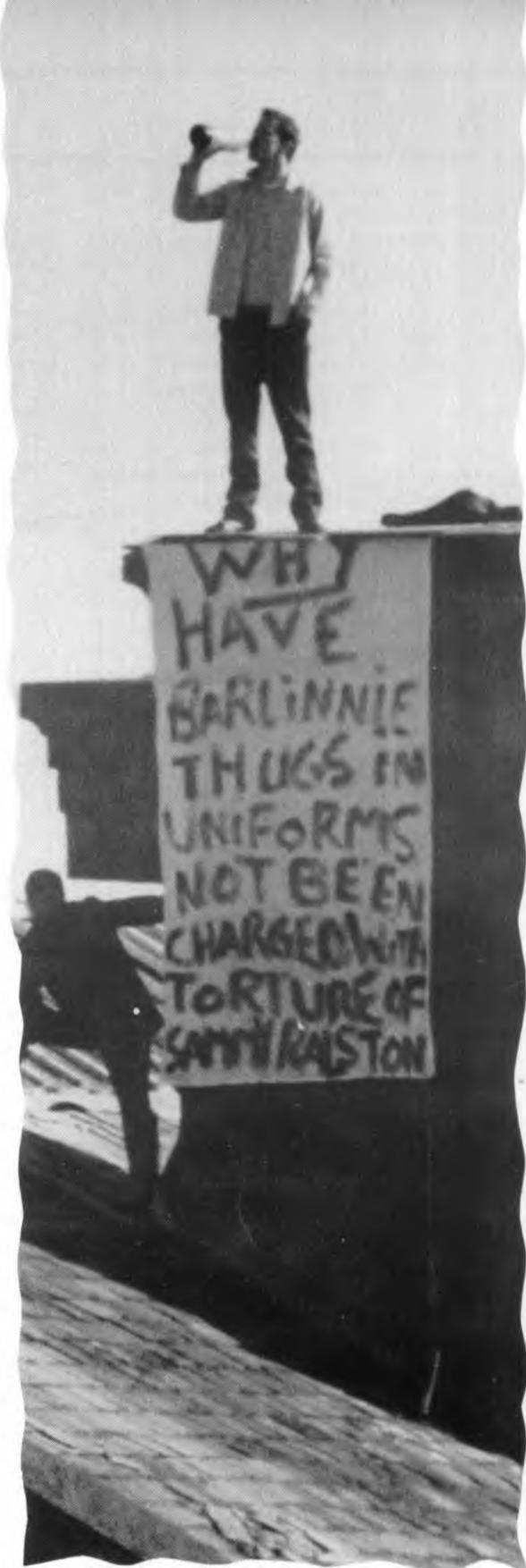
"...reflects a detailed knowledge of and concern for the Scottish Prison Service. It provides an invaluable aid to all who want to understand how the present-day Service evolved and how the author sees the future."

Peter McKinlay, Director, Scottish Prison Service

"...the first general history of the prisons in Scotland by one of Scotland's leading governors. This book describes current attempts to restore the progressive pioneering approach with which the service began, but which for many years was so conspicuously lost."

Professor Rod Morgan, assessor to the Woolf Committee of Enquiry into Prison Disturbances

ANDREW COYLE joined the Scottish Prison Service as an assistant governor in 1973. He has served in Edinburgh Prison, Polmont Borstal and in Prison Service Headquarters. He was governor of Peterhead Prison from 1988 to 1990. Currently he is governor of central Scotland's custom-built, long-term prison at Shotts.



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REVIEWS

Just Keep Writing

Meantime:

Looking Forward to the Millennium

An Anthology of Women's Writing

Polygon £6.95

Sian Bayne

97% of secondary school headteachers are male. In 70 years only 139 individual women have sat in Parliament. Only one out of nine authors prescribed for Higher English study is female.

If anyone out there believes that inequality is dead and equality lives, some reading in this book is guaranteed to bring back all that old anger and to stimulate new thoughts on feminism and where it should go from here. It will also provide an opportunity to enjoy some interesting and entertaining writing by Scottish women.

The collection is loosely based on the position of Scottish women and their expectations in the light of the approaching millennium. As one of the contributors points out - "Two thousand years from an arbitrary point in the history of a small part of the globe as recorded by men" seems a slightly tenuous theme, but it does give some cohesion to this broad mix of work, comprising of poems, stories, extracts and essays by both well-known women and by new, largely unpublished writers. While this unselfconscious mix is enjoyable and intriguing, the weight and lucidity of the majority of the essays gives the feeling that these are the real business, while the poems and stories take a second place as (mostly) accomplished light relief.

The main question which arises when discussing an anthology of women's writing, particularly in these days of 'post-feminism' is - why? Why do we need a 'women's collection'? Why, when most standard anthologies are dominated by men and their world-view would women settle for what could be termed marginalisation? Why 'an anthology of women's writing' and not just 'an anthology of writing'? It is an issue which Janice Galloway deals with in her introduction, where she points out how it all comes down to the male-created literary canon - "that 'recognised' body of work which is 'understood' to be 'significant' in literary terms". Because the canon is created and upheld largely by men it comes as no surprise that the female perspective is to an extent alien to it. The result is that the men who pass judgement on literature dismiss women's work on the grounds that it is "weak, or trivial, or sentimental" or that it "only deals with women's issues". The answer is therefore to ignore the canon, to write, to produce collections of women's work, to redefine literary standards and perspectives. As Liz Lochhead puts it, the answer is pretty simple - just keep writing. "You shouldn't be worrying about what you ought to say about something 'as a woman'. Tell the truth and it'll be from the woman's point of view, what are you going to do, sprout a penis?...We've just got to burst their

bloody canon by sheer volume and quality of what we say."

For those who believe that this is all old hat and no longer relevant, Janice Galloway points to the 21 regular feminist journals which existed in Britain in 1911, along with several feminist bookshops and presses. What happened to them? Who's to say that the same thing won't happen to Virago, The Women's Press, etc? As she says "Change is not change at all if it is not deep or lasting; if it does not directly alter old, damaging value systems". Whether these old systems really have changed permanently with recent improvements in the position of the female writer remains to be seen. Until this is proved however, the role of the women's anthology is an important one, providing as it does inspiration and input for women and men away from the oppressiveness of the male-perspective-as-norm attitude which dominates literature.

Alison Cameron explores this issue further in her excellent essay on 'Women and Education in Scotland', a chilling run-down of the effects of the male hierarchy on the education system. As she says "Maleness-as-norm, by its nature invisible and hence pervasive, is entrenched in our curriculum". She quotes the imbalance which exists in the study of literature in schools, where the study of three female authors to every 31 male authors is a standard ratio. Such figures are symptomatic of the imbalance of power within schools, which will obviously have profound effects on the outlook of children who go through the education system. Alison Cameron points out how "we teach boys and girls every day of their lives that men take decisions and women carry them out. It can hardly be otherwise in a school system where...a staggering 97% of secondary headteachers are male".

There's very little feminist raillery and cant in this book. The majority of the contributors write simply the truth about where women are in society, how we can change things, how we feel about ourselves, and how we are; good and bad. There has been recent media attention given to female terrorists, female child abusers and lesbian pornography featuring rape and bondage. Perhaps these are unusual, yet it is reasonable to suppose that as the creative and powerful sides of women have been oppressed, then so have our more destructive urges. Kay Carmichael stresses that "we have to acknowledge the shadow side of women's lives too" pointing to what she believes lies at the centre of the problem - "We think we can have it all and mould our feminism to beat men at their own game. We can't. Capitalism and patriarchy are indivisible".

But it's not all problems and no solutions, certainly not all bleakness and depression. Pat Gerber's outline of the school of the future stands out as a positive answer to today's problems with education, and there are bits that make you laugh, like Rosie Furlong's monologue 'Name a Dozen Women Artists' or Wilma Murray's history of 'Liberation and the Vest'. Generally, the book carries a hopeful message. Women know what's wrong, and what wants doing, and are going to carry on doing it millennium or no millennium. As Rowena Arshad writes - "I move into the future with hope!" ■



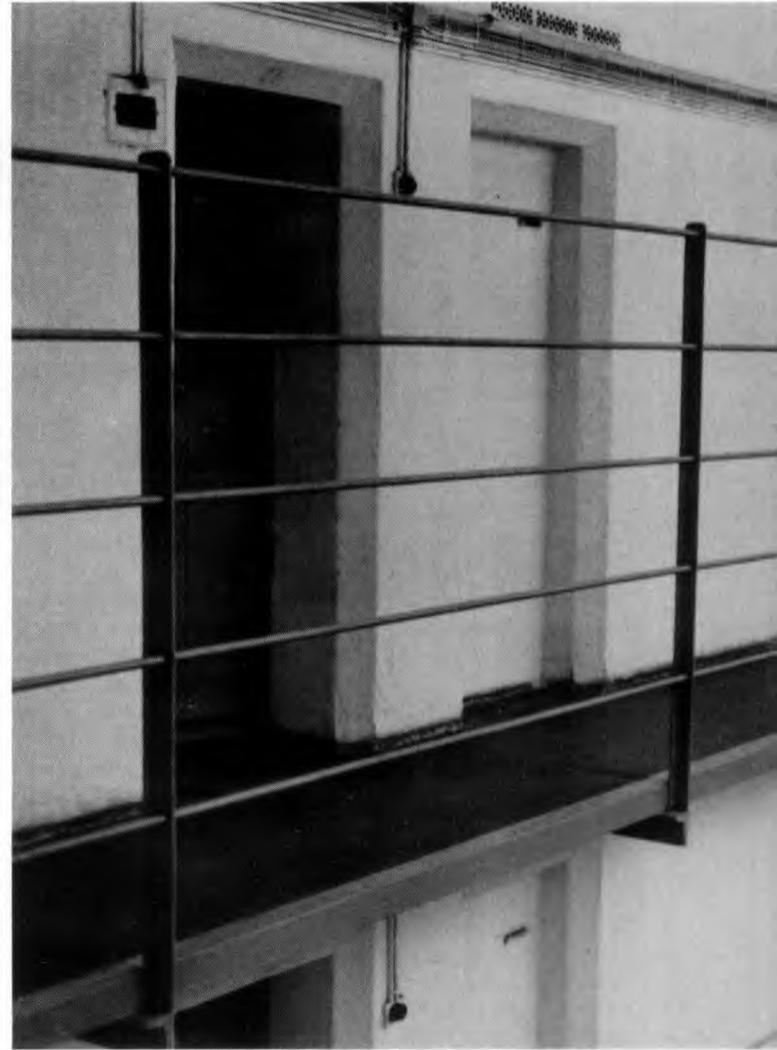
Julia Bayne

Who needs punishment?

The idea of punishment lies at the heart of our legal system. But what does it actually mean? And does it work? Here Philip Priestley reviews a new book about punishment by David Garland.

The persistence of the institutions and practice of punishment in modern societies is something of a puzzle; an anachronism that has attracted the attention of many kinds of students of social organisation. How can so-called civilised societies continue to visit pain and suffering on wrong-doers? Continue to do damage to people who have done wrong, in the name of a greater good? Why do we persist with penal practices that patently fail to cure, deter or reform?

Not that there is any universal horror at these proceedings. On the contrary there is, in the community at large, a readily discernible demand for not less, but more and more severe infliction of damage on the persons and prospects of those who are caught breaking the criminal law. There is even an otherwise reputable criminologist - Leslie Wilkins - who insists that it is one of the duties of the state to meet this demand for punishment. And we live under a political administration that has sought over the past decade or so to enlarge the penal estate in Britain - building prisons at a rate not seen since the middle of the nineteenth century,



encouraging longer sentences, restricting access to parole, and bringing in English legislation to annexe to its punitive archipelago the hitherto caring and helpful element of probation.

Edinburgh criminologist David Garland has addressed the conundrum in his book **Punishment and Modern Society**. He reviews what major social theorists have to say on the matter - Durkheim, the Marxists, Max Weber, Michel Foucault. He subjects their writing to searching criticism but seeks to retain what is valid in each of their analyses and to synthesise a new view of the sociology of punishment. It is an ambitious project and one to which he brings wide reading and a keen intelligence. His exposition of penal theory is lucid and readable. I enjoyed the book - but find fault with its proposed synthesis.

Contemporary critics of punishment, most typically penal reformers, call for its restriction or even its abolition on the grounds that it does not do what it claims to be able to do - reduce the amount of crime in society. Garland, following Durkheim, insists that this is

not a legitimate ground on which to dismiss punishment. Punishment, he says, serves a mainly symbolic purpose for society; the expression of a positive code of moral values, the denigration of individuals who defy its injunctions and the reinforcement of social solidarity. By this view punishment becomes a sort of meta-language in which society addresses itself and its citizens on issues of vital importance to its and their identity. And it becomes in its turn a defining agency - contributing to society's view of itself. So the efficacy of prisons should be judged by how few escapes they permit, not by how many of their graduates stay out of trouble.

There is an important truth in this assertion, one that should be retained and worked with - the theatre of justice is one that can be refined by rational processes of development to make it both more effective for society at large and less damaging for the individuals who are selected to serve those symbolic purposes. Here is a challenge to penal reform to create emotionally satisfying forms of legal dramaturgy that are not also



among the contributors in this issue...

cruel and destructive. Properly handled televised trials could meet some of those requirements. And so could the ancient tradition - since

'Why do we persist with penal practices that patently fail to cure, deter or reform?'

we are talking about human sacrifice - of offering the most valuable people to propitiate the angry gods - namely the rulers of a society rather than its poorest members.

But there are important gaps in Garland's argument. Durkheim has been criticised for failing to support his thesis with proper evidence. His examples from anthropology are generally thought to have been mistaken or inadequate. Garland repeats and agrees with these criticisms but insists on retaining the central tenets of the theory. On what grounds? That it is

elegant? That it appears to be true? To the extent that sociology defines itself as a social science then its theory must appeal at some point to some form of evidence. The strength of Karl Erikson's marvellous book *Wayward Puritans* lies in its anchoring of Durkheimian theory in the concrete events of the Salem witch-hunt. **Punishment and Society** does not seek to ground its conclusions in the real world and fails altogether to confront a huge body of evidence about punishment that exists in the autobiographical literature of imprisonment. A sociology of punishment that does not deal with the subjective experience of its administration can only ever be half a sociology.

Garland also fails to acknowledge or address a large and growing body of evidence that penal methods can be effective. Hundreds of studies involving thousands of subjects, standing alone, or subjected to sophisticated forms of statistical meta-analysis show clear signs of a penal agenda of methods that actually work, actually reduce the likelihood of re-offending. It may be that because these methods are re-

ported in the literature of behavioural psychology they have not come to the notice of a Law Faculty-based sociologist. But since Garland also goes on to quote Freud on the origins of the urge to punish - another evidential black hole - it may be symptomatic of a desire to build theory in a conveniently fact-free environment. A sociology of punishment that recognised the possibility of rational programmes of correction would also be different from the one presented in this book.

This is a rich and reflective book, worth reading for the stimulus it gives to thinking about one of the bed-rock institutions of modern societies. But - whatever the pretensions of its author to sociological neutrality - I am afraid that in its present form it lends respectability to the idea of punishment and must stand convicted of aiding and abetting the intellectually meretricious and morally indefensible penal policies of Her Majesty's present government. I hope John Patten never sees it. It will help him to sleep even more easily. ■

Punishment and Modern Society by David Garland is published by the Oxford University Press at £9.95.

Sian Bayne is a student at Edinburgh University.

Alison Bell is a member of **Scottish Child's** editorial group.

Margaret Elphinstone has two daughters and lives in Edinburgh. She has published two novels **The Incomer and A Sparrow's Flight** and has a book of short stories entitled **An Apple from a Tree** coming out this Autumn.

Meg Martin is a freelance journalist living and working in Glasgow.

Joe McGrath is an ex-Peterhead prisoner currently serving his 23 year sentence in Shotts Unit.

Philip Priestley is a writer and film director. He is currently writing a book about punishment.

Anna Fawkes lives in Edinburgh with her son Samuel.

LETTERS

Torturous Entertainment

Dear Editor,

You have probably seen advertisements for the 'Edinburgh Dungeon' museum which opened in May this year. The museum is trying to encourage school parties to visit it, and I am writing to express Amnesty International's concern about this exhibition.

All the advertising and publicity surrounding it gives the impression that the exhibition is educational, while at the same time emphasising its sensational/horror aspects. Although some historical information is given by most exhibits (too high up for small people to read easily), nothing is put into the wider context of Scotland's history. So a child will learn **how** a witch was tortured and killed, but not why.

The interior is dimly lit and there is a continuous background noise of screams, frightening music and the sound of guillotines or axes. Visitors are alarmed by a masked figure in a long black cloak. This creates the atmosphere of a ghost train rather than a serious museum.

I am sure you are aware that torture

is practised in many countries today, often on people who are guilty of no more than expressing an opinion. The Edinburgh group of Amnesty International are concerned that torture is too serious a subject to be portrayed almost as a form of entertainment, as it is in the Dungeon. It trivialises it and leaves the visitor with the impression that it is slightly amusing, and anyway all safely in the past. One of the comments in the visitors' book said "This was really scary, I'm glad it doesn't happen now."

As the Dungeon is encouraging school parties, we at Amnesty are writing to schools suggesting that a member of staff visit this exhibition before children are taken there, as in our opinion the publicity is misleading. We have already had a number of replies from schools, all favourable to our campaign against this museum.

Helena Poldervaart

**Amnesty International
(Scotland)**

Dear Editor,

We're passing the Edinburgh Dungeon. Somebody dressed as a skeleton hands my six year old a colour leaflet. He opens it, he looks shocked, fascinated. There is a naked woman hanging by the neck. There is blood and gore all over her tummy, running over and around her genitals, down her legs. It looks as if she has been cut open and her insides pulled out. Oooh, look at her vagina! he says. My seven and a half year old boy asks for a look. It's mine, says the younger child, but you can have a look. There is a look of shock and disgust on the older child's face. Does it bother you? I ask. Yes, what are you going to do about it? It doesn't bother me, says the younger child, matter of fact. Can I keep it?

There are many people around who feel like doing the sort of things portrayed in the Edinburgh Dungeon - and worse - if they could get away with it. That is, if they can be honest with themselves. If people were to be supported in voicing such impulses and desires and tracing them back to their own childhood origins they would no longer be in any danger of acting them out in the present.

Lionel Brookes

Health Problems

Dear Editor,

What do children think of our hospitals? How can a broken arm or leg in childhood shape his or her opinion of the NHS? Everyone has memories of the smell of wards, the needles, the bedpans, your parents not being there. It can be a frightening experience for a small child entering hospital for the first time. Advances have been made in the way of colourful wards, toys, creches - these all serve to make a hospital a friendlier, safer environment. Certainly the NHS should be congratulated on these sort of measures.

However, as recent reports have shown, all is not well in hospital-land. Morale is at an all-time low because of the forthcoming privatisation of the service and the inevitable loss of jobs that will follow. But it doesn't end there.

Parents who enter hospital with their kids demand a certain level of service and in most instances get it. But a few slip through the net. People who innocently entered hospital for a transfusion have now contracted AIDS. Doctors and patients alike are being assaulted within the hallowed grounds. One family is suing a Scottish health board over a mis-diagnosis of Cystic Fibrosis - their two children were treated with physiotherapy and daily injections until they were aged 14 and 16, before it was realised that they never had the killer disease at all!

Incidents like these may not be common - but parents would be well advised to look before they leap with their children, and find out all they can about any treatment they are getting. The NHS wall of secrecy will throw up more avoidable mistakes until people call a halt to the incompetence in an otherwise faultless, if underfunded, service.

Mark Bain

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Poll Tax Still Here



local anti sheriff activity in Edinburgh

Dear Editor,

From the news you would think the poll tax was over. It might be the end of the campaign for the SNP and the Labour Party, but beyond party politics there are still over a million and a half people in Scotland who can't and won't pay. It's as if we can all take out that £2,000 that we've had hidden away and give it to the nice council that gives us all our services, now that the horrid Tories have been beaten. But we haven't got any money and never had. 80% of non-payers can't afford to pay (Strathclyde University). And it's the local authorities that are sending in the sheriffs to attack us.

Of course those councils that are using these bullies to harass non-payers in their homes are blaming non-payment for their cuts in services. That's the biggest lie of all - because if it wasn't for the on going non-payment campaign the poll tax would have a future, leading local government down the road to self-destruction. Non-payers are the ones defending local services - not the councillors implementing cuts.

Harassment of non-payers

continues. I know of instances where single women at home with a child have been threatened with having their door smashed in - illegally - by sheriff officers, and where sixteen year olds have had intimidating sheriffs barge into their homes to search for items to pound.

The sheriff officers' bullying tactics, sanctioned by the local authorities, once again attack those least able to fight back. But fighting back is what we do.

Locally organised groups with contacts built up over two years are now showing their power. People know the law and refuse entry to sheriff officers. They know too that a crowd of supporters will deter an attempted pounding.

The poll tax is not over for the non-payers nor is the campaign for a fair tax system and an amnesty. The fight is real, now, and in our streets.

John Ball

secretary
Stockbridge Newtown
Anti Poll Tax Group
24 Dean Park Street
Edinburgh

Scottish Child

NEXT ISSUE

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 1991

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this diary.....

Bringing up Baby

Colin Chalmers



Anna and Samuel

Keeping a diary has had a surprising effect upon me. I thought it would probably become a hassle after a while, but it has proven to be an outlet for emotions in quite a positive way. Things don't seem less intense, but it's as though you are having a conversation with yourself and doing something positive - taking time to think.

That's something I have forgotten to do recently. I look after my son, Samuel, who is thirteen months. I am trying to get my dole and Com-

munity Care Grant and somewhere to stay all sorted out. Sometimes I begin to feel as though I am about to overload and spontaneously combust or something.

I really had enough today. The dole as usual fucked up. It has taken them three weeks to send me my new book. Each Thursday for the past three weeks I have waited for both posts, spent all afternoon explaining the same story to the same receptionist, getting the usual crap, the usual futile excuses.

This morning I got two letters. One saying my claim had been cancelled, the other saying my book is in the Post Office. I got such a sinking, full-of-despair feeling when I was told by the rubber-faced woman in the Post Office that my book had been returned to the dole. What is going on? What is going on? I just couldn't handle going in again to that dirty, smokey, stuffy dole office, so I went to the C.A.B. instead. Samuel was crying, he was hungry - it was 12.30 by now. I get my head together and trundle off to the dole and get my giro. They promise I will get my book on Tuesday.

It's days like this which make me feel so frustrated. Sort of trapped. I felt today that I had no control over my life. I'm totally dependent on £65.40 every Thursday. What makes it worse is walking along the street seeing new cars whizz by, people buying things and going places and me trying to get money to buy nappies, food and tobacco.

I smoke roll-ups. I like making them. I usually don't smoke them all. Just like cups of tea - I never finish them either. That seems to be a trait of parents of thirteen month old children!

I spent all day today immersed in a children's world, it was great. I spent most of today with my friend's kid Ben who is nearly 3. We went for a walk along the prom at Portobello, the weather was really close. There was a thunderstorm happening in Fife and the clouds were grey, tinged with deep purple, rolling unstopably towards us. I jumped up and down shouting "Look, look, Ben, look at the clouds!" but he was far too interested in the

steel animals in the concrete playground. I was totally taken aback by the power and force of these thundering clouds and felt completely insignificant for a moment. Ben took my hand and we ran all the way home.

Today is a **me** day. I haven't got Samuel today so I'm going to henna my hair. It seems to have become a ritual in a way but it makes me feel good. It's important to take time and keep it for yourself. I know everybody might not be able to do that though. Today I had the time to discover my skin, how soft it felt. My hands, practical, brown and cold.

I collected Samuel today. It's such an amazing feeling I get when I see him after his access. I treasure his first smile at me, his pure, innocent fresh laughters and sighs wash my soul clean. He makes me strong. I really am exuberant today. I got my book. I was so happy it took me aback. The battle with the dole isn't over yet, though - tomorrow I've got to sort out my grant.

I went to Craigmillar Social Work Department to see if they could do something. They phoned on my behalf. I've got a feeling that the dole really don't believe that someone could have a kid, no money, no cooker, beds, fridge, carpets. What do they want to hear? Anyway I'm going down to hassle them again tomorrow.

I'm at the dole so often now that when I go up to the receptionist I don't have to say my name. She's writing it down already.

Another wasted day. I was told by the receptionist that they did not

have my application form for the grant. I was told I wasn't entitled to the grant and I couldn't apply for at least 6 months. That was a load of rubbish. I left and went to the C.A.B. and they gave me a new application form and phoned to tell them I was re-applying. I was so annoyed, that I just got on with it. It was no surprise. I really can't understand why they are like this.

The other day for example. All I was trying to do was get my weekly money from the dole. Because (1) I was a single parent, (2) had a Niddrie address, (3) was a woman, (4) was quite 'perplexed' at the thought of having no money and basically just because I was there, I spent all day, 9.30am to 2.30pm, trying to get money. I was treated as a brainless idiot and it was 'only' because I had a 'kid' that I was grudgingly given a payment. I was fuming. So I went for a walk on the beach with my son, staring at the smelly, dark sea, looking for some meaning to it all. Then I just contented myself with dusting the sand from between tiny toes.

Sometimes I have been conscious of a need to clamber out of noise, feelings, situations, the air that I breathe. I walked up Arthur's Seat today and blew my staleness out. I am so pissed off with the dole. I'm trying to get a Community Care Grant. I'm entitled to it, I need it. Do you think I can get this? No. I have to keep proving I need it. My health visitor has written, my social worker phoned, I've been down countless times in tears, anger and politeness. I feel really tired sometimes.

I went to the Bridges Project today. A phoned call from a worker there and my grant was being processed. I couldn't believe it. Because someone 'responsible' and 'trustworthy' (?) had verified my

story the Social Fund Officer was 'a lot happier'. I knew they didn't believe me.

● Samuel's buggy got nicked last night. Aaargh! What next? I couldn't believe it. I have no money to replace it. I wonder if the person who took it needed it? It's funny because at first I just accepted it because I thought oh well, here's another thing to get on with; but now I'm angry.

● I got my grant today. Yippee! I wonder sometimes if the people at the dole realise the control/power/effect they have on people's lives. Do they know what the bottom line is? Have they gone without? Have they got their own place? Have they got a kid to think about 24 hours a day?

● I've decided not to live in Niddrie, for quite a few reasons. I think I would be far too isolated. Isolation is the last thing I need right now. After talking with a friend I think the best idea is to get a private, rented flat. God, it's so long since I've had a place.

I've got to get a place to stay fast; Samuel isn't settled either. He needs his own space as much as I do. I've got my own life to get on with but it's as though I'm banging my head against a huge wall. The wall is the dole. You almost start thinking that there's some crazy plan devised to take away people's pride and quash their spirit so they are no trouble, so they accept what is offered. Not me.

People are great. Well, the ones that I'm thinking about are. I'm glad that when genuine, caring, real people see someone struggling they are there. I've been so busy

'You almost start thinking that there's some crazy plan devised to take away people's pride and quash their spirit so they are no trouble, so they accept what is offered. Not me.'

proving myself to health visitors, social workers, the dole, 'friends', that I started getting really sick of saying I'm a fit mother. I care. It's not my fault I don't have anywhere secure to live.

● Today was great! I got a flat. It's small but it's ours. It struck me today that this is the first time in my life that I have really had my own flat. Now I feel 'normal'. I have a set of keys. I'm so happy, I'm not worried about that other great, useless, slow machine I'm going to have to deal with - Housing Benefit.

I remember the last 'doings' I had with them. I had to fight it out with them just to get what was rightfully mine - my rent. Don't they realise that the longer they take to sort out their mess the faster it takes to make someone homeless?

A couple of weeks ago I had a terrible longing to jump on a train with Sam and go. Anywhere. But I couldn't. Having Sam makes me face up to things. That's good. I tended in the past to run.

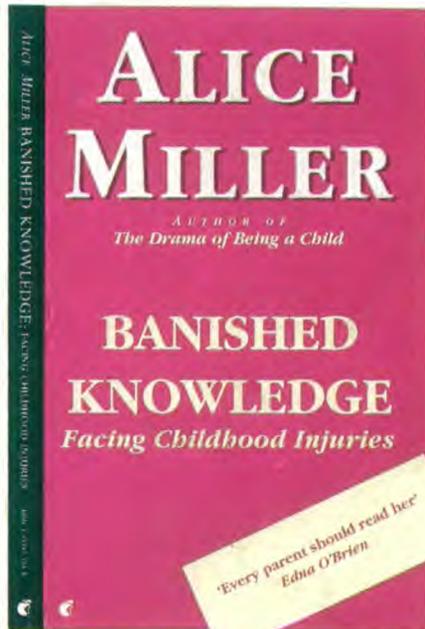
I'm definitely getting things moving now. My problem at the moment is to get pots for my flat. I didn't notice when I saw the flat that there were none. There always seem to be drawbacks. I'm really quite enjoying having my own place though. Not having to worry about being pleasant and amiable all the time, listening to music if I want to, having a shower if I want to - basic, lovely things that I'd forgotten about. Samuel really has opened up a lot too. It's as if he knows that he has a home too.

● Anna Fawkes

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