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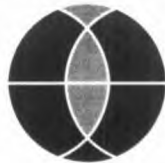
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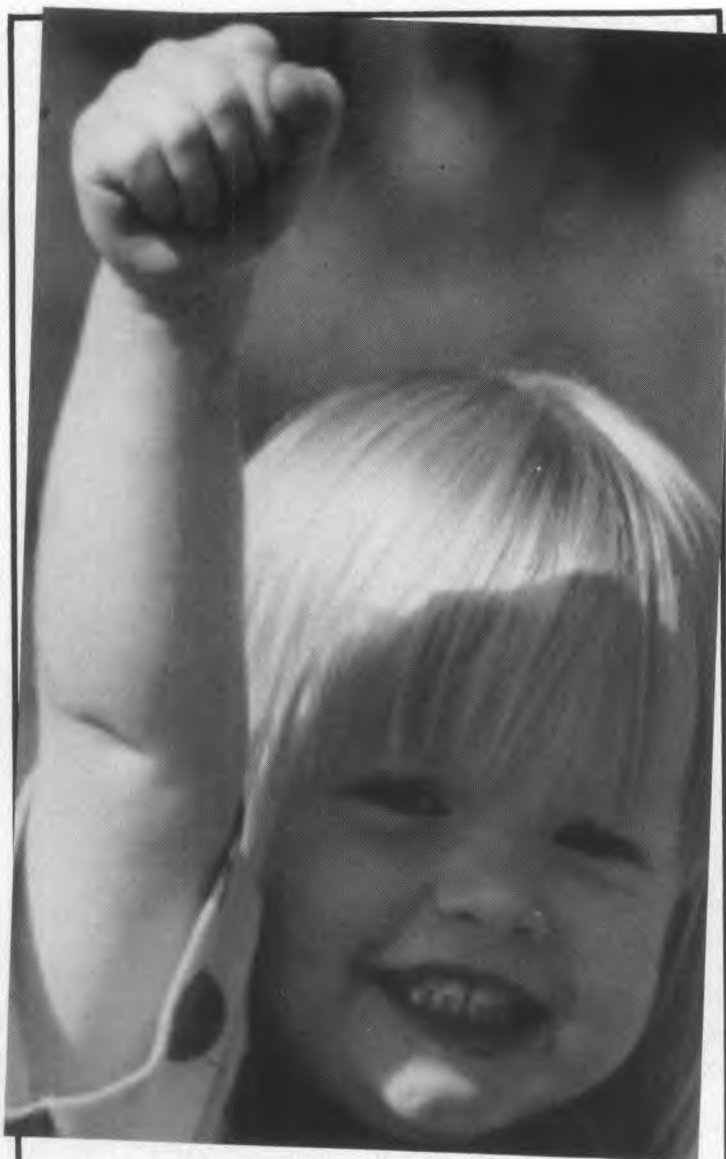
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Anna and the Accountants

Anna Fawkes, our diarist, isn't writing her diary this issue. We know a lot of readers will miss her open and honest account of what it's like bringing up a small child in Britain today on what is politely referred to as a 'limited income'. You may wonder why she is not writing for us in this issue. Well, you would just have to read her diary over the last few months to get a clue to that one.

In her first diary she wrote that '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's offered... Don't they realise that the longer they take to sort out their mess the faster it takes to make someone homeless?'. In December she told us how 'I didn't get Sam into nursery. I was told I was doing a "fine job" and seemed pretty together'. In her last diary Anna wrote that she 'felt like a walking time-bomb about getting Sam into nursery - I feel like shouting 'I NEED CHILDCARE'.

People can't go on 'managing' for ever. Poverty, homelessness and lack of help with childcare are very real problems, problems Anna has had her full share of. Sometimes it all just gets too much.

I keep thinking of Anna during this election campaign; whenever the politicians start on about 'what is affordable' or how we have to 'live within our means' - meaning, in effect, stuff the poor. I think of Anna because she is silent this month when these politicians are bombarding us with their words; words that speak in a language that excludes as 'unrealistic' the basic needs of millions of people.

For this is the language of the 'real world' - a curious phrase used by financiers and industrialists to describe their world as opposed to the world, say, of the homeless teenager sleeping in a cardboard box; or the pensioner having to choose between eating or staying warm; or the single parent dealing with the Kafkaesque bureaucracy of social security. It's a phrase that's been eagerly picked up by politicians keen to justify how little they have to offer to a world crying out for change.

This election has all the political depth of a bunch of accountants offering slightly differing business plans to a public most of whom are irrelevant to its outcome. Norman Tebbit let the cat out of the bag a few weeks ago when,

reminding John Major how the Tories had won the last three elections, pointed out that the aim of electioneering in Britain isn't to please everyone; it is that key group of voters, the comparatively well-off C2s as they are known to sociologists, who really count. Show your 'concern' for the poor, sure - but remember who gets you elected and make sure your business plan is acceptable to them.

It's not just the Tories who think like this - everyone has to play the game if they want to stay in the 'real world'. Labour, for instance, are desperate to win the C2s - so they avoid any promises that might 'alienate' them. It's worth remembering that Labour isn't, as is sometimes made out, exactly a party of the poor anyway - the average Labour Party member has a family income of £18,500 a year and only 22% describe themselves as 'working class' compared with 56% as 'salaried professionals'.

So what choice do the poor, or those who care about the glaring social injustice on which our 'affluence' is based, really have in this balance sheet world of well-off voters deciding everything on the basis of self-interest? Are sentimental noises about helping the poor (it's always 'them', never 'us') enough?

It's a sign of the times that to argue that poor people should be given lots of money that is now in the hands of rich people is considered 'extreme'. Worse, it's a business plan that's 'unelectable'. But is life really about tax bands, PSBRs and money, money, money? Or is the whole language in which political debate takes place - a language in which the needs of millions of people cannot be articulated - not simply a way of avoiding talking about the things that matter to those excluded from political power?

I know whose side I'm on when it comes to a choice between Anna and the accountants - between those with nothing, and the politicians, too timid or self-interested to want to change a thing. And for millions of people who won't vote, or who will vote without any enthusiasm at all, that's a choice that is very real - but for which there is no cross on the ballot box.

Colin Chalmers

More Than Words

CHILDCARE

With the General Election coming up, childcare is on the agenda of all the main parties as they vie for floating votes. Parties are making promises and your vote counts - but the promises don't seem to be impressing parents in Edinburgh's Greater Pilton area.

Parents in the area are all too aware of the lack of value put on childcare - and they have learned from bitter experience that if anything is to get done they had better do it themselves. It is against this background that the **Greater Pilton Childcare Action Group** has been set up. Two of the group's members Andrea and Jan, who are playleaders at a local playgroup in Muirhouse, told **Scottish Child**,

"Working in the playgroup we get paid £18.50 a week for twelve and a half hours' work. It's embarrassing telling people what we earn. If we need anything - lino for the floor, curtains, toys, plates - we have to fundraise. But we have 14 kids there and they are happy wee bairns."

Lynn McCabe, the full-time worker with the action group, thinks this is ridiculous - "Can you imagine it happening in any other job? You're told 'We are going to employ you as a cook. You will get crap wages and you will need to

give the place a lick of paint; do a bit of fund-raising if you want any cups or plates; oh, and you will have to buy the food yourself!'"

The group has an active membership of about 20, consisting mainly of local parents who need help with childcare. The plan is to provide childcare in the community through the creation of a childcare centre - a centre that would give children good childcare and at the same time enable local parents to return to education, start training courses or find jobs.

"You go along to job interviews," says Andrea, "and they ask 'What experience have you got?' and if you tell them 'I've run a play scheme for five years' they just say 'But you don't have the nursery nurse qualification'. If I had decent childcare I'd be able to get that qualification."

The area has its share of mothers' and toddlers' groups, playgroups and nurseries - but what is really needed is an agency providing *flexible* childcare. A few hours of childcare a couple of days a week is no use for people who want to return to education, do a training course or find a job.

Without qualifications, taking a job can mean that a family's income is actually reduced, as Jan knows only too well. She joined the group because she was interested in adding training to her practical experience -

"I wanted to find out more about getting on courses. You see, I'm not qualified at all..."

"...except that you've raised four kids!" another group member, Lou, reminds her.

"When I was offered a job at a local college as a catering assistant," Jan continues, "it was going to make me £7 a week worse off - as well as losing free dinners for the four kids, the clothing grant and my free prescriptions. You have to be qualified and be able to get a good job to avoid becoming worse off." - but of course you can't get the qualifications if you can't get childcare!

"It's no surprise that parents feel marginalised," according to Lynn. "People want to come along to a meeting but feel they can't because they've got kids. You get politicians saying 'Nobody turns up to my meetings, I can't understand it - everybody moans about childcare, so why don't they come?'" The answer should be obvious.

So would anything change with a change of government? Do the generous phrases about childcare being an issue mean anything? Not according to Lou - "I don't think either of the main political parties give a damn. The Tory Party obviously don't. The mainstream Labour Party pays lip service to social ideas but it's not really into

a society where people live equally. All they are interested in is votes and power."

The feeling amongst these parents was that most of the childcare initiatives we hear so much about were more about meeting the needs of industry and commerce than helping poorer families cope. As Andrea puts it, "It is people who can afford childcare who benefit." Jan views the whole election process with more than a little cynicism - "It's only when it comes to election time that you notice it anyway, that they start helping you."

"I'm sure there are individual politicians who are different, some of them are okay," says Lou, "But there seems to be a difference between their personal views and what actually gets done. We don't just want to hear their words."

Election time is supposed to be when ordinary people get the chance to have their say and to influence the political process. So are these women in Pilton alone in feeling that elections won't change much?

Andrea has the last word: "Folk always said to me that if you didn't vote you were voting for the Conservatives. But I didn't vote last time around. The choice seemed irrelevant. I didn't really see the difference between them." ■

Stephen Naysmith



Diane Barrie



Taking on the Politicians

POVERTY POLITICS

A recent report in the HERALD headlined 'Gloom for Youngsters Seeking Jobs or Training' described a 13% rise in the numbers of young people seeking employment in Strathclyde Region - along with a 28% decrease in the availability of Youth Training (YT) places. This would be worrying enough if it were just a matter of lack of training - but it is a lot more serious than that.

Since the government withdrew automatic entitlement to Income Support for young people aged 16 and 17 - stating at the time that they could guarantee a place on a YT scheme for any young person who wanted one - the stark choice for most young people has been a YT place or destitution.

Of course if you are a young person in Strathclyde you could be lucky enough to get a real job - very lucky. In Strathclyde Region the Careers Service are told of about 30 job opportunities a week - that's 30 vacancies for the 5,300 young people registered with them.

A recent estimate from the STRATHCLYDE POVERTY ALLI-

ANCE puts the figure of young people currently living in destitution in Strathclyde at 4,000. Some of these young people will survive with the help of family and friends; but others face homelessness, crime, prostitution, drug abuse and the myriad of other horrors that await hungry and desperate young people.

This year the SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION FOR YOUTH CARE AND JUSTICE - an organisation involving social workers, community workers, career officers, Children's Panel members and many more - has mounted a major campaign to draw attention to homelessness and destitution amongst young Scots. We are pressing for the immediate reinstatement of the safety net of Income Support for 16 and 17 year olds and the raising of benefits to all young people under 25.

We started the campaign because we recognised that unless young people are protected from absolute destitution we simply can't do our jobs. What use is a social worker to a 17 year old who is hungry? What can a youth worker do for a young person with no roof over their head? What's the point of a Careers' Office when there are no careers on offer?

Last month the campaign organ-

ised a rally in Glasgow attended by over 200 young people. The rally heard from a range of speakers - including would-be MPs from all the political parties - and three local bands. The rally started, however, with a group of young people from Glasgow reading out statements about their own experiences:

'I left school at 16, tried for a YTS but there were no placements, so I tried for hardship allowance. I got a knockback because I hadn't a YTS place. Dad is about to throw me out because I have no dig money - what do I do?'

'I left school at 16 and applied for hardship and got a knockback. I got pregnant and applied again but I still got a knockback. The people in the Social just laughed at me as though I was stupid. I think if young people got some money to live on there would be less crime like shoplifting.'

'I left school and signed for hardship and got it for 6 weeks but I was giving it all to my ma for dig money. I took up shoplifting to get some extra money. I couldn't get a YTS place and my hardship money finished, so my ma threw me out. I went to stay with my boyfriend and have become involved with drugs.'

The politicians who spoke at the

rally didn't get an easy ride from the young people who have been through these sort of experiences - they weren't going to get away with hollow promises. As one young man asked one of them, "How do you know that you're not talking shite like all the rest of them?" How indeed?

The Conservative Party is the only party going into this election without a pledge to reinstate Income Support for 16 and 17 year olds and raise benefit levels for the under 25s. But how solid are the other parties' commitments? For example, Labour's Brian Wilson, speaking at the rally, would only say that it would be done within the lifetime of the next Labour government - a possible 5 years! Needless to say, the young people in the audience were not impressed by this answer at all.

16 and 17 year olds can't vote. Those of us who can should ensure that whoever we vote for knows that young people can't wait years to have their right to a subsistence income recognised. It's a little more urgent than that.

For more information about SAYCAJ, it can be contacted c/o Rosemount, Girdle Toll, Irvine. ■

Neil Ballantine

Kids at Play - Kids in Danger!

SAFETY

'Accidents will happen' is an old cliché being challenged by **The Drumchapel Healthy Cities Project** in their new report **Concrete Action**. This report looks at preventable accidents occurring in local playgrounds. Preventable accidents, in this case, are defined as anything other than "Cuts and bruises which are soon healed and can be considered part of the rough and tumble of childhood". That the accidents could have been prevented is underlined by Glasgow Health Board figures showing that more than twice the number of Drumchapel children were admitted to hospital because of accidents (excluding road accidents) as children from comparable schemes such as Castlemilk and Easterhouse. So the question raised by the report is - how big a role do playgrounds play in these statistics?

In order to answer this question a team of Community Health Volunteers undertook a **Children's Safe**

Play Areas questionnaire. What they discovered was that almost 30% of Drumchapel parents surveyed did not even allow their children to use local playgrounds as they were known to be too dangerous. Out of 192 accidents reported by 700 parents the vast majority (92%) were directly related to the use of equipment provided by the council.

Some pieces of equipment were described in the report as "So unattractive that it is doubtful that children would immediately identify them as play equipment". The concrete and gravel surfaces surrounding the equipment in the playgrounds were identified as "critical" in determining the severity of children's injuries. Lastly, bullying of small children by older children and problems created by drinkers/drug takers were seen as important in adversely affecting children's safety at play.

The report points out that these problems have been successfully tackled in other areas. On the one hand by the use of soft surfaces surrounding equipment such as tree

bark and astro turf and on the other by employing playground supervisors. Five suppliers of play equipment **Gametime, McLays Playground Supplies, The Play Practice Scotland, Hunt International** and **Kompan**, (all of whom have worked in the past for Scottish local authorities) were then asked to make presentations to the group. These consultations were aimed at gaining a clearer idea about the equipment the group *do* want to see in Drumchapel playgrounds.

Two play systems were identified as particularly interesting from the viewpoint of safety. The German Company Kaiser Kuhne's **Play Structures**

(from McLays), currently on use in a number of areas throughout Glasgow and the Scottish-made **Towdabout**, a mobile play system for children of pre-school age presently in use in Castlemilk, Motherwell and Stirling. But, the report reminds us, "If they (local authorities) pay insufficient attention to safety factors when installing equipment then virtu-

ally all equipment can become unsafe, despite efforts by manufacturers to deliver a safe system."

So what has come out of the survey so far? Lots of interest but no action as yet. The project is still waiting to hear if funding is available to carry out any of their recommendations. Project volunteer Loraine Houston sums up local feeling: "We were able to see for ourselves the danger our kids face - concrete bases, very high equipment which had been vandalised, broken glass... Judging by the information we have gathered, is it not about time Drumchapel kids had somewhere safe to go where they would be supervised? We think it's time something was done." ■

Alison Bell

For a copy of Concrete Action - A Report into Child Accidents in Play Areas in Drumchapel contact Pauline Craig of the Drumchapel Healthy Cities Project on 041-944 3866.





The Tooth Fairy and the Orthodontist

TEETH

The tooth fairy has been working overtime in our house. By last summer our younger daughter was sporting a complete set of new front teeth. Though slightly squint, they closed neatly and crunched apples efficiently. She was delighted with them and so were we.

But other people were not so sanguine. Relations drew me aside and hoped I was going to 'get something done about them'. Our dentist informed us that she had arranged an appointment with an orthodontist. We were caught up in one of the parental rituals of the late 20th century.

A recent two-page spread in a best-selling women's magazine entitled 'Coping with protruding teeth' illustrated well current social norms about teeth. In it we are told that attractive teeth are increasingly important in our society; that protruding teeth and the associated condition of receding jaw are unattractive, resulting in a 'vacant appearance'; and that a parent whose child has such teeth should be persuaded to seek orthodontic help, even if they see no problem. Other articles speak of teasing, unpopularity and low self esteem resulting from irregularities of vari-

ous kinds; of difficulties with hygiene and the risk of decay.

Strong stuff, which any parent would ignore at their peril. Treatment is free on the NHS, braces are now not only socially acceptable but one of the rites of passage in early adolescence. Why hesitate?

Well, partly a distrust of medical procedures which are not essential, partly personal acquaintance with many adults whose teeth are squint but whose lives are unscathed. And partly a recent realisation that much of the current view has been challenged by research.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder - and there seems nothing inherently unattractive in irregular teeth. Indeed a heroine in a Mary Wesley novel is described as having, as one of her *attractions*, teeth which are like a row of dancers out of step. And a number of research studies suggest that members of the public, parents and children frequently see nothing unaesthetic about teeth which orthodontists see as a problem. Quite reasonably, they tend to focus on the person's eyes rather than their mouth.

Nor is it at all clear that irregular teeth create psychological problems for their owners. A recent piece of research found little evidence that children with straight or

straightened teeth had higher self-esteem than others whose teeth are less conventionally pleasing - self-esteem depended much more on other aspects of body image and personality. This bears out my own experience - the most noticeably protruding teeth and the most markedly receding jaw that I have met belong to two women in their late 20s whose chief attributes are their cheerful, outgoing personalities and their long strings of admirers.

I am sure that some children do suffer badly from teasing over teeth, though a 1980 study suggests that this is less common than teasing over other physical attributes such as height, weight and hair. But if teasing occurs, this seems to argue for straightening out the attitudes of the tormentors rather than the victims' teeth.

Finally, I am suspicious of the claim that irregular teeth make dental hygiene more difficult, leading to decay. My pre-brace generation numbers many friends and relations with uneven teeth, and though all of us have fillings they are mostly in our straight back teeth, not in the crooked front ones. The 1986 Schenschieff Report on Unnecessary Dental Treatment quotes research which also questions the claim, and points out that braces themselves can cause pain

and problems to teeth and gums - one child in five drops out of treatment.

Obviously treatment is entirely appropriate if it is to ensure that children can use their teeth efficiently or if the irregularity is so extreme that it causes embarrassment or distress. But for many, like our daughter, it seems to be simply about making minor alterations to appearance.

The Schenschieff Report suggests that "Much unnecessary and costly treatment may be taking place, and that this may in part be caused by the treatment philosophy of those undertaking orthodontics". Demand for orthodontic treatment has indeed grown dramatically over the past 20 years - in Scotland between January 1990 and March 1991 the cost of treatment involving appliances was over £3.5m. In a country where two-thirds of 12 year olds have decayed teeth, aren't there better ways of using the money?

Our daughter is in no doubt about it. "I definitely don't want them straightened. I like them the way they are. I don't like the look of braces and I think it's a waste of money. The government should spend it on more trains". ■

Ann Laybourn

The Schemes are Alive...

MUSIC

What's top of the charts? **Simply Red, KLF, Madonna, or Prince?** Not at all. When **Scottish Child** asked the young musical enthusiasts of Petersburn for their favourite sounds among the replies were stars of the sixties and seventies **Pink Floyd, Roy Orbison, Donovan** and that supergroup of the 1980s **Dire Straits**. Even when the project received a visit from **Deacon Blue's** Ricky Ross it was just business as usual - because making music has now arrived in Petersburn and having made a record (sorry CD) is no longer the stuff you can only dream about.

Petersburn, Airdrie is a housing scheme which in official terms is recorded as 'suffering from extreme levels of multiple deprivation and economic decline'. What this has meant for the majority of local teenagers is a social life which they describe as 'having nothing to do except hang about on the streets and sometimes get drunk'. That was until the opening of the purpose built **Petersburn Community Library and Youth Project** - managed by Monklands District Libraries - made things a bit cheerier for young people on the scheme.

Not only does the library-based project offer a warm, friendly place

to go in an area scarred by boarded up shops and houses, but it is attempting to provide a range of things to do which take account of the *real* interests of young people - especially their love of music. The other big plus is that the facilities are offered free of charge and are reserved primarily for the use of young people aged 13 to 25 in the surrounding Petersburn / Craigneuk areas.

The initial success of the project was obvious when **Scottish Child** visited a few weeks ago. "This place is jam packed in the afternoons" Debbie, 14 told us, "it's really popular after school." Why? "Well, We can just sit around and talk, play tapes, use the computers or watch the satellite television. Me and my friend Karen are learning to play the drums together."

At present there is a choice of drum or guitar lessons and the project will be purchasing ten guitars (cue for a song?) to lend to young people who think they might like to take up playing. The practice room / recording studio is also a magnet for already existing local bands. For these, more advanced users, they are able to offer teaching in a range of recording studio skills including the latest techniques of computerised sequencing. In the longer term the plan is to produce a regular fanzine and a compilation

music tape which would be distributed through libraries to promote local bands.

Lifelong Elvis fan, Chris, aged 17, has been singing his hero's songs since he was four. Now seven weeks after coming to the project he has recorded his own version of The King's 'I Want You With Me' and is taking weekly guitar lessons so he can accompany himself while performing live. He wouldn't mind being a pop star.

"It was really quite simple," says Chris modestly, "I just asked if I could do a song. It took Stewart and Dave two days working in the studio to lay down the accompanying tracks and backing vocals and then I came in for a day to lay my vocals over it. I sang my song three times and they mixed each version to put the best bits into the final tape."

The project's two part-time community musicians, David Fagan and Stewart McLeod are former members of the band **Wild River Apples**. They were recently tipped for chart success until like many young bands they lost their recording contract in the current recession hitting the music industry. The pair's professional experience has been invaluable to the project and they have now recorded some songs with their new band to demonstrate the high quality that the studio's equipment is capable

of producing. "Record companies are really jumpy at the moment," says Stewart, "they'll throw money at bands but if they're not an instant success they panic immediately. So they concentrate all their efforts into selling a few big names". However, small independent labels are making a comeback and as Stewart points out "Decent recording equipment is becoming cheaper and more and more accessible," this and the rise of 'sampling' (borrowing sequences of music from other records and reworking it using computers) has led to the end of multi-million pound supergroups' monopoly on quality. Many of today's top dance records are produced in someone's bedroom.

Curiously, however, it's a down to earth, acoustic style that is popular in Petersburn - there isn't much interest in synthetic rave-type dance music. George Williamson, Community Development Worker with the project describes the local taste as "Varied, but generally with the emphasis on thoughtful, lyrical content." As if to underline his point as **Scottish Child** were departing a local heavy metal outfit were tuning up in the practice room whilst next door a lad was striving to perfect the chords of an old Bob Dylan number. ■

Alison Bell



Colin Chalmers



IN BRIEF

What lengths will people go to to avoid **school testing**? Let's face it, Michael Forsyth's national testing scheme for all primary 4 and 7 children hasn't exactly been a roaring success. In fact, according to Fred Forrester of the **EIS** the extent of the government's defeat over national testing has not yet been fully appreciated and will be a matter of interest for future political historians.

Speaking at a public meeting in Skye last month Fred Forrester, the organising secretary of the **EIS**, said that so many parents were now withdrawing their children from the test that it had to be regarded as optional.

"The humiliation began last session," said Mr Forrester, "when two-thirds of parents rebelled and the Minister had to live with the consequences of the rebellion. Now, in session 1991/92, all the signs are that the army of dissident parents has grown - and that withdrawal will affect over 75% of eligible children.

"There is surely a lesson for students of the British constitution. In the last resort, a policy which requires the active participation of a large section of the population depends on consent and cannot be imposed through legislation. To push through unpopular policies leads first to administrative raggedness but ultimately to a lessening of respect for the law. This is the real lesson to be learned from the national testing debacle."

That may be the lesson for those-who-see-to-govern, certainly. But there is another lesson of course,

for those-who-are-governed - we've got the *real* power!

Six months on from when **Scottish Child** first noted the threatened closure of the **Achamore Centre** there is still no news from Greater Glasgow Health Board about the future of this pioneering centre for children with special needs in north-west Glasgow.

The letters of support for the centre continue to flood in to the Health Board - 800 from students at Queen Margaret Union last month, to add to the thousands of signatures already received. Helena McNulty, secretary of the **Achamore Parents' Group** reports that the only response to all this lobbying so far has been one letter from the Health Board telling them that their views will be 'taken into consideration'.

The parents are outraged at the Board's claims that the building is in such a bad condition through vandalism that it will be 'uneconomic' to repair it. They know that vandalism would never have been a problem if the Board had not withdrawn the full-time caretaker two years ago - and they said so at the time. Sounds - are we right? - suspiciously like setting up the conditions for closure. But the signs are that the Board didn't quite bank on the strength of the opposition. We'll be reporting again.

The need for more and better childcare for under-fives has had a good deal of publicity in the run-up to the general election but as thousands of working parents know

SCOTTISH CHILD APPEAL

SCOTTISH CHILD's Appeal for Friends is six months old. We have found Friends in familiar and unexpected places and been cheered by all the messages of support and goodwill - below we list those who have decided to become a **FRIEND OF SCOTTISH CHILD** so far. We have also raised some much needed cash. But more still has to be found for the Appeal to reach its half-way target of £5,000.

A magazine which asserts the importance of childhood and children by the quality of its writing, range of contributors and professional design cannot survive unaided - that's the clear, unequivocal message we are giving our readers through the Friends' Appeal. Being a Friend doesn't mean agreeing with every article in the magazine: but it does mean agreeing with the importance of the overall project of **SCOTTISH CHILD** - to give voice to ideas and views which are drowned out by the hubbub of the mass media.

That's the importance - and the uniqueness - of **SCOTTISH CHILD**.

And *that's* what you'd be helping to support by becoming a Friend. The form is on page 4 - please use it today.

FRIENDS OF SCOTTISH CHILD SO FAR

John Aitkenhead
Morag Aitkenhead
Graham Atherton
Alison Balmarry
Francis Bowman
The Bruce Trust
Irene Buchanan
Malcolm Chalmers
ChildLine Scotland
B Cochrane-Muir
Cormorant Films
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Eildon Dyer
Edinburgh Family Service Unit
Bob Goupillot
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Charlotte McEachran
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McLays Playground Supplies Ltd
Caroline Naysmith
Rena Phillips
Pilton Youth Programme
Alan Riddell
Moira Scott
Who Cares? Scotland
William Wolfe
Young Families Now

Plus anonymous Friends

the need for good quality childcare doesn't stop once children go to school. What does your child do **after school** if you don't get home till six in the evening and have to work over the school holidays?

You may be lucky enough to have an after school playscheme or club in your locality - or you may have to rely on the goodwill of neighbours or friends to help you out. After school and holiday care for school-age children is needed more than ever but is still only patchily available throughout Scotland. Those who run such services have no means of knowing what else is going on in their area - let alone in other parts of the country.

That should change though, according to Rita Hopper, Development Worker at the **Strathclyde After School Association**. She has been helping to launch the **Scottish Out of School Network** which will appoint a co-ordinator later this year. The co-ordinator

will advise and support groups all over Scotland who want to organise or improve childcare for school-age children. One of the co-ordinator's tasks will be to put childcare groups in touch with each other so that each region gradually develops a self-supporting network.

The **Scottish Out of School Network** can be contacted c/o SASCA, 39 Hope Street, Glasgow G2 (Phone 041-221 8119).

Were you one of the lucky ones who went to the first **Scottish Child Ceilidh** at the St Bride's Centre in Edinburgh on 21st March? Well, if you were you'll know how well the party went and how shoes were worn through with dancing to the Robert Fish Ceilidh Band! This was the first of the Benefit events **Scottish Child** is running in 1992 to help towards the Appeal. Our thanks to the band for giving their services free and to all of you who made it such a good evening. ■



Out in the open

The Overnewton Centre in Glasgow is Scotland's leading centre for working with child sexual abuse. **Rosemary Milne** went there to talk to project leader **Tom Hammond** and his colleagues **Theresa Cowe**, **Helen Happer**, **Jan Ferguson** and **Maureen Sanders** about their work.

We start off by talking about what happens in a family once sexual abuse is revealed. "Once a child has told you," says Helen, who along with Theresa is a senior social worker at the Centre, "the temptation is to think that things will start to get better. But of course in the short term they often don't. In fact once the sexual abuse is out in the open everyone may feel for a while as if chaos has been unleashed. Part of our job is to help families and social workers through this phase, to reassure them that the chaos is temporary. It does subside and things do eventually get better."

The Overnewton Centre was set up in 1987. Its aim since then has been to develop ways of working with families where sexual abuse is either known or suspected to have occurred - and to offer training and consultancy to other professionals working with sexual abuse.

It's a unique service. Funded by the Greater Glasgow Health Board, the Scottish Office, the RSSPCC and Strathclyde Region Social Work

Department, the Centre balances the need to maintain what they call a 'practice base' - a small number of families with whom they work intensively - with being an 'action research unit' committed to sharing its knowledge throughout Scotland. Overnewton's collaboration with area teams in Strathclyde may be direct and hands-on or remain a background consultative service to different professionals working with a family. This variety allows the staff to meet with a whole range of professionals, many of whom have no experience of responding to cases of sexual abuse.

Maureen, a teacher by training, has written with Ouaine Bain **Out in the Open - a guide for young people who have been sexually abused** - a straightforward, clearly written book for survivors of sexual abuse. The book's down-to-earth advice has already helped countless survivors and is beginning to receive international recognition. Maureen agrees that the straightforward style of the book reflects the general approach

that the staff at Overnewton adopt in helping children survive sexual abuse:

"People working with children often need basic information, some guidelines about what to look for. Without a certain level of awareness you'll never be suspicious. You have to admit to yourself that sexual abuse exists as a phenomenon before you can see that it might be there.

"A common question from teachers is 'How much leeway do I have to check out my suspicions before I have to act on them?'. It's a question that regularly comes up in the Centre's own work with families as well. There is, of course, no easy answer. The rights of the parents and children in the family need to be considered as well as any concerns about the safety of the child."

The fear that intervention may be worse than the abuse is a common one. Many teachers, and other professionals working daily with children, describe themselves as feeling frightened at the idea of tackling an abuser about what may

'People don't want to believe that nice, ordinary men do these things'

have been happening. And there is enough evidence around by now - in Cleveland, Orkney and elsewhere - to suggest that there can be a very wide gap between the rhetoric of the 'child's best interests' and the actions of both parents and authorities once sexual abuse has been alleged.

The Centre assumes full statutory responsibility for some of the families it is working with including, where necessary, supervising a child on a compulsory supervision order from a children's hearing. "Some children are on supervision orders", Helen explains, "but in practice the compulsory order may be of limited use. The degree to which the mother, as the non-abusing parent, is willing and able to join in the work is crucial here."

It is not a slip of the tongue that makes Helen refer to 'the mother'. The experience of the Overnewton staff is that it is almost always men who are responsible for sexual abuse. Supporting the mother is therefore crucial to the long-term survival of families. But the mother, in turn, must be able to give the abused child a clear message that it is the abuser, not the child, who is responsible for what has happened. She must be helped to not reject the child as a result of the upheaval caused by the child's revelation of sexual abuse.

What does a social worker do if he or she feels that this non-abusing mother must have been at least dimly aware of abuse and chose to ignore it? How difficult is it for a social worker to voice that fear if the 'professionally correct' view is that the non-abusing parent must also be believed if she says she did not realise what was going on? That's not the least of the thorny problems which the Overnewton staff have to work with - both for themselves and for the local authority social workers they help.

"Sexual abuse arouses such strong, negative feelings in everyone", Helen continues, "and it's sometimes quite easy to point the finger of blame at the non-abusing parent. We do have to remind ourselves that a lot of mothers have themselves been treated very badly by the abuser - they start from a very low base of self-esteem with which to meet the needs of their child."

The staff at the Overnewton Centre take a broader approach to the problems of sexual abuse within families than is often possible for other professionals working with such families. "We are described as working with families where sexual abuse has been uncovered," says Tom, "but a lot of our work at any time may be focused on issues other than sexual abuse. For example, families quite often want to leave the area where the abuse took place. Also, with the abuser out of the house, the family may have lost the main breadwinner and money may be a major problem. Lots of questions come up in the work we do with families. We do not restrict our work to the sexual abuse only."

One of the distinguishing features of the work at Overnewton is the long-term nature of the commitment to a family. The Centre remains involved as long as the family seems to require help - and this can mean years rather than months. As Tom puts it,

"There are strong pressures on local authority social workers to achieve tangible results.

'Resolving' the immediate crisis allows a social worker and his or her manager to close the case or give it reduced priority, freeing the social worker to deal with another equally or now more urgent case. So a 'successful result' can be defined as making sure the child's safety is no longer at risk or that some measure of stability has returned to the family.

"But an emphasis on 'resolving things' can present dangers. One of the ideas we try to get across to social work departments is that you can never be sure that you have 'completed the work' with a sexually abused child or the family. But all too often if further work has to be done at a later stage the social worker who was responsible for the original work may be made to feel that he or she didn't do the job properly the first time around."

DO:

- remember you are not going crazy. You are not mad and you are not bad. To have got this far you are courageous and strong
- try to talk to an adult you can trust about what is troubling you *most* at this time. It could be that you need help to deal with family reactions, or you could be worried about what is happening to the abuser, or you could be wanting to feel safe
- ask questions of any professional people involved about what is happening and what decisions are being made
- take one day at a time

DON'T:

- be tempted to say that it was all lies in the first place. *However many pressures are on you at this time, you are right to stick to the truth. You owe it to yourself*
- hurt yourself. If you feel suicidal and can't get help from the people around you - try one of the phone-lines (for instance *ChildLine, the RSSPCC, the Samaritans*)
- despair. This time will pass. Each hurdle you overcome is making you a stronger person

(From OUT IN THE OPEN)

Helen agrees. "Traumatic events such as sexual abuse have a habit of resurfacing and affecting a person's life not once, but again and again. I don't mean by that that a person who has been sexually abused is somehow 'stuck' as a victim for the rest of his or her life - what is sometimes called the 'damaged goods' view of sexual abuse. But things do crop up in people's lives that lead them to reassess or even relive aspects of their history - that's true for people who have been sexually abused as with anyone else. If you accept this, you can see that a model of social work oriented towards concluding work with a client may be quite at odds with the needs of that client. It may also be at odds with a social worker's gut feeling about how the case should be handled - but the institutional demands of a busy social work office, coupled with fears about 'creating dependency' in the client, often mean that social workers withdraw from contact when there is still useful and

necessary work to be done."

All the staff at Overnewton are aware that much of what is on offer to families is time-limited. They see this inability to tailor resources to need as being a key reason why professionals restrict their involvement with families - 'What do I do if I have to stop after a short while when I know more is needed?'

The discussion moves on to the problems of empowering professionals working with families - and the families themselves. Professionals working with abused families often face undermining attitudes from others in their own profession that mirror society's uncomfortable attitude to sexual abuse. Jan, a health visitor by training, says she regularly has to justify her decision to come out of 'mainstream' work to other health visitors. "I feel my professional competence is on the line. The spoken or unspoken question 'Why are you so interested in this kind of work?' is around a lot of the time."

As for the families, everyone is of the view that groups in which parents of abused children can meet to talk are invaluable. Helen points out that "If you can't talk it through with others who have been through similar experiences, you can become very depressed. You get very disabled by it."

We move on to talk about why there doesn't seem to be any clamorous campaign against sexual abuse in this country. One explanation the team put forward is that it is more difficult to organise and publicise such a campaign because of the exceptionally private, personal nature of the abuse that has occurred. Certainly on a political level, sexual abuse is an issue that is dealt with in a piecemeal, reactive way - there seems a reluctance to acknowledge just what a commonplace, everyday occurrence it is.

The Orkney Enquiry, with its vast expenditure of public money on lawyers' fees to come to conclusions that are likely to offer nothing new to those who actually have to deal with sexual abuse, illustrates this reluctance all too clearly. If the main result of the Orkney Enquiry is, as now seems likely, some advice about tightening up the rules relating to the questioning of small children in advance of court hearings, we should certainly be asking the politicians how they can justify spending millions of pounds on the exercise - especially when those services that actually offer real help - the Overnewton Centre, the Scottish Child Law Centre and others with axed or threatened government grants - are not within miles of meeting the needs of those who have been and are being abused.

The staff at Overnewton carry on, though - aware that they are working with a problem that many people would rather not hear mentioned. "It comes back again and again", says Jan, "to the fact that people don't want to believe that nice, ordinary men do these things. And the media, especially the press, powerfully express society's anger and fear towards the message-bearers who bring such awful tidings." ■

OUT IN THE OPEN - A guide for young people who have been sexually abused by *Ouaine Bain and Maureen Sanders* is published by *Virago* at £3.99.

ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION



men on men

Having given up on any attempt to get a 'representative cross-section' of men to have the definitive discussion on the subject, four of the lads got together over a few coffees to talk about men - and a few other things besides. Taking part were **Bob Goupillot** a university researcher, **Kinnon Hutchison** who's unemployed, **Colin White** a dramatherapist who co-runs Scottish Child's gender workshops and **Colin Chalmers** Scottish Child's editor.

Bob: It's quite difficult knowing what 'being a man' means these days. I think we suppress ourselves as men quite a lot, because we're unhappy with the aggressive, macho stereotype we've been given. I was brought up to be aggressive and punch people, be a typical man. I didn't cry. And then I went through a period when I repressed the anger in me because I

thought 'I shouldn't be like this'. I ended up going quiet, suppressing myself instead of being different.

Colin C: I remember a time - ten, fifteen years ago - when people I knew hardly ever said that they fancied anyone. You couldn't do it, because by fancying someone you were excluding

someone else. I don't know where that fear of being wrong by fancying someone came from but it was very strong.

Colin W: That's what I felt, that sexual attraction was somehow equated with oppression.

Kinnon: The idea that finding someone sexually attractive is wrong or bad sounds a bit extreme to me. I certainly couldn't accept that - maybe I'm just lucky for not having lived through that era. I don't feel any guilt if I'm sexually attracted to someone - it's what I do with that that could be wrong or bad.

Bob: I agree, but there was a time when I used to think 'But what do I now do? What's the right way of saying to someone that you fancy them?'

Colin W: I used to feel that the only way I would be attractive to these feminist women I knew would be to be sexless - and then they would like me. I was really trying to please them and fit in with what I thought they wanted me to be. That completely undermined everything that I was, who I was. It just about cracked me up.

Colin C: I think these are quite different experiences from the majority of people though. I don't think they're typical experiences.

Bob: I think men are often emotionally uneducated. The thing about men is that because we're traditionally not encouraged to express our emotions we never get the chance to get it wrong so we can get it right. It's not as easy for us to be in touch with our emotions because we're forever holding back, we don't burst into tears.

Kinnon: You mean expressing feelings wrongly so you can learn how to express them right?

Bob: Yeah.

Colin W: I don't know what that means. What does it mean to express emotions wrongly?

Kinnon: Being oppressive to somebody else. When you're being physically aggressive to somebody because you're angry at them, I'd say that would be a wrong way to express an emotion. It's okay to be angry at somebody without being physically threatening, just saying 'Look, I'm really pissed off at you'.

Bob: I feel that as a boy growing up my emotions weren't given full play. I was told 'Big boys don't cry' and all those cliches. I think my sister was also emotionally repressed but in a different way. If she burst into tears that was a girl or a woman bursting into tears whereas for a boy that definitely wasn't encouraged. I remember being put in scary situations where I had to be tough - I didn't want to be, I wanted my mammy, I wanted to run home and cry, but I couldn't do it.

Kinnon: I know what you mean, I think that thing about not being allowed to express emotions is quite universal. Maybe it's tougher on men because we're not allowed to express feelings at all, but it's still there for girls. I'm not saying that in order to be a good person, a good man, you have to reverse the tables and have man becoming submissive to woman - but I think you have to think what is and isn't acceptable. I've heard some pretty radical

'It's quite difficult knowing what 'being a man' means these days' - Bob

feminists say things that I just can't accept. So I don't accept them.

Colin W: Thinking back to the height of the women's movement, I think women felt that in order for them to work out who they wanted to be they needed to remove themselves from men, take a step back into groups where there were just women so they could discover who they were and who they wanted to be and forget about trying to please men. And that's what is happening for me now - that's why this men's group I'm in is so important for me. I'm beginning to find ways of being who I am. I find quite a lot of women sexually attractive, I'm a man who can be angry and aggressive and that's okay. I find it tremendously supportive to be told that that's okay by other men and that they're like that too.

Colin C: But there's nothing new about men's groups. Men's groups run the country and always have done. The Cabinet is a men's group. There's nothing new in men getting together, so what's different about these men's groups? Is it something to do with a dissatisfaction with men's roles, wanting to change them, or is it just about feeling all right about how things are?

Bob: We're brought up with an idealised image of men. For a lot of men growing up daddy is absent for a lot of the time, much more than mummy. Men are absent, there's a vacuum to be filled and the image you get is Clint Eastwood, big and tough and riding horses. We all know we're not like that but we think there's all these other guys who are.

Colin C: The images were never just John Wayne though, it's more subtle than that. They weren't all just mindless thugs. Some of them show some emotion, vulnerability. Your hero these days sheds a tear occasionally and shows some sensitivity - but is that it? Is that everything all right now?

Colin W: Everyone looks for heroes to model themselves on. I remember when I was growing up looking around for clues about what sort of man I should be. All this 'should be' all the time.

Colin C: All this stuff about the absent father seems to be saying there's an absence there for men so there's a sense of being lost that women don't have in the same way. Women are in a sense less lost than men - and that's the roots of a lot of men's rage. Why do men get violent and get abusive? Where does that rage come from?

Bob: As a child you want to be loved, you want affection, and if you don't get it despite your whole body trying to get it, that is bound to bring rage. Later on as adults that comes out, some people take it out on the child that was them or they beat up their wives because this woman can never love them enough.

Colin W: Rape is like the most desperate attempt to get a woman to love them. It's the absolute last, hopeless attempt.

Kinnon: Isn't the desperation in rape that of wanting to exert power over somebody? I don't know, maybe we're in danger of stereotyping rapists.

Colin W: The man feels himself to be in a very

powerless place, he wants to be loved and the woman who refuses that is powerful in his eyes. He's angry, and the only way he finds to counter the woman's power to refuse is to force himself on her. But of course he's not going to get what he really wants.

Colin C: The level of domestic violence is just so high, and so hidden. Women's Aid turn away 5 out of every 6 women who come to them - that's just the ones who go to Women's Aid. Day in, day out, women and children put up with abuse from men. I think you have to keep remembering that, I think men especially have to keep remembering that.

Bob: Do you think men talk about abusing women in their lives? Because it's so common it must be being perpetrated by men we know.

Kinnon: I don't think they do openly discuss it. There's always that thing that it's all right for men to commit violence against men but a lot of men - often quite aggressive men - find it unacceptable to hit a woman.

Colin C: At the same time I know of women getting beaten up by men and guys in the room just walking out - it's a private matter. There is a widely held view, a male view and a quite predominant one in the police, that violence in the home, 'domestics', are a private matter. It's not that long ago that wives were husbands' property.

Bob: There is a female equivalent to that attitude that says that male-on-male violence is not an issue. For a lot of women, if guys are fighting then that's up to them. It may be undesirable but it's not an issue - a man hitting a woman is political, you do something about it, we all have to take a stand on it, whereas it's just unfortunate if one guy hits another guy and one of the guys isn't into it. Depending on where we are in society we do tend to see certain types of violence as permissible. I hate to see kids hurt, it really makes me get agitated, but some people would say 'what's the problem?' about that.

Kinnon: I think some women's attitude that men can beat each other up might be because they see it as inevitable rather than permissible - just men being men. It disturbs me to see two men knocking lumps out of each other but when it's a man hitting a woman or a man hitting a child I feel a different kind of revulsion, it's just unacceptable.

Colin W: Don't you think that people who feel really powerless in their lives will always seek somebody that they can feel powerful with? Somebody they can take out their rage about being powerless on? So the guy who's unemployed, has no chance of work, bottom of the pile, shitty housing - he's got one person around that he can take that out on.

Kinnon: That's stereotyping a bit - I qualify on all those criteria, I feel powerless in terms of social change but I don't feel *that* powerless because who am I left with at the end of the day but me. When people say 'what can I do to change 'IT'', well it's got to be internal. It's got to start with yourself.

Colin C: I think you've also got a bit of responsibility with other men to not go along with

women-hating, subtle or not. I don't mean being right-on about it, I don't think that works. I think it's a mistake, for instance in youth work, to always tell guys 'It's sexist to talk about your bird, you have to talk about your girlfriend' - they just tune out, you're not having any effect. But when it's real, when it's men talking about women like they're scum, it's time to say 'Wait a minute, why do you feel women are worthless?' It's about exploring it - which can be a lot more difficult than telling kids not to act in a particular way while you're around - and sometimes saying 'That's not on'. It's a lot to do with men talking to each other more.

Kinnon: In an all-male hostel I stayed in recently there were a lot of people coming from a lot of different backgrounds and that was sometimes a problem for me. If there are really derogatory statements being flung about about a woman, or women in general, and someone looks to you and waits for you to laugh, a good a reaction as any is sometimes just to say 'You're talking shit - it doesn't turn me on, it doesn't make me laugh, it doesn't make me think you're a big shot'. But I have to come to the point of saying that. That's what I mean about internal change - 'If you want to hold those views I can't stop you, but I can refuse to go along with you and humour you'.

Colin W: It comes back to that rage, that's what these men are feeling. And how do we, because I include myself in this, get our rage out?

Bob: I think a way of dealing with it is to understand where it's coming from. You never get rid of a blind rage because you don't know where it's coming from or where it should be going - when you find out where it's coming from then you can say 'I am an angry young man because my old man was a bastard, he used to knock me around all the time, and the person I should be angry at is him'. Once you start to understand where the anger comes from then it starts to go away. You can still feel anger, but it's a rational anger about things that happen to you now.

Colin W: We've talked about the need to challenge other men's behaviour but I think that hand-in-hand with that is a need to accept other men. You need to really hear who this person is. Once you do that, and a lot of men have never been really heard, then the deep hurt underneath can begin to be shown.

Colin C: One of my reservations about the whole gender, 'sexism' discussion is that most of the people who do most of the talking live lives in which sexual discrimination is mostly about relationships and so on; not the brutal, economic stuff about women getting paid half of what men get, becoming homeless if you complain about your husband beating you up. I wonder sometimes if we're in danger of whining on so much about how bad it is being a man that we start thinking we're actually worse off than women who are able to talk to each other, who are open to their emotions and all that whereas we men are emotional cripples who after going to men's groups for years and years might eventually be able to be like women.

Colin W: I don't know about that. I've been very



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INSIDE OUT

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► aware of this attempt to make out that deep down we're just the same as a woman. I think we have to acknowledge that men and women are different and that it's okay being different. There's no way I'm the same as women, my whole life experience as a man is bound to be different from women's.

Colin C: I feel more similar to some women I know than some men. And it's not just about being able to talk to women easier because they're better listeners - I feel more in touch and more in tune with some women than with a lot of guys. I remember going out dancing a while ago with a couple of female friends and this guy started dancing with them, bumping into them, and I just felt I had more in common with them than him, I identified with them. And I don't think that's uncommon or strange.

Colin W: I really don't understand what you mean by saying you identified with these women. Maybe you sympathised with them or felt more friendly to them or more attracted to them but that's not the same as feeling that you're the same as them. That guy would never go and bump his hip up against yours - you can't possibly be in the same position as them. You're really just like him, you want to please women too, at some level we all want to do that and there's nothing wrong with that. He's just got it wrong, he's picked the wrong people to bump his hip up against. But he'll go to another disco and there'll be women who love that. You're just pleasing them in your own way, which is fine.

Bob: I can see ways in which I'm not like women, but there are women I know with a similar background to me, similar age, similar experiences in their lives, who I feel I'm very like. There's a common ground there.

Colin C: I can't agree with the idea that there are men and women and these are almost separate worlds. That's not my experience. I dislike that view equally in men and women. I get very angry and frustrated at women who, because I am a man, will not listen to what I have to say. I think the idea that there is an unbridgeable gap between men and women is just silly.

Colin W: It is silly. Men and women share a lot - we've all got lungs and hearts and brains and we're all born into the world in much the same way. But from there on in things diverge and I resist this attempt to merge and make things safe - denying our fear of the other by making out that everything's just the same. There is a difference between men and women and I think a lot of people are frightened of that difference because they can never really understand it.

Colin C: I don't see this need to divide the entire human race into two different species and say we're just so different - it's the way Afrikaners talk about black people in South Africa.

Kinnon: Obviously you relate to some women better than some men and some women relate to some men better than some women. I don't really understand what's trying to be established here. I relate to some women better than I relate to a lot of men but I also relate to some men better than some women.

Colin W: But that's about getting along with people. I get along with lots of women, but there's always an energy there that's about our difference, our sexual difference.

Bob: There are women I know who if I was to think about it I would say 'Yes, I find that

women sexually attractive' - but I don't think that's what is determining the relationship most of the time. There are other things at work as well - I like them, they come from a similar background, they understand what I'm saying.

Colin C: If we're talking about how big a part sex plays in relationships, I just think 'It depends'. Sometime it doesn't play much of a role, sometimes it's just about all it is. And sex is so mixed up with power and rage and other stuff. The way sex and pornography get mixed up is a clear indicator of that. Pornography is an enormous industry which exploits millions of people, mainly women and quite a lot of children. Sex isn't pornography but the two get mixed up a lot - it says a lot about us that something that's really nice and something that's really horrible get so mixed up all the time.

Bob: Sex is all twisted up in our society. If we are to believe what we read about societies like Polynesia, they didn't have these guilty, dirty feeling about sexuality. It was just a thing that people did with each other that was enjoyable. I'm sure there was rivalry and jealousy, but not the guilt and hypocrisy.

Colin W: I don't think it does any good men being told that they're bad people, which is what they've been told by feminists. Men who are told that they're inherently bad people aren't going to put any energy into seeing the woman's point of view. In my experience the commonest response to being told you're bad is to become more stubbornly what you're like rather than to think about changing.

Colin C: I suppose I think that sort of feminism is dead and gone, on the way out anyway, because I think people have realised that the world isn't just a patriarchy where men are the enemy. I think people realise that women are oppressed in our society, that there is real oppression, real poverty, real violence caused by men against women but that you don't overcome that by getting rid of men.

'There is a difference between men and women and I think a lot of people are frightened of that difference because they can never really understand it' - Colin White

Bob: You don't get rid of racism by abolishing white people.

Colin C: But equally you don't let racists get away with what they're doing.

Bob: I have been a sexist git - I was brought up that way. I only learnt to change by people saying 'That's out of order, what you just said'.

Kinnon: I can relate to that. I still get occasional pangs of guilt, sometimes quite strong, about when I was a kid in care between 14 and 16. I think I was quite promiscuous and forceful, discovering what it was like having an orgasm. I think that I was really oppressive to some of the girls I was involved with. I can't think where the influence came from that made me start to change, be more concerned about not being oppressive towards women. In the first three years of my sexual experience I didn't even think about the fact that a woman wasn't feeling

what I was feeling, it didn't cross my mind. Maybe it was when that crossed my mind, that I realised the woman had a right to some of the enjoyment, that I started almost trying to ensure that a woman got pleasure from sex. When I'm in bed with a woman I'll ask her what she wants me to do. I use my own experiences and we'll talk about what we like, we'll communicate.

Bob: My memory of early sex is that you didn't talk. Once you got into it you stopped talking. I remember when I was about 18 this woman saying 'One thing I liked about you was you didn't stop talking to me'.

Colin C: Was that a compliment or what?

Bob: Yes, it was - I didn't suddenly switch into vampire mode. I wasn't really conscious of it, but it was important to her that I saw her as a person.

Colin C: I'm a great believer in fun breaking down barriers. I think you can actually communicate through just having a laugh. Sex can be just good fun. That's what worries me about this idea of the big divide between men and women, it all gets very heavy.

Colin W: You're painting it like a chasm where you can't meet this person - I feel that I can meet a woman, but she's a woman I'm meeting. She's different from me. And for me, as a heterosexual man, there's a lot of excitement in that difference.

Colin C: With every woman you meet?

Colin W: Somewhere that is there, that energy.

Colin C: But it's not always there - sexual attraction, fancying someone, isn't always the most important thing, this big primary thing that is more important than any other thing. I think there's a big danger in people saying 'This is the way things are for everyone all the time' - people are very different and I like that.

Bob: I think that sometimes the sexual recedes

into the background and other characteristics may become more important. The sexual aspect will never go away, but it can become less important.

Colin C: It's like talking about being Scottish. I'm Scottish - but I don't go about, as some people go about, constantly thinking of myself as Scottish. But if I'm in London surrounded by a bunch of East Ham skinheads calling me 'Jock' and making jokes about Billy Connolly then I feel very Scottish. In the same way I don't go around all the time feeling myself being a man. It's one aspect of me, being a man - it's not the defining aspect.

Colin W: It's fundamental.

Colin C: Some people would say being white is fundamental.

Colin W: I'd say bollocks to that. ■

In my life

over the sea to s

Eilidh Munro goes to school by ferry, from her home on the little island of Ulva to the primary school on the mainland. Here she talks about her school and life on the islands when you're eleven years old. Photographed by [unreadable]



chool

ool across the water on Mull.
s by Colin Chalmers.

I've lived on Ulva since I was one, all my life really. It's good living on the island. It's quiet. There are about twenty six people living on Ulva, mainly crowded down at the ferry.

I take the ferry over to school - my uncle runs it. He takes us over in the morning and comes back over at half three to take us back. Some days the ferry can't go because it's too windy. One day, it wasn't a school day, we nearly got blown out the boat trying to get over; we had to come back into the rocks. My older sister knows everything about the boats, so does my brother, but I don't fancy learning anything about them. I don't like boats really.

The school I go to is Ulva Primary School and it's very different to what you hear about bigger schools. We're ahead of bigger schools. You miss out on some things like P.E. but we've got a playground behind the school and we get a lot of exercise just being in the country.

I like Mrs Douglas, our teacher. I think it must be very hard managing primary one to primary seven in one class. She usually starts at

primary seven and works her way down. While she's telling us what to do, the wee ones are usually reading a book or keeping themselves occupied. Primary seven and six get on with themselves but the wee ones usually have to get shown what to do. Sometimes we help the wee ones if they're having trouble. I can't imagine what it would be like in a big school.

If it's too windy in the morning to get the ferry to school we just go back up the road and Mrs Douglas phones over and gives us work to do. Maybe if we're writing a story up then we write a story up at home; or she'll tell us sums over the phone and we'll write them down and do them; or mum will write fractions down and I'll do them. That doesn't happen very often though - only sometimes in the winter.

There are eleven pupils at the school now, but four have just started today. We have gone from seven to four to seven to eleven this year. When it was only four in the school, the two wee ones and me and Robert, the teacher had to say "Good morning, Eilidh and boys" because I was





the only girl.

We've just got a new computer. It's very easy to type on the computer. Mrs Teare, the secretary, gives us computer lessons, well, just shows us things about the computer. That's not part of our teaching but she shows us how to use it. When Mrs Douglas gets stuck we try to help her out.

When I leave school I want to do something with horses. I'm hoping to go to a riding stable. I might not do that to start off with though, I might just do something in an office then move on to horses. I'd like the vet's job but it takes ages and ages, five years or something, to become a vet.

My dad's a farmer and I help with gathering in the sheep every month. I think we've got a thousand and fourteen sheep. We split up, someone goes down the shore and someone goes up high, and we gather all the sheep into a bundle at the end. I do all the running around, stopping the sheep from getting back along the shore. You do different things to them at different seasons: dipping, dosing, vaccinating, lambing. The year just goes round.

We've got one working collie and a pup who's training. We look after another dog for a couple that's away on holiday just now. And we've got three cats, a kitten and two adult cats.

I go out riding mostly every day. We've got six horses altogether. There are two younger ones that are going to be sold, a new one, two other ponies that are mine, Tammy and Blossom, and my wee sister's got a Shetland pony. We use them as riding ponies and take them to the shows. I've been to quite a lot of shows. The Pony Club Rally is a fun day, you do games and jumping and races. I'm quite good; last year I got Champion at the games at the Salen show

and the Strontain show, I got loads of first rosettes.

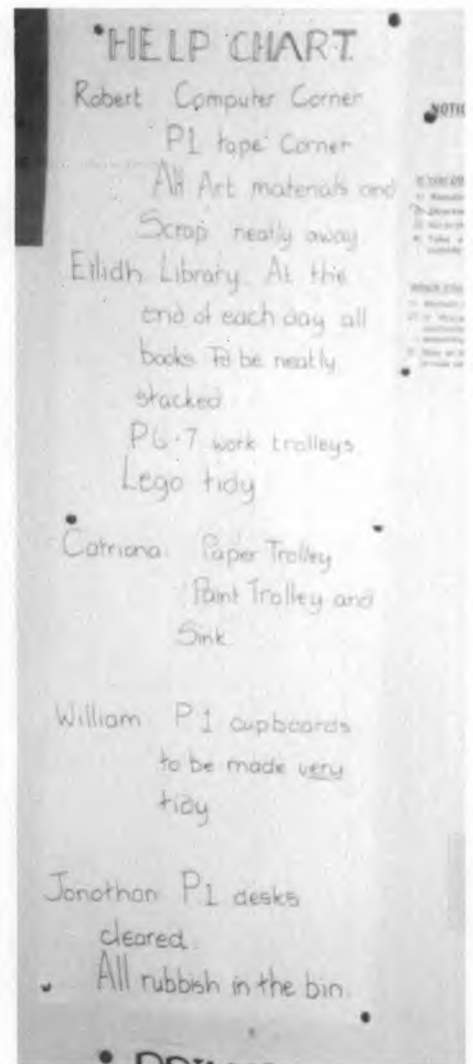
In the evening we've got chores we've to do. We take turns washing the dishes, cleaning the table for mum. We've got two horses inside pens because they haven't got a thick enough coat to go out so we have to clean them out every night, make sure they're bedded down well. Then there are the sheep to feed, and the dogs.

We've got a television, but it doesn't work. We can't get reception because of the trees, but they're trying to get the aerial up on a hill. We've got a video, but I've forgotten about TV. I don't think I miss much; you hear about all the news in the newspaper and we've got a radio.

I don't get bored, there's always something to do. I like Mull, but I prefer Ulva; there's not so many people, there's no cars or anything. It's mostly farmers on Ulva. There's one baby, two younger ones starting school this year and my brother and sisters. There's not many children on Ulva, it's mostly adults.

When it comes to music, I like EMF. They're crazy, heavy metal. You have to go away down to Glasgow or Edinburgh for concerts but I think I prefer listening to it on a tape. There's too much noise at a concert. My sister's got a huge, big ghetto blaster, so that's just like a concert. We're having a huge big party in the church hall on Ulva for my sister leaving school. It's going to be a heavy metal disco. It'll be funny watching the adults dancing.

I like living in the country. I've been to Edinburgh and Dundee and I've passed through Glasgow but I don't really like big cities. I don't like the fumes. If you're in a city people just barge past you, some say hello but a lot just carry on. If you're round here you stop and talk to people. I like that. ■





'First they came for the Jews'

At a time when racism and fascism are growing throughout Europe, and the British government is increasingly telling refugees that they are not welcome here, **Rita Strassmann** talks to **Colin Chalmers** about her escape from Nazi Germany as a nine year old Jewish refugee - and the new life made possible for her in Scotland.

I was nine years old in 1939 and I lived in Hanover. I went to a Jewish school so I did not have Nazi propaganda at school - but I was conscious all the time that things were happening. We weren't allowed to go into certain shops, we had to wear yellow stars, we were called all sorts of anti-Jewish names. I knew that something was going on but living with my family I didn't worry as long as they were there.

I remember seeing people shouting 'Sieg Heil!' and seeing notices in shops and streets saying 'Juden Verboten', Jews forbidden. I would think 'I'm Jewish, I'm not allowed there'. We did feel it as children. You do, if you're

different from all the other children around.

The area we lived in had quite a few Jews in it. There was a Synagogue and a Jewish school. Not everyone was Jewish though - we had non-Jewish German neighbours living next door. They were very nice but I remember everyone being afraid by this time to help in any way.

It was very obvious that it was the state, the police, who were leading it. They were all uniformed, goosestepping. There were lots of parades with people chanting 'Heil Hitler!' and when all that happened we had to be kept indoors. All the friends we played with went out to these big processions and we were told to

come in. There were lots of processions, flags, soldiers marching.

It was incredible how the crowds just followed Hitler. He was a madman and they all just idolised him. My friends joined the Hitler Youth but we were told to stay indoors and not be seen while these marches were going on. We thought 'They're having great fun and we have to stay indoors'.

At the start of it all other children were still quite friendly because they hadn't been indoctrinated enough. But once they had been in the Hitler Youth for a year or so they were indoctrinated and would have no Jewish friends. So

THE KINDERTRANSPORT ORGANISED THE EVACUATION OF 10,000 JEWISH CHILDREN FROM NAZI EUROPE TO BRITAIN DURING THE YEARS 1938 AND 1939. MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE KINDERTRANSPORT IS AVAILABLE FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

■ **THE SCOTTISH GATHERING OF KINDERTRANSPORT** is in touch with many of the Kindertransport children now living in Scotland. It can be contacted through Dorit Sim on 0292 79312 or Joe Metzstein on 041-334 5770.

■ **THE SCOTTISH JEWISH ARCHIVE CENTRE** has an exhibition about the Kindertransport with particular reference to Scotland. If you would

like to use the exhibition you can contact the Centre at Garnethill Synagogue, 127 Hill Street, Glasgow G3 6UB. The exhibition can be viewed at Garnethill Synagogue on Sundays 10th May and 14th June 2pm -4pm or may be viewed at other times by arrangement.

■ **THE LAST GOODBYE - THE RESCUE OF CHILDREN FROM NAZI EUROPE** is a touring exhibition about the Kindertransport by the London Museum of Jewish Life. If you are interested in hiring the exhibition for your school, library or community centre you can contact the London Museum of Jewish Life at The Sternberg Centre, 80 East End Road, London N3 2SY (phone 081-349 1143).

PUBLICATIONS

■ **I CAME ALONE - THE STORIES OF THE KINDERTRANSPORTS** edited by Bertha Leverton and Shmuel Lowenson (Book Guild) £16.50. Available post free from Bertha Leverton, 50 London Road, Stanmore, Middlesex, HA7 4NU.

■ **THE NINTH OF NOVEMBER** by Hannele Zurndorfer (Quartet) £5.95.

■ **AND THE POLICEMAN SMILED** by Barry Turner (Bloomsbury) £5.99.

■ **'FIRST THEY CAME FOR THE JEWS...' - THE LEGACY OF PASTOR NIEMOLLER** is an information pack about Pastor Niemoller and the Holocaust. It is available for £1.50 from the Minority Rights Group, 379 Brixton Road, London SW9 7DE.

they backed off.

It hurt, but at nine, as long as you've got your family, your uncles and your aunts and your mother, it doesn't matter so much. It was Jewish children in their early teens who felt it more.

The Jewish community became closer. It tried to overcome all the things that we were missing out on otherwise - swimming pools, gymnasiums, things like that.

Then on *Kristallnacht* - oh, they really had a time. I was too young to take a lot in but all the Synagogues were burned, smashed to bits. All the Jewish businesses were burned and looted, smashed to bits. They went round all the houses and got rid of the people. It was all uniformed people and the German people were afraid to intervene. People were afraid to come out and speak about their antagonism towards Hitlerism.

Being in business my family were friendly with a lot of German people and were warned when raids were going to take place. One German friend in particular used to take us away and hide us overnight in non-Jewish homes when there were raids. We had a friend who always helped, he would phone and take us away in the car if there was going to be a raid. To me it was an adventure, we would go and stay somewhere overnight, it was great, then come back in the morning. I don't know how he knew there were going to be raids. That man was taken off and died in camp for hoarding Jews.

My grandfather and about four or five brothers and sisters of my mother went over to Israel in 1936. They saw how things were going. They kept saying to my mother 'Get out, things are going to get worse' and she would say 'Not at all, it won't get worse'. A lot of Jews perished because they thought it could never happen. There were a lot of family discussions, a lot of families said they weren't going to walk out and leave their homes, leave everything. They thought it could never happen.

Then one night my mother and I were whipped off to camp. Out of the blue the Gestapo came to our house. I can still see that, it is a horrible memory. Big men came in shouting 'Get ready!',

'Out!'. The place was locked up and that was it.

We were pushed into the back of this lorry full of people we knew, all crying and howling. We were all taken to this Camp and put into a tiny little room with a bucket in the corner. It was horrible. After three days, because I had a guarantor in Britain, they came and called my name. If you had a guarantor who was willing to look after you when you came to Britain then children under fourteen were allowed out. I heard 'Rita Strassmann' and my mother said 'You're going'. I didn't want to go but my mother said I must go and she would come later.

I was allowed back to the house, we had a lovely house with silver and jewels, and the Gestapo said I could take something out of the house. I went in and collected my doll and some doll's clothes and that was me. I've still got my doll.

coming. It was an adventure. Then we arrived in the station in London where we were waiting for people to pick us up - we were sitting saying 'Look at that horrible man coming, I hope he's not coming for me.' Our names were called and then a person came up and picked us up and took us away. It did not feel very nice. My guardian-to-be came down, collected me and brought me up to Rutherglen.

Years later I found out how I got my guarantor. It was done through the Jewish Children's Committees. This couple had all these photographs of Jewish children who needed homes, they put them all out at a meeting at their house one night, and this lady said 'I'll take that child there'. It was her that came down to London to pick me up and take me back to Rutherglen.

When I arrived in Rutherglen I couldn't

'All the friends we played with went out to these big processions and we were told to come in'

I heard later from a cousin in Israel that they made my mother and the rest of the people who stayed in the Camp work and walk for miles and miles. My mother didn't make it - she is buried in Riga. I don't know if they marched them there or what. This cousin was on duty pulling people out of the gas chambers in Auschwitz, he pulled his mother out, he saw his father shot and his brother shot. More than three-quarters of my family perished in the gas chambers, young kids, everyone.

After us children were collected from the Camp we were taken to Hamburg and put on a ship and sent over to Britain by the Kindertransport. I was nine years of age then.

There were 360 children on the boat, it was good fun because I thought my mother was

speak a word of English. I didn't want to leave my family, I had left my mother in the camp, I wanted to stay with her.

The couple that took me in were Christian Brethren, very, very strict. Very nice people, but very strict. I wasn't used to that at all - no cinema, nothing. They said Grace at meals, prayed and read their Bible.

I wasn't a very nice girl for a long time. I just cried and cried hoping that someday they would get fed up with me and send me back. I wouldn't eat, I wouldn't sleep, I don't know if I slept. They persevered and I went to school.

War started in September, the month I went to school. That was very difficult because the children all knew about the Germans. They would call me 'German dog' and tie me up. I

Scottish Child May Workshops

Responding to Child Sexual Abuse

Thursday 7th May, Glasgow

“When a child tells an adult about sexual abuse, it becomes the adult’s crisis, not the child’s.”

How do we manage to create the conditions in which children and teenagers feel safe to tell others about abuse? How can we ensure that children are both protected and empowered when abuse is suspected? What are the problems for workers and parents involved with sexually abused children? The workshop on Child Sexual Abuse finds common ground between sexual abuse and other forms of abuse of children.

Workshop leaders: Colin Chalmers, Rosemary Milne

For Your Own Good? - The Punishment of Children

Wednesday 13th May, Stirling

Thursday 14th May, Aberdeen

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All workshops begin at 10.00am and continue to 3.30pm. The venues are listed below.

Glasgow: Childline Offices, 33 Stockwell Street (off Argyle St),

Stirling: The Mayfield Centre

Aberdeen: Walker Road Community Education Centre, Torry

The workshop fee is £25 per day, including lunch, tea and coffee. A limited number of concession places are available at £5. Enquiries and booking can only be made to Scottish Child 031-220 6502.

Please reserve me _____ place(s) at the Child Sexual Abuse workshop on 7th May in Glasgow.

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**First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Jew.**

**Then they came for the communists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a communist.**

**Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a trade unionist.**

**Then they came for me -
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.**

Pastor Martin Niemoeller



had all sorts of problems as a result of being German. They didn't know anything about the Jews.

I went to a little Primary School in Rutherglen called MacDonal School. The staff were very helpful and very kind. I had no English so they had to be very patient.

Some of the children in the school were great, they helped me tremendously. The two tough bullies in the class, boys, looked after me. If anyone did anything they came and protected me. If anyone said 'German dog' or 'Dirty Germans' they'd say 'Don't you dare say anything to her'. They had no idea about the Jews, they were just kind boys. Others didn't want to play with me because I was peculiar, I didn't speak English, I could say 'Yes' and 'No' and that was about it. I could sing 'London Bridge is burning down'.

They put me into a lower class than I should have been in for my age. I had a tiny little desk. They tried to teach me bit by bit, but it was my next door neighbour who really helped me learn English. She was marvellous with me, she had a car and took me out every day. She would say 'horse', 'field', 'cat', 'dog' and then at night we would go through the words. Bit by bit I learnt the language until I was upgraded in school.

All this time I managed to get 25 words a month on a postcard through the Red Cross from my mother, censored obviously. That's what we were allowed. All I knew was that the cards were from Germany. She would tell me to be brave, be a good girl, don't cry, keep warm, put on a coat if you're going out - all the things a mother tells a little girl. I was writing to her, my 25 words, saying 'You'll need to get me out of here, they're not Jewish people, they're making me go to Church' and so on. She would write back and say 'You've to be a brave girl, I'll be over with you as soon as I can. You just do what these people want you to do. Be a good girl'.

So I decided okay, I'll wait till she comes. I was sure she would come. So much so that when my guardian wanted me to become an adopted child, change my name, I said 'No', because my mother wouldn't be able to find me. I was certain she would come. Of course, she never came. She died in Riga, that is all the Red Cross could tell me. They were marched there and she

died, I've got, not a grave, a number. That was in 1945, just at the end of the war. The American army had gone in and they were able to get out but she died, just months before the Liberation. So that was that.

I married in 1952, when I was twenty-two. My husband was posted to Germany and we stayed there for two years. I went to see our house in Hanover which was all still rubble when I arrived. That was a funny feeling - it was peculiar to go back.

I went to a place the equivalent of Somerset House and asked where my family was. They knew where everybody was. They had my address here in Scotland, all the Israeli addresses. So I wrote to my family in Israel and told them that I was married to a non-Jewish man, that I was Christian now. If you are a very orthodox Jew they 'bury' you if you marry out, but they wrote back and said we don't care what you are, we're just glad that you're alive. After that they all came to visit me, one after another. For a long time before that I felt I had nobody, I just had adopted uncles and aunts in Scotland that weren't really mine. It was nice to know that I did belong somewhere.

I go back to Germany most years, I have an old aunt there. Even now some of the Germans say Hitler did so much for Germany, he built motorways, did so much good. You meet peo-

ple who didn't know. Imagine the family living next door disappears overnight - 'We didn't know'. But they were afraid, terrified. We had friends who helped Jewish people. They would take people in overnight when they knew there was a raid coming on and they also went to Camp, disappeared.

I think we all feel 'Why did it happen?' Then I think I wouldn't have my husband and I wouldn't have my children. I've had a happy married life, it was a horrible time for me from nine to about fifteen, it was hard, but I got there. Scotland is my home now. I like Glasgow in particular, maybe because that's where I came to when I first arrived.

There is a big memorial going up in Hanover and they want all the names of all those who died in Hanover to be put on this. They're arguing at the moment where to put it, they want it next to the Opera House and some of the Germans don't want it there. They've built a new synagogue, which is far too big because there are only about 300 Jews left in Hanover now.

A lot of people feel the Jews are just building up the whole thing about the Holocaust from very little. But it happened all right - and I don't think it should be forgotten.

I have cousins in Israel who still will not even fly over Germany - but I feel why have all this

**'It happened all right - and I don't
think it should be forgotten'**

ple who don't know what I went through and who say Hitler was so good for the people. At the station in Hanover now there are always skinheads, you try to ignore them, but they would like Hitler to be back again.

People were so afraid during Hitler's time. Even now they say 'We didn't know what was going on, we wouldn't have sat back and let it happen'. But they did know. We lived in a flat and suddenly we disappear and there is a seal on the door and the people two up or one down say

bitterness? It's the same as in Britain, there are some good people, there are some horrible people. You have to be tolerant in this world, I don't think it helps one bit to be bitter. My memories of what was done will never go, it's deep within, like a scar, always. People tell me to forget it, it just makes you sad. But I can't forget it, it's something I feel deep down. It doesn't help me or my children to keep going on and on about what happened. I don't dwell on it. But I don't forget. ■

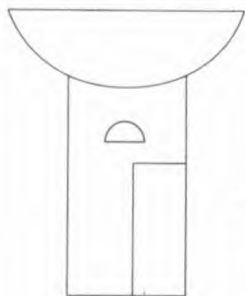
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What Happened on the Hill

a story by Frances Campbell

Bridie swung on the half-door, see-sawing between the light from the yard and the dark kitchen. Her mother was getting ready for the bus to Letterkenny. Some of the light hit off the mirror. Further back in the shadows Aunt Cass was clearing the breakfast things from the table.

"So you're off again the day, are you?" Aunt Cass grumbled. "The way you spend money you'd think it was going out of fashion." Bridie's mother stopped and held her lipstick away from her mouth.

"I didn't hear you refuse that cardigan I bought you, or the chemical toilet for the barn!"

Aunt Cass grunted and swept the crumbs from the table into her apron. "We managed fine without one up till now."

Bridie watched as her mother put the top on the lipstick and quickly clicked her handbag shut.

"Jesus, Cass! How you expect people to empty a pot behind the midden in this day and age beats me! Do you know what century you're living in?"

"I know it's high time you caught that bus if you're going anywhere at all. Your friends will be looking out for their nice souvenirs."

Souvenirs were crystal jugs and carved shillelaghs and Irish linen. Bridie knew her mother always bought things like that to take home. They came to the farm every summer because Bridie's mother had a share in it and Uncle Bernie was her only brother. Bridie's father didn't come because he was in business and that was why he spent his holidays at the golfing in St. Andrews.

After the bus was away Aunt Cass fed the hens in the yard. "Here, cluck, cluck, cluck! Here, cluck, cluck, cluck!" Her fist dived into the pot and came out spraying showers of potatoes. The hens curtsied and ran, closing a circle around her, regardless of the flying lumps that sometimes hit them in the eye. Bridie watched them for a moment then moved towards the lane.

"I'll tan your backside if you go beyond the gate!" Aunt Cass called out behind her. "And don't touch the honeysuckle! I'm tired telling

you how it's poison!"

Brambles hung over the clasp of the gate. They weren't poison but she had to watch she didn't get jagged. Tucking up her skirt she climbed over the bars... slowly... so's the splinters wouldn't jump into her legs. The perfume from the honeysuckle was like a tune going through the air, a tune that only she could hear. Maybe honeysuckle was fairy trumpets and they were calling her away, like the sound of the bus on the high road that took her mother to Letterkenny.

Bridie lay in the sun on top of the hill. It was just like an adventure. Like being Dick Whittington or Robinson Crusoe. Maybe when she grew up she'd be an explorer. Not like Aunt Cass who stayed in the house or her mother who only went to the shops. Bridie looked down at the road that ran around the hill. Two cars had passed in the whole afternoon. They disturbed her as little as the crows flying over the ridges towards the horizon. But Bridie liked being on her own. It was nice really. Not like yesterday when her uncle gave her a row for cutting some hay to make a den.

She screwed her toes down into the earth. First it was cold, then the ground warmed up again and she'd wriggle her toes to make the hole deeper. Her shoes lay beside a patch of heather. Bees hung over the purple. Bridie watched hard to see the sacks of pollen her teacher said they had in their legs and when she'd had enough of that she followed their shadows moving over the carpet of hill until they disappeared into the distance or the deeper shadow of a rock.

Propping herself up on her elbows, she studied the country around the hill with the kind of concentration she gave her tin kaleidoscope back home. Further down the slope young trees stood here and there, their leaves shimmering in the sunlight and the breeze. On the green plain, white dots of sheep moved slowly, like tiny clouds tied up in the fields. And far, far away she saw the shining flash of sea, a silver band on the horizon.

Bridie squinted her eyes to make the rays dart out of the sea. She could go on another adventure to the strand. Her uncle had said that he would take her when he had the time, but she

couldn't go without him. Maybe that's what she'd do tomorrow. When she rolled onto her back the sun sprinkled freckles on her cheeks. Sun kisses, that's what her mother called the freckles. The sun was a big golden labrador licking her face. Bridie smiled when she thought of that and turned her head aside. With her eyes closed she listened to the sounds of the hill. A grasshopper rubbed its legs behind some ferns and, now and again, a lamb bleated up from the fields. But most of all there was nothing, only the warm hum of the quiet. A beetle tried to climb up on her dress. "Here, beastie. Did you think I was a mountain?" Maybe other beetles came but she didn't pay attention. She was away in another place - the golden labrador lapping her face and the breeze sometimes playing in the shafts of her hair.

The footsteps must have been far off at first but then they came nearer. Bridie scrambled onto her elbows. There was a man on the road below the hill. He had his cap-tilted back on his head and his jacket flung over one shoulder. For a moment he stopped, half-turned and threw the end of a cigarette down at his heels. Then he came on again, his steps ringing out on the white gravel road. Suddenly the man turned off the road and veered towards the hill. Bridie edged closer into the heather. A voice in her head. Don't talk to strange men. Strange men... little girls. Bees buzzed in the purple but she didn't notice them, her eyes were on the man that was climbing the hill. With his back bent he was covering the ground. Even and steady. The stripes on his shirt were blue and the strap of his belt was dangling at his waist. His boots swished against the ferns and chinked off the rocks as he drew closer to the summit.

Bridie turned her head and looked into the black roots of heather. Nobody, nobody else around. Down in the valley Aunt Cass threw tatties to the hens. And in Letterkenny...

*Holy Mary, Mother of God.
Make him not see me.
Don't let him come near me.*

Her heart battered off the turf but she couldn't hear her breathing. It was covered by the man's, loud and fast...

The man moved over the breast of the hill, treading a path away from the girl. After a while she heard his footsteps take up on the far loop of road. It would be okay now. She was sure he'd gone away. Crawling out from the heather she heard the chirrup of grasshoppers in behind the ferns and lamb crying up from the fields. But it wasn't the same; the hill didn't seem so comfortable anymore. The sun had sunk lower and the ground was growing cold. Being out by herself made her want to cry. She wouldn't go to the strand tomorrow. It would be better to stay near the farm. She dashed the crumbs of earth from her knees and elbows, picked up her shoes and looked quickly over the hill. The sea had turned grey and no light shimmered in the trees. Sliding and scrambling back down to the house in the valley, she could hear the evening bus, far off on the road, as it brought her mother home from town.

REVIEWS



From All Join In

So Much to Read!

John Pelan who runs the children's department in an Edinburgh Bookshop takes a brief look at the current state of children's books in the UK - and reviews some of the new books for 1992.

A question I'm often asked by hapless adults wandering aimlessly around the children's department is "Can you help me? I'm looking

for something for a five-year old?" Or it could be for 'a ten-year old' or 'a boy of about three' or maybe 'a girl nearly two'. "What would you recommend?" they ask.

What can I recommend? Where do I begin? There really is so much to choose from. Board books, bath books, pop-ups, carousels, books that play tunes, sticker books, mini books, giant books, books for five to nines, or nine to twelves. Books for young adults, pony books, ballet books, adventure gamebooks - books in just about every shape or form on anything that might interest a child.

Children's books are a booming industry. In the period from July to December 1991, UK

publishing statistics recorded that 3,364 new children's books were published in the United Kingdom. It is a figure which represents a growth in output as well as an increase in variety. The range of children's books today is quite astonishing and brings me back to the original question 'What can you recommend?' and why it is so often asked.

The reason for this is, to a large degree, the fact that there is so little information available on children's books. Parents are forced to do a quite a wee bit of research if they are to find out just what is and what is not suitable for little Sophie or Tom to read. While reviews and critiques of the latest Salman Rushdie, James



an extent, true. But it is also true to say that there is a widespread lack of interest in children's books as such in the media, attributable to a very British and very peculiar perception of children and all things childish as being somehow not worthy of study.

This is a sad state of affairs when you think of just how many words and energy are expended on analysing the new Jeffrey Archer novel or the latest Madonna biography. Children's books are interesting and challenging and - for my money - much more imaginative, inventive and groundbreaking than the bulk of contemporary adult fiction.

Although there has been a steady growth in children's publishing over the past decade, the blight that is now affecting the publishing industry in general in the UK looms as an ominous threat over new children's books. Many publishers of children's books depend on hardback sales to schools and public libraries - and given the huge cutbacks in library budgets over the past few years this is becoming an increasingly unprofitable business.

Children's publishing is also in danger of becoming too competitive, thereby pushing many companies out of business and diminishing range and variety. There is an increasing trend in children's books nowadays to establish readerships through promoting series such as the teenager **Babysitters' Club** (currently twenty eight titles in the series and counting), or the **Point Horror** series or the **Usborne** reference series. What happens is that once a publisher has promoted a successful series or range of books, other publishers very quickly produce or import similar series in an effort to achieve the same level of success. The market becomes saturated, harming the children's books' market in the long term. Ultimately it will be the consumer, in this case the children, who will lose out.

But the present scenario is far from depressing and the ins and outs of publishing is lost on the child who, when encountering the world of books, sees colour and excitement and discovery. Books, if we read them, shape our lives and outlooks - none more so than the books we read when we are young. And if you're on the lookout for children's books this spring - moving ones, scary ones, resonant ones or just plain different ones - there are quite a few on offer.

Josie Smith and Eileen (Collins £6.99) is the fourth in the series about the resolute little girl who will be familiar to viewers of the Granada TV series **Josie Smith** - it was one of the 1991 Smarties' book prize winners. Written for five to eight year-olds who can read unassisted, this new book contains three stories.

It's hard not to believe in Josie Smith. She has all the qualities and toughness of a streetwise kid - both she and her friend Eileen are a long way from the traditional sugar and spice image of little girls. They display a good bit of cunning and deviousness as they go about their adventures. When Gary Grimes, a local boy, threatens to thump Josie she knocks him down and Eileen promises that if he "tries to thump me again I'm going to nip him and then I'm going to tell over him".

These are good strong stories, clearly written, which children will enjoy reading. Josie Smith is definitely a hero for the nineties.

For the very young, a bright, noisy new book by Quentin Blake (perhaps best known for illustrating almost all of Roald Dahl's children's books) has just been released in paperback. **All Join In** (Red Fox, £3.99) has been described as 'exuberant' and 'anarchic'. Although it is certainly a colourful and entertaining book for parent and child, it also smacks a little of the typically middle-class perception of childhood prevalent in so much children's literature. There's a Ferdinand, an Oscar, an Amy and a William and some very 1970s-ish well-meaning parents who obviously can't keep control.

I suspect that this book is of greater appeal to adults looking for 'something suitable' than to children, who will actually find little to identify with in the rhymes. Although lots of kids will undoubtedly have fun 'joining in' as they are invited to do, I can't see this book becoming a classic.

A more interesting and enduring book for young children is **In the Middle of the Night** by Kathy Henderson (Walker Books, £8.99) which is almost an extended lullaby with real people.

On the twentieth floor
of the office block...
another night cleaner's
vacuuming the floor
working nights on her own
while her children sleep at home.

But what makes this book really special are Jennifer Eachus' atmospheric and at times eerie illustrations depicting night scenes, like the bakers baking tomorrow's bread.

The Blue Boy by Martin Auer with illustrations by Simone Klages (Gollancz, £3.99) was originally published in Germany. It's a modern day morality tale with more than a few echoes of Raymond Briggs' **When the Wind Blows**. It tells the story of a boy who lives on a faraway planet and who has lost everything he loves in a terrible war. The book is described in the blurb as a 'moving, resonant plea for unity and reconciliation'. It's a very sad book and certainly open to interpretation but I suspect that its rather abstruse style will prevent it from gaining the status of Brigg's book or Antoine de Saint-Exupery's **The Little Prince**.

For the ten to twelve age group Gillian Cross' gripping novel **Wolf** has been published by Puffin in paperback at £2.99. This unconventional story, described as multi-layered, is an intriguing and frightening tale as much as a symbolic reworking of the subject of fear and instinct in puberty. It is sure to become a school text and has already won the prestigious Carnegie Medal.

Finally it's worth mentioning **The Golden Shadow** by Leon Garfield and Edward Blishen (Gollancz, £12.99). This expensive book is a new edition of the original first published in 1973. Garfield is one of the most distinguished of children's writers and this book will appeal to both children and adults who have an interest in Greek mythology. The eighteen stories in the book deal with the struggles and achievements of the earliest men and are written in a solid upright prose which grabs your attention and holds it to the end. The late Charles Keeping provides the striking and at times startling illustrations. Definitely a classic. ■

Kelman or Illustrated History of Scotland are rich and plentiful in newspapers, on radio and on television books programmes, all parents can expect in the way of advice or analysis of children's books are a few meagre scraps thrown in at the end of the Sunday review section.

If you compare the figure I've just mentioned of almost three and a half thousand new children's books (this includes new editions) with the total number of new adult fiction titles for the same period - 4,051 - the huge imbalance in terms of coverage looks even more unfair. There is the argument, of course, that children's books do not by their very nature depend on the same level of hype and hard-sell publicity which accompanies new adult publications. This is, to

After The War

HEALTH AND WELFARE IN IRAQ AFTER THE GULF CRISIS

International Study Team
(October 1991)

Available from Medical
Education Trust £15

Hugo Whitaker

How do you remember the Gulf War? A short, sharp, technological war, with smart bombs and surgical strikes? A military exercise designed to teach Saddam Hussein a lesson once and for all? There was 'collateral damage' like the 300 civilians who 'accidentally got in the way' when the Al-Ameriyah Air-raid shelter was destroyed. And there were 'targets taken out' like the thousands of Iraqi conscripts killed by some of the most sophisticated technology ever invented while fleeing home across open desert from Kuwait. But what we were told then, and are told now, is that 'Operation Desert Storm' was necessary to prevent further suffering and loss of life - 'Yes, it was regrettable, but who knows what might have happened if we hadn't done it.'

Anyone could be forgiven for thinking the war has had no lasting effect on anyone. Our country has taken part in one of the most one-sided, technologically advanced and devastating wars ever - yet hardly any attempt is being made to look at the consequences of what has happened and listen to those affected. This report, based on a very detailed survey carried out in Iraq in August and September last year, is a welcome break in the silence.

Although the report is very long and not an

easy read, it gives a vital glimpse into the suffering inflicted during those weeks in January and February 1991. The report looks at all parts of Iraq, urban and rural, including the 30 major cities, and covers some of the areas that suffered most during the US-led invasion and its aftermath. The report looks at the effects of the war on women, child mortality and mental health, nutrition, income, agriculture, water and sewage systems and much else. It does not limit itself to the effects of the military attack on Iraq - it also emphasises the suffering and enduring bitterness felt by the Iraqis as a result of the continuing UN sanctions, sanctions which have had supporters in this country ranging from the government to CND.

The figures tell their own story. The death rate for children under one year old more than tripled (a 330% rise) in the first eight months of 1991; deaths among the under fives almost quadrupled (a 380% rise) in the same period; the figures for pollution, general health and income are equally horrific. But what is perhaps most important about this report is that it documents the voices of the children of Iraq - voices glaringly absent from any discussion of the war here - about their memories of the war, how they feel about it now and how they see the future.

A total of 224 Iraqi children of primary school age were interviewed - 107 from the Al-Ameriyah neighbourhood in Baghdad (the site of the air-raid shelter bombing) and 107 from Basrah. *Nearly two-thirds of the children believed, six months after the end of the shooting war, that they will not live to become adults.* Many of the children think that what happened in the recent past could easily happen again, because 'They have no idea why the conflict/events happened in the first place'. As one child says, "Still I don't know who first attacked Kuwait and why it all happened".

Many of the children give versions of the following story: "Saddam Hussein took Kuwait and that was wrong and then Bush helped

Kuwait and said it was because it was a little country, but that was wrong because he was interested in controlling the oil and then he took Kuwait back and attacked Iraq and that was wrong also, but this is a secret."

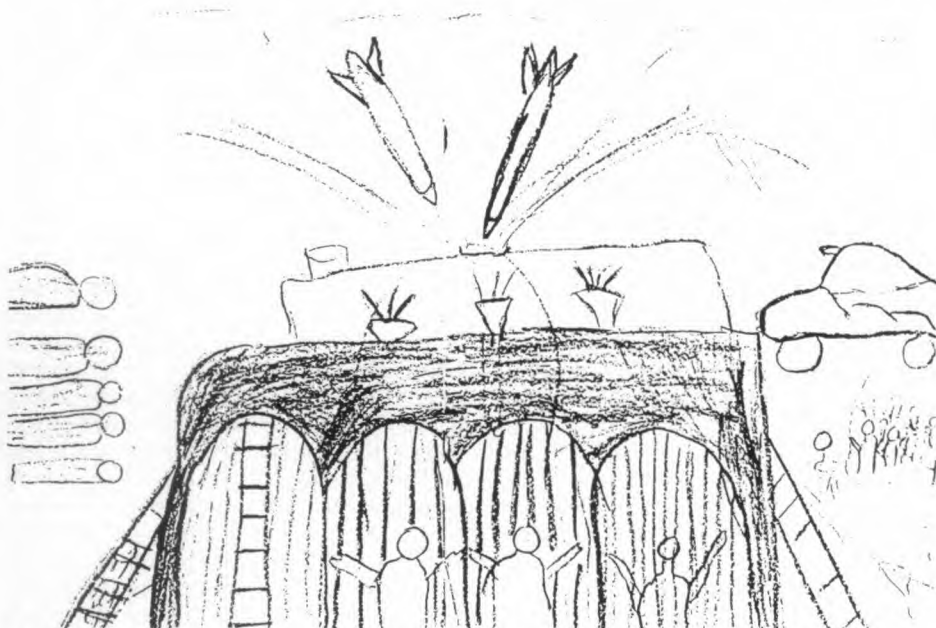
The report also mentions that 'When children were asked about the reasons behind the conflict, they generally began by stating that it was an attack from the USA, personified by the name Bush. Even 6-7 year old children talk about Bush. When asked, some of the younger children would recount how Bush was sitting in a plane from where he bombed Iraq. Older children complete the anti-Bush version by declaring a victory for Iraq in the future, with some children also talking about revenge.' The authors of the report point out that 'It is the sanctions much more than the war itself that create aggression, feelings of revenge, and negative anti-American attitudes in the population.'

The children interviewed in this report strove to understand what they saw. They tried to make sense of planes bombing, houses collapsing, fires burning, soldiers fighting, mutilated and crushed bodies lying in the streets. They fought to forget what they heard - people screaming, desperate voices, planes and explosions... Not surprisingly, they did not always succeed. As the report concludes, 'The most significant impression from the interviews of the children, in both Baghdad and Basrah, was their lack of 'life', their deep depression, sad appearance, tiredness, and lack of joy.'

As the report points out, 'Adults constantly underestimate what their children have, in fact, experienced, and how their children suffer psychologically from such experiences'. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves whether we are going to ignore the traumatic effects of our actions simply because they are experienced by little people, far away - or whether are we going to listen to the voices of these children, acknowledge what has happened and try to undo some of the damage.

In February of this year, the **Medical Educational Trust** produced a follow-up report which confirmed this report's conclusions. It also asked the question 'Was the Gulf War good for children?' (George Bush has described it as 'A victory for the human race'). Their answer is unequivocal:

'The state of a nation's children gives the best picture of that nation's public health. The answer can only be that the Gulf War has been disastrous for children everywhere. Even children of the wealthy minorities in the West experienced via the media something of the horrors of war. They will inherit the future consequences which continuing this cycle of violence will bring. They have learnt that again their technologically adept parents have no better, kinder or more intelligent answer than outbidding violence with worse violence. That this is bad for all children, and the future, is undeniable.'



A bombing raid against Iraq, as drawn by one of the children interviewed in the report

Copies of the report are available for £15 (plus £3.25 p&p) from the Medical Educational Trust, 601 Holloway Road, London N19 4DJ (Phone 071 272 2020).



Developing Solutions

WOMANWISE

A popular guide and directory to women and development in the third world
SEAD £2.95

Stephen Naysmith

SEAD (Scottish Education and Action for Development) sees itself as 'challenging the myth that people in Scotland and people in the third world are literally 'worlds apart'' - this directory has been produced to aid that process.

The book is primarily a practical tool, a directory of organisations and resources for those interested in learning about women in the third world. The resources described in the directory are wide-ranging - books, journals, videos, magazines and games are listed along with where they can be found. The information is designed to be of use to teachers, trade unionists, community and adult education workers, students, members of women's groups, voluntary organisations and political parties.

The directory is interspersed with interviews, articles and excerpts illustrating the kind of material that is available. It might be easier to find your way around if they weren't there - but

the readability which the interviews and comment add is certainly worthwhile.

The final level on which the directory works is as a manifesto for SEAD itself, promoting their belief that women in Scotland and the third world can learn from each other's experiences, wants and problems. As such it has an important message which needs to be heard above the hubbub of Telethons and Comic Reliefs.

As a man reading the *Womanwise* directory - and attending the conference to launch it - an obvious question that struck me was - why women? A quote on the back cover offers some explanation but doesn't really justify the woman-only focus of the book: "No matter where you go ...if there is a scarcity of water, women have protested; if there has been overfelling of trees, women have resisted it". Fair enough - but so have men.

Inside there is the space to make out a more compelling argument. It is acknowledged that women and men share obstacles such as grinding poverty, racism and war; but other problems apply more severely to women: lack of education, status and self-confidence, poor health and lack of childcare - as well as having to work a 'double day' of domestic and paid labour.

Money, as always, is the key. Under the section 'Women and Money' the directory points out that women are the first victims of the poverty caused by third world debts: "When health care services, water development and education provision are being reduced as part of

expenditure cuts, who bears the brunt of the costs of increased sickness? Who carries the water? Who is the first to be squeezed out of schooling as incomes fall and school fees rise?"

Another reason for concentrating on the viewpoint of women is because it is a view that so frequently goes unheard. This was demonstrated at the *Womanwise* conference which was ignored by the national and local press and by the Scottish Office, who declined to send a representative.

SEAD director Linda Gray is all too accustomed to this dismissive attitude. As she put it at the conference, "Development as an issue in Scotland is not taken seriously, particularly ordinary people's development. If we were 200 businessmen meeting we would not be getting ignored."

Partly as a result of this, SEAD is opposed to what it calls the 'tyranny of the expert'. An important theme of this directory is the need for women in Scotland and the third world to find their own solutions.

This is an area in which western women can learn from their third world counterparts. According to Linda, "The choices faced by people in the third world are often life or death ones. That gives them a sense of urgency which we don't have. They are not frightened of bureaucracies and structures in the way we are. They are prepared to find their own solutions whereas we tend to look to local authorities, or to people who are deemed to be experts. We need to realise that they are not the experts. We are." ■

Among the Contributors in this issue...

Neil Ballantine is the campaign co-ordinator for the Scottish Association for Youth Care and Justice (SAYCAJ). Frances Campbell is a freelance writer living in Stirling. Ann Laybourn is a research fellow at Glasgow University. Stephen Naysmith is a freelance journalist. John Pelan runs the children's section in an Edinburgh branch of Waterstone's Bookshop. Rita Strassmann now lives in Glasgow. Hugo Whitaker works with the Edinburgh Creche Co-op and is a member of Scottish Child's editorial group.



The Care System - A System that Cares?

Dear Editor,

On reading the article about the young woman Suzanne Frazer (*a helping hand*, *Scottish Child* February/March 1992) we were pleased to find a young person being given the opportunity to express her views and share her experience of being in care and how society has treated her.

She has been courageous in speaking out and deserves all of our support for being brave enough to do so. It is right and proper that *Scottish Child* gave her the opportunity to do this. Young people should have a voice - **Who Cares? Scotland** is committed to achieving this. Many young people feel this way and they are angry.

It is a sad fact that some Scottish local authorities still expect young people to leave care at 16 to fend for themselves. Thankfully other authorities have started to do more.

If the article makes some people listen to what is happening and decide to do something about it, it will have served its purpose. We would not want to have to see more young people expose themselves in this way. It would be easy to exploit the plight of the vulnerable in a sensationalist manner - it is important that we do not add to the problems by doing this.

Mandy Stewart
on behalf of the young people of
Who Cares? Scotland
Glasgow

Dear Editor,

Suzanne's experiences as told in the last issue of *Scottish Child* (*a helping hand?*) were indeed horrific and disturbing. Sadly, however, far from being an isolated case, Suzanne's story is one which I found all too familiar.

I have worked for some years with homeless young people and many of them have confirmed their experience of social work care as one in which they have felt powerless, not listened to and almost punished by the system which is there to protect and care for them. It would be foolish for those involved in the caring professions to dismiss the way Suzanne and many young people like her feel about their experiences of being in care.

Sue Powell
Edinburgh

Dear Editor,

We would like to comment on the article in the February/March edition of *Scottish Child* entitled *a helping hand?* We feel well qualified to do so because over the last four years our lives have been very closely linked with that of Suzanne, the subject of the article.

Reading the article, one's heart goes out to Suzanne not just because of what has happened to her and what life has thrown at her but because once the wheels of

social work started turning it becomes increasingly difficult to 'get off the roundabout' for everyone concerned, including the professionals.

To find yourself in a secure unit when you have injured no one but yourself and committed no crime would surely cause most of us to rebel. But how do you get help when the system swallows you? As adults it is pointless saying there are plenty of people to tell, plenty who care, when to the child in the situation the system seems to take no notice. If you are incarcerated in a secure unit or children's home how do you get your wishes noticed when they appear confused and may be at odds with the social work reports and recommendations? Anyone who believes that the child's voice is always heard above the clamour of these reports needs to radically rethink their views.

Sadly, the problem of how young people like Suzanne are cared for don't fall into neat categories; they are intangible problems for Social Work chiefs to deal with and so, we suggest, are likely to be swept under the carpet.

Somehow we have to find a way of stopping the abuse of children within the 'care' system. Somewhere along the line the social work system needs to be able to stand back and look at itself and decide that in some cases, probably more than is acknowledged,

the 'care' system is doing more harm than good.

Phil and Val Springthorpe
Argyll

Dear Editor,

Child battering, wife battering, child sexual abuse by adults, ritual child abuse - all these things have been going on for a very long time. We like to think they don't happen to people like ourselves, so we are not always good at helping those we suspect of being abused. It is almost as if the 'good victim' is the person who has been a little bit abused and tells the correct people in the way the correct people want to be told!

We are horrified and disgusted by the idea of female circumcision in some countries. What is that but ritualised, physical and sexual abuse? "Oh, but that's different, that's a different culture" - yes, but abuse happens in this country too, and on a very wide scale.

We human beings of the 1990s are not perfect. Until we can accept that we will find it hard to respond helpfully to the victims of child sexual abuse.

Ask the victims how they would have liked to be helped. That includes those taken into care because of suspected abuse. Treat the children with dignity and respect.

Catriona Rouf
Aberdeen

Poetry or Pornography?

Dear Editor,

Just a note of congratulation on the high standard of the last issue of **Scottish Child**.

The content was excellent throughout. It was particularly gratifying to see you publish five poems from Kim Oliver, one of Scotland's most captivating, intense and consistently brilliant performance poets.

I will be surprised if I read better poems than **Ice Ice Baby** or the lacerating **Learning** in any other publication anywhere this year.

Kim Oliver is a poet who deals with the subject of sex (see **Ice Ice Baby**) without ever approaching the boundaries of pornography. And as the different subjects (love, loss, bereavement, motherhood, self-reliance) and styles of the other poems show, she has an astonishing fluency and range.

I commend the bravery of **Scottish Child** in handling the difficult subject of sex in all its aspects: from Suzanne Fraser's experience of abuse to Kim Oliver's exuberant celebration of women's sexuality; from the expose of the **Daily Sport**'s pornographic reporting of abuse to Anna-Louise Milne's review of Nancy Friday's new book.

Sadly, John Knox is still alive and flourishing in Scotland and I feel certain there will be a few complainers. There are so many emotional eunuchs who, faced with a *positive* presentation of matters sexual, reach for their bibles. These people are unable to understand that to refer to sex is not, *ipso facto*, to indulge in pornography. Above all, they seem to regard sexual frigidity in women as a virtue.

Keep up the good work.

Barry Graham
Edinburgh

Dear Editor,

In the February/March issue of **Scottish Child**, page 11, the **Daily Sport** is rightly denounced for an obscene article which puts the acquisition of money before caring for children.

On page 27 of the same issue is published a poem which is palpably lewd and openly, shamelessly pornographic.

The **Scottish Child** claims to 'promote an understanding of the importance of children and childhood in society'.

This poem puts the denounced **Daily Sport** article into the shade, with a front cover advertisement of "Performance Poetry" is the **Scottish Child** not guilty of gross hypocrisy?

Lately I have found it difficult to find any parallel between your magazine and my work with Scottish children.

I do still pay a subscription and am in a position to influence. I would be pleased to learn of the connection **Scottish Child** makes between pornography in whatever guise and the importance of children in society.

I A J Thom
Headteacher
Howdenhall Children's Unit
Edinburgh

Scottish Child welcomes readers' letters.

Please send them to:
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Scottish Child,
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IN THE NEXT ISSUE JUNE/JULY 1992

Has the position of WOMEN changed in the last few years? Are things really better - or is women's equality just a myth? In our next ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION women talk it out.

In June heads of government from across the world meet in Brazil to discuss Ozone depletion, global warming and other environmental disasters threatening the world. Is there any chance that they will be more far-sighted than usual? ANNE LAYBOURN investigates.

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The Burden of Poverty

Dear Editor,

Last October the government introduced a White Paper which proposed measures to trace absent fathers and force them to pay maintenance - and to fine women living on Income Support who for many reasons would not help a so-called 'Child Support Agency' to trace these fathers.

The White Paper was called **Children Come First** and appealed to the sympathies of those across the political spectrum who naively believe that the difficulties faced by lone parents can be made the responsibility of the absent father.

This view ignores the reality experienced by the vast majority of lone parent families and absent parents, and masks the real aims of the Act - to withdraw the right to support from benefits for around 50,000 women and their families.

Aberdeen Poverty Action Group estimates that there are around 5,000 women in Aberdeen District alone who are claiming Income Support as lone parents and who could be affected by the Act. There are obviously many more children.

The reality for many lone parents is that in many cases absent parents are on benefits or low wages themselves, and cannot afford to support the families anyway. Absent fathers who are low waged or unwaged, or absent fathers who have second families to support, will often be unable to meet the maintenance assessed by the **Child Support Agency**.

Perhaps even more worrying is the fact that women who want no contact with absent fathers because of fear of violence or resentments

and tensions which will affect the children will be put into an unacceptably vulnerable situation by the Act. Under the Act:

- Any maintenance paid to families will be deducted from benefits payments - the Treasury will gain from the maintenance paid but the family will be no better off at all. What the family will lose if maintenance payments set by the **Child Support Agency** fail to arrive, or are irregular, has been conveniently ignored by the proposals.
- Families forced off Income Support by payment of the same level of maintenance (set by the assessment of the **Child Support Agency**), will also be much worse off as they lose the right to claim free health care, free school meals and, worst of all for many families, lose mortgage interest repayments - the family's status could swiftly change from claimant statistic to homeless statistic.
- The government claims that fines to parents who refuse to name the father will be deducted from the 'adult allowance' in Income Support. Anyone living on this below-subsistence level will tell you that parents already go without in order to provide for children. It is absurd to suggest that the pittance these families exist on can be further reduced.

The underlying policy of the Act is to enforce women's financial dependence on men and to restore

the institution of the Victorian 'family'. No matter what circumstances are faced by women, these policies will ensure that for many women there is only one choice - stay with your husband or starve.

While the implementation of this Act is obviously designed to save money for the government, it will initially require between £100m and £150m additional expenditure - surely money which should be urgently used to support families directly.

Our society seems unable to offer any recognition of the cost of caring for children or of the contribution this care makes to the future health of the country. The Victorian view of benefits as charity for the poor - not basic rights to which individuals and families are entitled - inevitably leads to increased suffering for those already in poverty. If it is not challenged it will cripple the future of our society.

People nowadays live in widely varying family circumstances - not all families conform to the heterosexual, white, middle-class, male-dominated view of the world. Children do need support, as do adults, and society's attitudes need to change and become more flexible to deal with new realities. The **Child Support Act** can only put more pressure on fragile situations and more stress on the children it purports to help. It will inevitably increase the burden of poverty that is one of the most vile means of strapping a moral straitjacket on society.

Between now and April 1993 pressure will increase on parents

to name and help trace absent fathers. **Aberdeen Poverty Action Group** have been concerned by reports of illegal threats to women by the DSS to cut Income Support to women before the Act is fully operational.

Initially the main aim of our campaign is to ensure that women have access to information on how the Act may affect them, and more importantly, how they can protect their Income Support before April 1993. We are advising them of their rights and encouraging them to take along witnesses or a tape recorder to interviews with DSS officials.

We are most concerned at the discretionary powers invested in officials by the Act to assess whether a woman is 'telling the truth' about her risk of violence or rape to her or her children if she names the father.

In cases of appeal against levels of maintenance that have been set, the Act plans to bring together estranged partners under the adjudication of an official from the **Child Support Agency** - an even more threatening situation. The whole Act threatens the weakest and most vulnerable in society again.

If you want more information about the **Child Support Act** and the **Campaign Against the Child Support Act** you can contact **Aberdeen Poverty Action Group** through Aberdeen Women's Centre, Shoe Lane, Aberdeen.

Ruth Campbell
Aberdeen Poverty Action Group
Aberdeen

childhood



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