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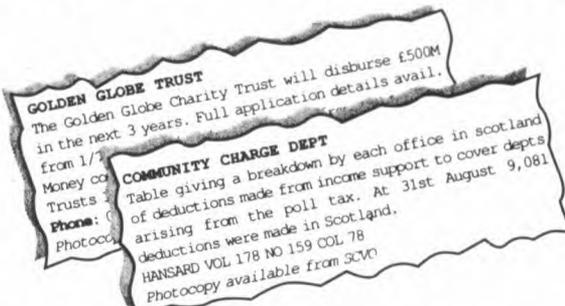
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# Scottish Child



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12 FOCUS

21 FEBRUARY 1993 THE SUNDAY TIMES

## ARE OUR CHILDREN



### A youth crime wave is striking at the heart of the nation's moral fabric

by Jonathan Margolis

The headlines are full of it. The news is full of it. The television news is full of it. The newspapers are full of it. The radio is full of it. The children are full of it. The youth crime wave is striking at the heart of the nation's moral fabric. It is a crisis that has shocked the nation and has led to a re-examination of our values and our society. The headlines are full of it. The news is full of it. The television news is full of it. The newspapers are full of it. The radio is full of it. The children are full of it. The youth crime wave is striking at the heart of the nation's moral fabric. It is a crisis that has shocked the nation and has led to a re-examination of our values and our society.

THE SUNDAY TIMES 21 FEBRUARY 1993

## OUT OF CONTROL?



Police: Ted Chapman

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### Poverty should not be scapegoat for lawlessness

Our culture...  
Christie Davies

The headlines are full of it. The news is full of it. The television news is full of it. The newspapers are full of it. The radio is full of it. The children are full of it. The youth crime wave is striking at the heart of the nation's moral fabric. It is a crisis that has shocked the nation and has led to a re-examination of our values and our society. The headlines are full of it. The news is full of it. The television news is full of it. The newspapers are full of it. The radio is full of it. The children are full of it. The youth crime wave is striking at the heart of the nation's moral fabric. It is a crisis that has shocked the nation and has led to a re-examination of our values and our society.

THE GUARDIAN  
Wednesday March 10 1993



### Bad-bastardness

If all of this sounds uncommonly horrific, then I can only say that it did not seem so then; it was the mainstay of the boys' lives; it was their spare time.

Andrew O'Hagan

The headlines are full of it. The news is full of it. The television news is full of it. The newspapers are full of it. The radio is full of it. The children are full of it. The youth crime wave is striking at the heart of the nation's moral fabric. It is a crisis that has shocked the nation and has led to a re-examination of our values and our society. The headlines are full of it. The news is full of it. The television news is full of it. The newspapers are full of it. The radio is full of it. The children are full of it. The youth crime wave is striking at the heart of the nation's moral fabric. It is a crisis that has shocked the nation and has led to a re-examination of our values and our society.

## Start by Getting Angry

After all the hysteria of the past two months about delinquent teenagers, bad children, the breakdown of the family - again - what can Scottish Child usefully say about these matters?

Everyone else has had a go, from the tabloids and Masud Houghugi loudly propounding their different brands of behaviourism, to the literary editor of the London Review of Books who took two pages of The Guardian one day recently to tell the world just what nasty little nerds he and his pals were when they were growing up on a west of Scotland housing scheme.

It's pretty disgusting stuff although there've been plenty of people who've tried to inject a note of moderation into the worst of it, pointing out that there's no sense rushing to make major changes to policies on children or teenagers and crime because of isolated sensational acts of murder or violence.

However, if you're devoid of any sense of why you do what you do, you swing round easily on the changing wind of public opinion - and you're happy to do so. That's what passes these days for 'political leadership', as Clarke, Blair and all their imitators have shown.

In Scotland it's that same absence of solid 'groundedness' in the politicians which has to explain the line taken in the Scottish Office's consultation paper on the Emergency Protection of Children (see page 7 of this issue) - with its proposals on the redistribution of powers between sheriffs and hearings which threatens to undermine some of the fundamentals of the Children's Hearing System. What's prompted this volte face? Could it be Orkney - one badly handled case of child protection? Handled badly as much by the sheriff concerned, let it be said, as by any other of the officials involved.

That's Scotland.

Down in England, they've got ram-raiding, 'twoc-ing' (taking without owner's consent) and most recently, the murder of James Bulger to feed the papers' and the politicians' love of lurid drama.

Never mind that child abuse and child crime are two intimately linked issues; never mind that children sometimes try for years to tell what they've suffered at the hands of parents, 'care' workers, teachers, what's news just now is 'bad children' - and bad parents, especially if they're single parents. And we're so much more comfortable with that aren't we?

Well, fortunately, quite a lot of us think rather differently about these matters. This issue of the magazine has plenty of material for those who want to put the child punishment debate in other terms. Take a look at what single parents have to say about the punitive and intrusive effect of the Child Support Act, or what black teenagers feel about the endemic racism of British society. Have a read of what Kaitie Lorimer is creating in her work with kids and the arts in Pilton and while you're doing so be aware that this inspiring project looks like being yet another casualty of the government's and the Scottish Arts Council's grant-giving - for which read grant-withdrawing - policies.

There's plenty of depressing stuff here, if you want to read it in that frame of mind. Or you can see shining through, again and again, the triumph of human will and resourcefulness over adversity. Then maybe instead of feeling depressed, you'll get angry - and that's a start.

## WATER PRIVATISATION

Selling off publicly-owned services has become such a regular event now that the fundamental arguments of opposition are hardly heard. Selling off Scottish water however has been given a massive thumbs-down by the public: 98% of respondents in a recent national survey said they were against full privatisation!

But with the headline news leaked this week that the government intends to implement a halfway scheme of private companies bidding to run publicly-owned services, the straightforward issues are likely to be lost in the deliberately confusing and complex choices between national franchises or regional deals. It may also be simply delaying full privatisation - would-be shareholders prefer to see clear accounts dating back three years before they put their cash into a company. Scottish water costs are currently linked in with the finances of local government (unlike in England and Wales before privatisation).

The arguments against any kind

of privatisation or franchising are worth restating. Clean and plentiful water provision, drainage and sewerage provided by a publicly controlled body and owned by us all is a major social achievement worth celebrating - and holding onto, for public health reasons alone.

The evidence from England and Wales and the predictions for Scotland are frightening. Bills have increased by almost 50% and 21,000 people were cut off last year. As usual those on low incomes are hardest hit. Large families with young children are having to learn to be 'economical' about flushing the toilet and having a bath. Housing estates in London where water has been cut off have been declared health hazards and water companies have been ordered to reconnect. Excrement has been disposed of down rubbish chutes and sewage pipes are blocked through lack of water. Environmental Health Officers are warning of the increase in salmonella, gastro-enteritis, bed bugs and body lice.

In their response to Scottish Office proposals the **Scottish Forum for Public Health Medicine** explains that as a community we have nothing to gain from privatisation:

"Increased charges to the

consumer are inevitable. It is essential, on public health grounds, that such charges do not place an additional burden on low income groups. Households on income support already have difficulty in meeting the costs of fuel and food.

"The government should prioritise its spending to improve public health. Action to provide warm affordable homes should take priority over measures to improve drinking water quality."

The report also makes several points about medical problems. "Temporary increases in domestic water consumption occur in relation to acute illness episodes, such as gastro-enteritis, which occurs more commonly in poorer households and in households with children.

"Current advice to householders with lead plumbing is that taps should be run for several minutes first thing in the morning in order to flush the system of lead which has accumulated overnight," particularly, as the report notes, in households using tap water to make up bottled feeds for young babies.

It's not difficult to foresee how that advice will be taken in the new era of water meters - water-metering is now compulsory in parts of England and Wales.

On top of these considerations

are wider issues surrounding the creation of a monopolised service with no accountability. With these arguments clear we must resist any attempt at privatisation. The supply and ownership of water services must be based on the public health needs of everyone and not on the profiteering motives of private companies and the short term cash benefits of asset-stripping.

In the face of the apparently complex proposals, will enough Scots apply the recent lessons of the anti-poll tax victory? The knowledge of the achievements of direct community action against the poll tax can be used again, provided there is the political will. People can refuse to pay water bills to private water companies or to allow sheriffs to collect debts and they can act to prevent water cut-offs or meter installations in tenements and streets.

It was the strength - and the tenacity - of these campaigns by locally organised groups that kept the poll-tax issue alive until the government finally caved in. It may not be an exaggeration to claim that this time yet again these groups hold out the best hope of defeating the latest government 'sell-out'.

Oliver Brookes



Oliver Brookes

## CHILDREN'S HEARINGS

Over the years those working with the Children's Hearing System have grown used to the idea of change. We have mostly welcomed the proposals for reform which have been put forward from time to time, finding them generally well argued, constructive and practical. The same cannot unfortunately be said of the latest contribution from Scottish Office, "Emergency Protection for Children", which quietly 'slipped the leash' on February 3rd at the start of a short, six week consultation period. There was no publicity for the launch of this consultation paper and its limited circulation list is puzzling when one considers the radicalism of many of the changes it proposes making to the system.

The picture is not wholly negative - there are some suggestions for change which will attract wide support. For example, professionals should have to show that there is genuinely an emergency situation before removing a child into emergency care. The law does not require this at present, although most social workers would insist that 'good practice' does.

However, many of the paper's other recommendations have been widely condemned by reporters, children's panel members and others. Possibly the proposal that has raised the most alarm is that which says that all powers to hold children for short periods in emergency care should pass from the children's hearings to sheriffs. If these proposals are adopted it will mean that even where the hearing is already dealing with a child's case, the present power of the hearing to order short-term emergency protection for children will be taken away.

To understand why there is such alarm at this proposal it's worth reviewing the fundamentals of the Scottish system. It is concerned with the whole circumstances of children, whether they come to the notice of the reporter because of wrong-doing or because they require protection themselves. Once a child becomes involved with the hearing system, the aim is to identify the child's needs for care, protection and control and to find ways of meeting those needs by working with the child and family. In the first instance, a child's case is screened by the reporter who is the only official empowered to decide if official



Paul Raeburn

## Emergency Measures

proceedings are needed. If the reporter decides that they are necessary, all subsequent decisions about the child's case are made by a children's hearing, composed of three trained panel members, representatives of the local community. The role of the courts is limited to resolving disputes on basic issues of fact and to hearing appeals against decisions made by hearings.

Both children's hearings and the sheriff court may be involved in emergency and non-emergency cases under this system. The dividing line between their responsibilities is quite clear though. The children's hearing plainly takes the lead on issues of child welfare. The major effect of the new consultation paper would be to move the dividing line by involving the sheriff much more closely in child welfare decisions in emergency cases.

If the only effect of the change was to shift the roles of the hearing and the sheriff a little, it would be difficult to understand the controversy the paper has generated. But it is fears about the negative effects of the recommendations on the rights and interests of parents and children that explain the depth of opposition of many reporters and children's panel members.

The fears are that children could well be detained on a vaguer basis than is presently possible, since

the test on which decisions would be based would be quite different from the tests on which reporters have now to decide whether to take up official proceedings. Children could end up in limbo for up to seventy days through official disagreement over the right course of action to take for a child.

The formality of the court room will be far less suited to the open-ended exploration of the issues involved in assessing whether a child needs emergency protection. In the informal atmosphere of the hearing, parents and children can be helped to express themselves. In court the talking will be done for them by their lawyers.

In rural areas there is the prospect of the same sheriff granting an initial warrant to remove a child and hearing evidence twice about temporary extensions of that warrant - all before he comes to consider the evidence in full as to why a child should be brought to a hearing in the first place. Lawyers well understand the dangers of evidence being tainted or prejudiced by such frequent re-hearing. Will child victims have to give evidence three times in as many weeks?

The setting of the children's hearing allows conflict to be aired constructively and cooperative solutions to be found. This plays no small part in helping to build honest cooperation between the family and the professional

agencies. It's the strength of that relationship which is often the key to minimising the risk to vulnerable children. The adversarial nature of the court room is liable to undermine this process rather than support it.

When a child is detained in an emergency it is essential that both the child and parents have a meaningful right of appeal. At present an appeal can be heard by the sheriff within three days of a hearing's decision to detain a child. If it's the sheriff who issues the warrant, the only right of appeal would be to the Court of Session where appeals take months to be heard - not much use when the warrant itself only lasts three weeks.

It is not clear why the Scottish Office thinks the changes are necessary. The proposals are set out in a 'take it or leave it' fashion which makes it difficult to offer a reasoned response to their suggestions. One theory is that the proposals are aimed at bringing the Hearing System more into line with international human rights obligations - the European Convention on Human Rights in particular. This is a worthwhile aim but a complex one. In any welfare-based system there is always a tension between welfare principles and justice principles. It is all too easy to turn a relatively constructive tension into a destructive or unworkable one.

The Children's Hearing System is widely considered to have served the interests of Scottish children - and society - well for twenty-two years. There may well be ways in which the rights of children and parents can be refined without undercutting the welfare basis of the system. If that is the aim of the Scottish Office paper, it is highly ironic that its effects appear to be to reduce existing rights of children and parents and to make the system's welfare aims harder to achieve in some of the most sensitive cases.

Perhaps the most fundamental contradiction lies not in what is proposed but how it is presented. The rights and interests of children and parents are complex issues that require thorough and informed public debate. The Scottish Office would best serve the interests of Scotland by opening up the thinking behind this paper for discussion. If nothing else, that would be an example of the genuine respect for human rights which the consultation paper claims but fails to deliver.

Alan Miller

## Locked into the System

### PRISONS

It is a well-rehearsed truth that Scotland still locks up more offenders than almost any other European country. What is less well-known is that as a consequence of this pattern of action by the courts, something like 12,500 Scottish children are directly affected by imprisonment every year. The number of children affected in Scotland is proportionately higher than in England and Wales because Scottish courts put more short-term offenders and fine defaulters in prison than English ones do.

Scotland has a total of fifteen prisons for adults, including Barlinnie Special Unit, and four institutions for young offenders, one of them for young men on remand. Many of these 'establishments', as the Prison Service likes to call them, are located some distance from the big cities, often in remote and inaccessible parts of the country. Ironically, some of the prisons most distant from the central belt - Peterhead, Aberdeen, Inverness, Perth - hold prisoners serving out the longest sentences. This is also true for young offenders - Jessefield in Dumfries, currently holds more than a dozen youngsters aged under eighteen who are beginning life sentences for murder. Most of these boys come from the Glasgow area, so

find themselves locked up in an institution more than eighty miles from their families.

Prisoners themselves have consistently placed contact with their families at the top of the changes they want to see - ahead of 'in-cell' sanitation and electricity. What efforts has the Scottish Prison Service been making to meet their demands?

In general since the riots of the eighties the Scottish Prison Service has been trying to haul itself into the twentieth century - just in time for the start of the twenty-first! There have been some limited improvements in visit arrangements since then, particularly more 'open visits', i.e. ones where prisoners can actually be in contact with their visitors, hold hands with a girlfriend or wife or have a child to sit on their knee.

Nevertheless the overall picture described in the study commissioned recently by the Scottish Forum on Prisons and Families remains depressingly unchanged. A woman rearing children on her own while her man is in jail has to cope with a whole range of extra burdens besides all the usual single-parent problems of low income and lack of support. The conclusion one draws from this brief introductory study of the subject is that for all practical purposes, the Prison Service still takes no responsibility for the effects of imprisonment on families.

Even at the most basic level, information - about what you can claim to help meet the costs of visiting, about where the prison is and what public transport takes you there - is not kept up to date and is not readily available for visitors. Despite the emphasis placed by the Chief Executive, Eddie Frizzell, on creating a 'quality' service, women describe staff as frequently unhelpful, hostile and negative. The few visit rooms that do provide child-minding and play areas for children do so mainly thanks to the part-time efforts of volunteers. The small child may be catered for with a toy box but for the teenage visitor, in to see his or her dad, there is nothing to relieve the strain or to dilute the publicness of the encounter.

Not surprisingly perhaps, in view of the generally low standards in Scottish prisons, the report singles out Dungavel prison in the west of Scotland for special praise for its more enlightened visit regime. The prison has special 'family visit rooms' with cooking facilities (a micro-wave oven), and a separate play area for children. This is a far cry from the visit 'stalls' of Barlinnie but it should by no means be taken as a standard of excellence to aim for, which is what seems likely to happen, since other prisons are said to be looking at developing similar facilities. In a recent television documentary, a family

interviewed at Dungavel did give the arrangements a higher rating than elsewhere but also described the experience of being in the family visit room like "being in a goldfish bowl". The warder positioned outside the glass door is able to monitor the movements of the family throughout the entire time of the visit.

It will take a great deal more than material improvements of this sort - important though they are - to shift the approach to one that is genuinely more child and family-centred. It really needs little less than a complete change in the attitude of prison staff, particularly uniformed staff who deal directly with visitors. However, since prisons are primarily concerned with secure custody, many staff view all 'invasions' from outside with suspicion. Open visits may look like a major concession in their eyes but unfortunately for children, they hardly even constitute the first step on the road to meeting their needs for real contact with a parent.

**Scottish Child** is running a national conference on "The Imprisoned Family" in the Pearce Institute, Govan on 28th May. See advertisement on page 16. The report, **Scottish Prisoners and Their Families** is available from Save the Children, 6 Western Corner, Edinburgh EH12 5PY.

Rosemary Milne



Douglas Robertson



Playplus Stirling

## Play On!

### PLAY

Playplus in Stirling began when a group of regular users of the shoppers' creche whose children had special needs organised playschemes and monthly 'fun sessions'. Five years on the project enables around eighty children scattered about the area to have a bit of fun while giving carers a break.

Although one important aim is to integrate children, regardless of their differences - physical, emotional or intellectual - the emphasis continues to be on giving the children themselves choices about the sorts of activities they want to pursue. By working to ensure a choice of safe and secure environments it is hoped the children will be encouraged to mix in the wider community. The first sessions became mixed once the children were comfortable enough to want to invite brothers, sisters and friends along to join in.

For the younger ones integration has been made simpler by the ease with which Playplus can tap into the programme of District Council holiday playschemes. Playplus provides transport and staff to support the children. Making sure each child has a good time involves motivating them to join in as well

as basic physical care and that means well-trained workers as well as sensitive planning of activities. Karen Doran whose work involves supporting volunteers at the playschemes says, "If after an event a volunteer comes up and says, 'It was terrible - we just didn't get on!' you want to congratulate them because then you know they've learned what they are meant to be doing. It's the ones who won't admit their difficulties who have the bigger problem."

Equipment that is popular with all children has been one of the keys to successful events where other children have been invited to join those with special needs. A specially adapted bouncy castle, bikes with huge balloon tyres and sensory stimulating Snoezelen equipment - one piece resembles a giant child-proof lava-lamp, another consists of huge bunches of fibre-optic rope which sparkle in the dark - have all proved their worth and are lent out to other organisations.

Clearly heavy emphasis has to be put on making sure there are plenty of willing trained people to step in. This becomes even more important as the children become teenagers when the last thing they want is to be escorted everywhere by their parents. Their diverse

interests also stretch resources. Whereas many of Playplus' younger users will outgrow their difficulties the teenagers tend to be those who will be making the transition into an adult world still hostile to their needs. Playplus finds teenagers at 'special' schools very reluctant to mix with 'other' kids because their experience suggests they'll be picked on. For the first time however these same teenagers are referring their friends to Playplus events organised exclusively for them.

Even so Playplus continues to quietly break down the barriers. Scottish Child was invited along to the music workshop that's part of an integrated link-up with Community Education. The venue is tiny recording studio Random Rhythms Music Workshop. Having picked up Robbie and Claire, complete with keyboards, we meet Farhara and Uzma who are keen to play guitar, and Michelle who sings with local band "Purple Passion". Neil, who works at the studio, leaves Robbie to have a go on the keyboards in a 'wannabe's' dream room complete with a giant mixing desk, mikes, wires and instruments crammed into every space. Ewan and Harold, workers from Playplus, are soon down to business, strumming and picking with the

guitarists next door where the much loved Snoezelen projector is casting multi-coloured bubbles over the walls. Meanwhile on the studio floor Michelle and Claire, (keyboard abandoned), start drumming along to the backing track for their art, dance and music show in six weeks time. These 13 and 14 year olds may not end up regular friends but they will clearly take much away from the experience.

The committee of parents and professionals continue to play an active part. Recently they raised funds for a new public playground at Polmaise, Fallin, designed and built by The Play Practice and providing a much needed opportunity for more natural integration to take place: after all not every child likes going to clubs!

If there is an anxiety expressed by parents it is that perhaps their children's expectations are being raised too high. The natural desire to protect them from disappointment and hurt has to be weighed against the benefits that will hopefully give them the confidence to face the future whatever it may hold. But whilst parents cast a critical eye at what's available in the adult world for special needs, the children just want to have fun!

Aileen Bruce

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## **First Announcement**

from

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Second National Congress

*On the theme:*

## **“WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP”**

**5th-8th July 1994, Bristol University**

**British Association for the Study and Prevention  
of Child Abuse and Neglect**

**10 Priory Street, York, YO1 1EZ, England.**

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## IN BRIEF

**Mayfest** is sticking to its roots as a community arts festival with closed outreach workshops in primary schools run by the respected TAG Theatre Company with 'The Banyan Tree'. However there are still shows to invite granny to, including Clyde Built Puppets with 'Giants, Magic and Mystery', the irresistible Nofit State Circus and the popular Hullabaloo (who also appear at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh) - and of course there's Magic Bob.

If you take **play** seriously you might like to sign up for this year's Scotplay at The National Centre for Play at Moray House Institute of Education's Cramond Campus where 'Providing for Play' takes place 25-26 May. You can clamber about the outdoor exhibition in between attending seminars on among other things 'Playground Design and Layout' and 'Integration and Special Needs'. The conference 'The Agenda for Play' on 14-15 September is concerned mainly with policies for play. Speakers are being invited from both national and local institutions and voluntary organisations, in the rest of Europe as well as in the UK.

On the heels of scrapping the poll tax, the government has once again bowed to public pressure with its decision to withdraw regulations requiring **national testing** of 8 and 11 year-olds in Scottish schools.

A two-year boycott of the tests by parents, a major anti-testing campaign by the main teacher's union, the unwillingness of councils to enforce the regulations, the opposition of school boards and the succession of a Thatcherite by a conciliatory minister at the

Scottish Office, all conspired to bring about a government switch to an informal, voluntary system.

The testing - in English, reading and maths - will still go ahead, but at times of the teachers' own choosing. Pupils will be tested when the teacher thinks they are ready to move on to a higher one of the five levels in the 5-14 curriculum. (Under the initial system the teacher had to test the children for the stage they were already at - and the testing was, not surprisingly, criticised for telling teachers nothing new).

The new arrangements will mean that children could be tested up to four times in primary school and perhaps once in the first two years of secondary school. As if in belated recognition of the deep-seated hostility to the compulsory testing regime, the government now say no pupil will be put under pressure to attempt a test "before the teacher considers the pupil ready to be tested."

Concerns still remain about the government's long-term agenda (and the possible effect of using test results to put children into ability "streams" or "sets"), the amount of teachers' time taken up with the tests, and whether results will be kept confidential enough. But fears that children might be bludgeoned into taking the tests and branded as "successes" or "failures" at too early an age have, for the time being, evaporated.

There's a new addition to the BAAF collection of **guidance manuals** for professionals. This one's on working with HIV affected and infected children and it continues BAAF's established pattern of providing a wide-ranging and useful examination of a particular child care issue in a manageable and readable form. The title is "**HIV Infection and Children in Need**" and it offers an up-to-date picture of work being done in different regions of Britain with



**More strange goings-on concerning marine-life? Hidden beneath the surface of the disused quarry at North Queensferry, Fife, in the shadow of the Forth Rail Bridge, a gigantic aquarium will be opening in April. Visitors to Deep-Sea World will be fed on a moving pavement through an acrylic tunnel, surrounded by a million gallons of sea water filtered from the frothy Forth. It promises to be the nearest thing to diving in the Atlantic without getting wet, with sharks, cod and congers on view and elsewhere a touch tank for little guddlers. There's even a bit of coral reef. A timely opening what with Flipper on the telly and all.**

HIV positive families. From the 'flexible care' arrangements of Lothian Region Social Work Department to Barnardos 'Positive Options' planning scheme, you get a sense of a vast amount of really good, creative thinking going on in this area of the social and health care services. At £9.99 for non-BAAF members, it's not a cheap read, but well worth the outlay. Copies obtainable from: BAAF, 11 Southwark Street, London SE1 1RQ

Anybody who read 'Let's Talk About Sex' (**Scottish Child February/March 1993**), couldn't fail to be impressed by the mature approach of the young people in the discussion. They were all members of the Brook Advisory Service's

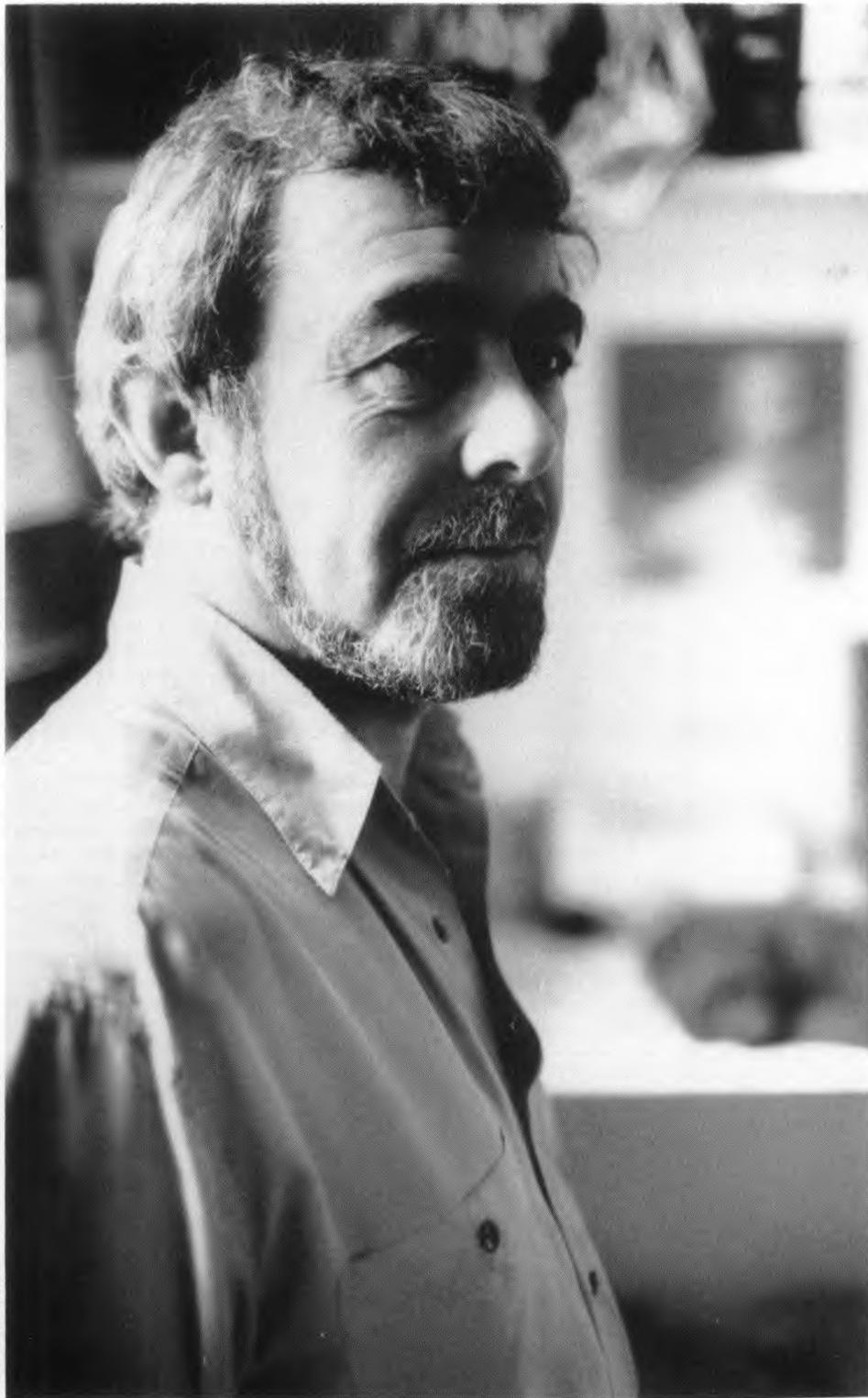
**Peer Education Project**, based in Edinburgh.

Set up three years ago, and now? You've guessed - under threat of closure when its funding runs out in June.

Lothian's loss is Fife's gain. Wendy Russell, who built up this very successful service in Edinburgh by working much more than her allotted six hours per week, is moving to a full-time post to help develop a new peer education project, funded for three years to the tune of £47,000 per year by Fife Health Board.

The Brook Advisory Service still hopes that some peer education will continue in Lothian. But if you go by what young people themselves were saying, that's a drop in the bucket compared with the need out there.

# OIL AND TROU



Paul Raeburn

Shetland fiddler, **Aly Bain**, has been following the Braer disaster in his native Shetland Isles. **Lucy Turnbull** went to speak to him about it.

I met Aly Bain in the offices of Regular Music. He was just back from Shetland for a week before going to America for a short tour. I wanted to find out what's known about the aftermath of the Braer disaster and I was fairly certain he'd be able to tell me, since he has never lost his links with Shetland. He has family still living there and visits regularly, although he left in 1967.

The first thing I learnt was that he's got some gigs lined up for when he comes back from America but not for his own benefit - the proceeds will be going to a fund that has just been set up after the Braer disaster by the Shetlands Islands Council. "I feel very pleased to be a part of this initiative. They plan to set up The Marine Environmental Foundation which will promote the wellbeing of all the marine environment - not just of the North Sea but all the seas and oceans across the world." He continues, "Although this Foundation doesn't seem, in some ways, as spectacular as 'Save the Birds!' or 'Save the Seals!', it's actually far more important because it takes a long-term view of the environment. The work of the Foundation will be in monitoring the state of the seas, the seabed and all the marine life and educating people at all levels about what's happening, what the problems are in continuing as we do at present. That has to be the way forward. I hope, and the Shetlands Islands Council hopes that the Foundation will be funded from as many different sources as possible, particularly by governments and oil companies."

There's a positive, upbeat note to all of this but I want to go back a bit to when the disaster happened. What does he miss most about Shetland, and what did he feel when he heard about the Braer?

"It's a very beautiful and peaceful island. After travelling around it's one of the few places you can go out for a day and be absolutely alone. If you've not experienced it, people can find it hard to believe how you can go out on the lochs all day fly fishing - that's something I enjoy - and never see another soul. That kind of beauty and peace and unspoiltness is so rare. When I first heard of the disaster on the television, it was like suffering a sudden bereavement. The nearest thing I can compare it to is that it was really like watching somebody die and not being able to do anything about it."

But the optimism returns - "Luckily the disaster coincided with the worst weather this century so the oil was widely dispersed. When I was up last week there were no visible signs that there has actually been a disaster. A few miles from where it happened the beaches look clean and there is no sign of oil or other pollution. They say the fact that it was light crude oil helped enormously - that and the bad weather. Don't get me wrong though, there is pollution off the west coast of the island and there is a no-fishing zone of seven miles out of the west coast of the island. That's going to create great

# BLEED WATERS

hardship for the salmon fishers and inshore fishers because that's their livelihood. And it's undoubtedly a worry that we don't know where the oil has gone. We don't know yet if it's been completely dispersed or if it's on the sea bottom, although there is evidence that fish feeding on the sea bottom have been polluted."

Most of the publicity surrounding the Braer disaster has centred on the hundreds of birds, seals and otters that have been killed - Shetland is home to one of the rarest types of otters in the world. Fortunately they have not all been killed off or left the island. Doesn't Aly find it heartbreaking though, knowing of all those birds and seals that have been killed when it could have been prevented? "I think the message coming from Greenpeace and the press is pretty much an over-reaction. If you ask local people what they think about the problem a lot of them will say they're actually quite relieved that it hasn't been a complete disaster. What I'm hearing is that people think it's a miracle that the oil seems to have disappeared. And there's some anger at the way the global media have given the impression that the islands are completely polluted. That's not the case. There is understandable concern that this portrayal of the situation could seriously affect tourism. I don't by any means think it's some kind of cover-up to protect the tourist industry either. My own sister lives beside a lovely little sandy beach five miles from the disaster and it's untouched: there's not a sign that there's been any disaster."

But is it really untouched or is it that it just can't be seen?

"What I'm saying is that there's no oil there. It may be contaminated in some way but I'm sure that's only in the short term. The sea is so powerful up there that I'm sure it will wash all that's left away anyway. Take my word - if you went up there you wouldn't notice anything. I think we feel as if we've got off really lightly."

"Now what the people in Shetland are concerned about is that this doesn't happen again. We've got to pressure people, especially the government, into changing the code of practice to keep the oil tankers away from Shetland and areas like Shetland. This means making sure the crews are better trained and can speak at least one common language, that the tankers are safe and that there's some kind of tagging being used. They could be monitored using a satellite, like what's used for cars in London where they can be tracked centrally on a computerised map. This could easily be done with boats and if the vessels kept regular contact with the coastguards that would keep them on course"

So how are the salmon farmers feeling, since they have apparently been more affected than most by the disaster? "The catch that they were going to harvest this year has had to be destroyed and the catch they were expecting to harvest next year may also be lost. Add to that the fact that they have to put in salmon this year to grow

and be ready for the year after that as well, what we're maybe talking about is three years harvest - worth upwards of eighty or ninety million pounds. That's a lot of money for the island's economy to lose and it's a disaster for the salmon fishermen. I'm not sure if they know yet what their insurance position is with regard to future years, or if they're just insured against losses for the current year."

Aly left just before the oil companies moved into Shetland bringing a lot of newcomers to the islands and a lot of money and new wealth. I wondered how the islanders took to all these new changes and how these incomers were received?

"I don't think there were tensions between the newcomers and the islanders. The Shetlanders treated these people the way they normally treat people and that's with hospitality. Some people who came up initially without intending to stay liked the islands so much they stayed. Shetlanders feel that anybody who wants to come to the island and wants to be part of island life and make a contribution is welcome. That's always been the case. You've got to remember that taking in newcomers has been a pattern in Shetland history. There have always been seafarers coming to the islands - from Ireland and Scotland and further away. People accepted the advent of the oil companies as just another addition to this line of visitors from beyond our own shores."

"The oil companies have brought a great deal of money and prosperity to the islands. That's been welcome and it's been wisely used by the Council. The Shetlands Islands Council has probably the best schools in Britain. That's one reason why people like to move up there, because the education is so good. The Council's also

was a case of 'bad news is news'. Shetland is not totally polluted and although the worst hit, the salmon farms and the inshore fishermen, have been very badly affected, it doesn't seem as though it was the total disaster it was portrayed as. The question is, does an accident like this have to be categorised and hyped by the press as a cataclysmic event before people begin to take pollution seriously? Is the the government going to need a tanker of oil tipped over Downing Street before it takes heed and prevents this sort of disaster happening again?

"Shetlanders have always been worried about oil because it might bring this kind of disaster. The Islands Council worked very hard at trying to prevent it. It's ironic because this oil wasn't Shetland oil it was Norwegian oil. It didn't even come from Sulom Voe, it was going from Norway to Canada. What we have to do is to try to make people aware of what the consequences are of the present unsatisfactory attitude of governments towards the oil companies. I don't think the responsibility lies solely with the Islands Council. It can't. The Council has taken a lead by organising a Marine Environmental Conference which was planned before the disaster. This is their way of trying to bring people together, their attempt to put pressure on governments to change the regulations for the movement of these dangerous loads around the seas. That's really all the Islands Council can do directly, besides looking after the islands themselves. I'm sure that we can learn a lot through this disaster, more as time goes on and we can share that with people and, one would hope, prevent something worse happening!"

"It will be interesting to see how many representatives the government sends to the

## "Seeing the disaster was really like watching somebody die and not being able to do anything about it"

spent money on building recreation centres the like of which you won't find anywhere else in Britain. They've invested in young people and in industries like fishing and salmon. There's been a big road-building programme all over the island which has made life much easier for all sorts of people."

"You asked me earlier what changes I see in the islands - well, when I was five or six the islands hadn't changed in hundreds of years. The busiest times used to be in the herring season between May and August. The population of the island used to double. Hundreds of women came up to gut the herring and coopers arrived to cure the herring. The herring fishing just sort of died out a few years before the oil came"

After listening to Aly Bain for a while, you're inclined to feel that the Braer disaster

Environmental Conference. Personally I'll be surprised if they send anybody. I don't think they're prepared to take it that seriously - that's the depressing side of all of this. They want to avoid it because in order to do anything it's going to cost them money. All these various Ministers come up to Shetland. They all look very concerned on the television and they say a lot and then they all piss off back to London. They're only politicians and I don't think they really give a shit."

I have to agree with him and it puts a final damper on the conversation. We all know that there is only so much a local council or even a well-endowed Foundation can do. Without the backing of national and international legislation and properly funded inspectorates, the fight against pollution, in the North Sea or anywhere else is a losing battle. ■



# CLOSE TO THE EDGE

Single parents, **Linda, Margaret, Maureen** and **Mairi**, a social worker at One Plus talk to **Rosemary Milne** about the Child Support Act and its effect on families on benefit.

The scene is a room backstage in the Old Athenaeum Theatre in Glasgow. Four women, members of the Lone Rangers drama group, an off-shoot of One Plus, the Glasgow-based organisation for single parents, are talking about the Child Support Act which comes into force

on 1st April, changing the rules for maintenance payments to single parents.

Under the new law, single parents on Income Support, Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance have to divulge information about the absent parent of their children to officials of

the Child Support Agency or risk having their benefit cut if they refuse to do so. Those who do refuse will only escape being penalised if they have what the Agency terms 'good cause', for withholding the information. Single parents who do cooperate and supply the particulars of

## Some Legal Points

The Child Support Act 1991 has a deceptive title. It is not about children. It does not, for instance, define their needs, nor does it give a useful or comprehensive definition of the duty of parents not living with their children to support them financially. It is in fact a piece of Social Security legislation, dressed up in terms which are designed to appeal to the family values which so often feature in Tory Party rhetoric.

It is an almost impossible task to summarise briefly the legal features of the Act, especially in view of the fact that it has been followed by thirteen pieces of more detailed legislation. The Act itself contains the bare bones of the provisions and takes up only eleven pages of the Parliament House book, which is remarkably little when you consider what a fundamental shift it introduces into the arrangements for the financial support of children in one-parent families.

The Act sets up the Child Support Agency which starts operating from 5th April this year. The agency is responsible for tracing absent parents and for the assessment, collection, review and enforcement of maintenance payments. Parents who are looking after children in their own home and who get Income Support, Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance must apply for a

Child Support Assessment. Although other categories of parents and indeed, in Scotland, children over twelve years of age, can apply for a Child Support Assessment, it already seems clear from DSS information available that the agency will be prioritising those cases where state benefits are being paid.

There are going to be lots of problems with the Act. For example, it has been drafted within the framework of English law and it fails to take account of Scots law in relation to the duties of parents to support children up to the age of twenty-five if in full-time education - the technical legal term for this support is 'aliment'. There will almost certainly be situations in Scotland where, when a family breaks up, both the courts and the agency will get involved - but separately - with the question of a child's maintenance. This is just one of the ways in which the Scots law concept of aliment will find itself conflict with the maintenance 'formula' as laid out in this piece of legislation.

This is by no means the only problem. There are three categories of 'legal person' named in the Act: the 'qualifying child' - ie. the child for whom maintenance is payable; the 'absent parent' - ie. the person from whom the agency may seek a maintenance contribution for the child; the 'person

with care' - ie. the parent (or agency), with whom the child lives on a day-to-day basis. The Act defines the absent parent as one who does not live in the same household as the child. What one wonders, will the Child Support Agency make of a parent who has been the subject of an exclusion order and who has not voluntarily absented him or herself from the family home? Similarly the arrangements for joint custody pose potentially enormous legal and ethical problems.

It is impossible within the terms of the present Act to tackle the deeper questions about parents' responsibility for the maintenance of children with whom they no longer live, however useful such a debate might be. The Act encourages tactical, defensive action by both the caring parent and the absent parent: as one anxious parent recently revealed, the father of her child who had seen the child only once since it was born, on hearing how much he was going to be asked for in terms of maintenance under the new Act, was considering applying for custody on the grounds that it would be 'cheaper'. There's one person who's got the true measure of Peter Lilley's much vaunted 'family values'.

Joan Cradden

an absent spouse or partner to the agency will have part of their state benefit replaced by a maintenance payment from this absent person. Since the legislation is designed to make savings for the government on its ever-increasing Social Security budget, there is never any question of single parents getting more money through the new regulations. The best they can do is maintain their existing levels of support, the worst is actually to lose money.

Although, in the meetings One Plus has had with the Child Support Agency, the officials have been at pains to stress that their officers will not have specific saving targets to meet, it is clear that the agency has been set up to achieve this aim. Indeed Peter Lilley, the Minister responsible, said as much when he warmed the hearts of the Tory faithful at the Conservative Party conference with his cheap innuendoes about single mothers and the promise that he would do all in his power to lift the burden of supporting single parents from the taxpayers' shoulders.

Mairi, a social worker with One Plus, is the only person in this group of four women, who will not be hit in her pocket by the Act. The others, Linda, Maureen and Margaret, are all single parents on benefit. Between them they have eight children, all of them bar one, under twelve years of age. Two of the women are divorced, one is separated. All three are already bringing up their children on a weekly sum that wouldn't buy some people a business lunch. All of them are alarmed and angry at this latest attack on them by the government. Their anger finds its outlet in their drama but they are well aware that, however useful the theatre is to educate and campaign, more is needed if there is to be any hope of really sustained opposition to the new law.

When questioned about where they might

look for an organised framework to support their fight, they are clearly at a loss. None of them mentions either the trade union movement or the Labour Party as their 'obvious' allies. As Margaret sums it up, they look to each other and their families - "the sixteen of us in the Lone Rangers get a lot of help from each other but when you go back to where you stay the atmosphere there can be quite depressing. With unemployment, no money, all the other worries you have, sometimes the stress of it just weighs you down. You lose your fight. There are days when you don't want to be bothered to wash or dress even, things are so bad."

Maureen, Margaret and Linda are outraged at the new powers to pry given to the agency, but they also say that similar bullying tactics have been commonplace with the DSS for years. Their descriptions of the questioning techniques used in Social Security offices show the extent to which Britain has developed into a police state in recent years. The description of the persistent questioning and intimidation of claimants reminds you most of police interrogation methods with suspected criminals.

The comparison is an accurate one Linda believes. "Basically they let you know they don't believe what you're saying. They always assume you're telling lies. You should never expect any different when you go to the Social Security. To them you're low life, scum. There's often two people in the room to interview you. They fire questions from different sides, so you find yourself getting upset and confused. It's done quite intentionally."

Now the resentment at the hostile attitude of Social Security officials is overlaid by anger at the powers of the Child Support Agency: the agency's right to take money off you if you don't supply the information they require and the fact that what will be deducted is not just a

token sum but nearly £9 per week - a massive cut on benefit of £65 total for a woman with two primary-age children to feed and clothe. What's more, the Act allows the agency to continue to take money off the non co-operating parent for up to eighteen months if she persists in withholding the information they need to find the father.

As one of the mothers says, "Adults can maybe get used to the attitudes of the people who run these offices. But this Agency represents a whole new development in the government's hounding of poor families. The children are being directly penalised. They like to say they're not touching the children's benefit, they're taking it off what they call your personal allowance component. The fact is though that when you've got as little as we have, the idea that you keep so much back for yourself is a nonsense anyway. As if the amount they give you leaves you with extra that you somehow keep for yourself!"

Violence by her ex-partner is one reason a woman can cite to inhibit the agency from going looking for an absent father. The government has been quick to claim this let-out clause as evidence of its unwillingness to cause any unnecessary difficulties to lone parents. There are glaring practical and ethical problems in putting this exception into practice however. The agency reserves the right to question the woman closely about the violence and even to ask her to provide proof of what she alleges she suffered at the hands of her partner. Some women are unable to supply evidence, since a lot of domestic violence is notoriously difficult to prove, either because of the absence of witnesses or because, even when a woman reports an assault, it may still not be treated with the seriousness it merits by the police.

From an ethical point of view it is clearly

A **Scottish Child** one-day conference on the needs and rights of prisoners and their families.



# THE IMPRISONED FAMILY

Venue: **the Pearce Institute, Govan**

Date: **Friday 28th May 1993, 10.00 am - 5.00pm**

Conference chairman: **Dr Andrew Coyle**, Governor, Brixton Prison.

## Speakers:

**Dr Sylvia Casale**, Independent Consultant to the Home Office, Guest Inspector of Prisons and a member of the Steering Committee for London Prisons Community Links

**Jean Raeburn**, Children's Panel Training Organiser, Lothian, Borders and Western Isles.

**Joe McGrath**, HM Prison Noranside

Conference fee: £50.00 full rate; prisoners and people on benefit who are not sponsored by an organisation: £10.00.

There is a free creche for under-fives. Places are limited so, please let us know on your application form if you require a place.

Complete the form below and return with your remittance to: **Scottish Child**, 40 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh EH2 4RT

I wish to book \_\_\_\_\_ place(s) at the **Scottish Child** conference **The Imprisoned Family**, on Friday 28th May 1993 at the Pearce Institute, Govan.

I wish to book \_\_\_\_\_ place(s) in the creche for under-fives. The name of my child/children is \_\_\_\_\_ aged \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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I enclose a cheque/PO for £ \_\_\_\_\_ payable to **Scottish Child**



The conference is supported by Govan Initiative

## **"Whatever way you look at it, it comes back to money - the main pressure on lone parents like us is that we're strapped for cash all the time." - Maureen**

questionable whether in a civilised society any woman on a barely subsistence income should have to prove violence by an ex-partner in order to be eligible for state payments to help with the rearing of her children.

The guidance to staff about a woman's right to withhold information about the father if this will lead to unacceptable consequences for her and her children, is that she should be believed unless what she is saying is shown to be 'inherently implausible'. However, as Mairi points out and the single parents themselves readily confirm, this makes the whole let-out clause feel like a charade, because the bias of DSS staff training teaches staff to be suspicious of claimants' stories rather than to believe them.

"In fact it's been happening already," explains Mairi, "women who've been assaulted in their homes and who've separated from their man for that reason, have been thoroughly quizzed, I mean really put through it, by officers from the agency. At One Plus we've had women ringing us up very upset by the way they've been treated, very scared of what the Act can do to them and their children. So what you're seeing is another whole layer of violence - not physical but emotional this time - on top of the original hurt the woman experienced. It's quite frightening."

Linda voices another fear of many women about the reappearance of her ex-partner - the fear of the disruption it will bring to her children's lives and the distress that will be caused. Her ex-partner has been out of her and her children's life for some years and the idea that he could be right back in touch is a source of dread. "I know that the minute they ask him for money, no matter how little, he'll want access and then it'll be back to square one. I've just no idea how the kids would cope with that. They've had no contact with him for so long and they're perfectly happy with the situation as it is. How can this so-called Support Agency square that with what they say about 'the children coming first'?"

"In a sense I can understand a man saying if he's got to pay he wants to see his kids. That's exactly why you don't get him to pay - because it leaves you free to protect the children and yourself from him and how he was with you when he was in the house. You've no obligations to him and, however hard it is, you can get on and manage your life. The way it will be with this new Act is that you lose control over your life, you have no control at all. Social Security give you £69.50 a week and this means they can call all the shots."

Mairi is concerned that a woman whose main reason for not naming the father is that he has been out of the family's life for years is very likely to lose benefit, no matter that the mother may insist that it is not in the children's interests or hers to have to re-establish contact just because of a maintenance payment.

"I think the issue of the man with a history of violence has been aired enough for officers to

feel they have to be ready to accept this as a reason for the woman withholding information - although I wouldn't be over-optimistic even about that. But, as far as a woman saying 'he's not been around the kids for so long it's a bad idea to let him back in and we don't want it', well, I think they'll have their work cut out convincing the Agency that this is good cause for not revealing the father's identity."

Women who have had children by more than one father can expect to have their lives made even more difficult. Margaret cites her own case where the father of her youngest child refused to have anything to do with her after he discovered she was pregnant. She has brought this child up totally unaided by him, since the father returned to his wife and family.

It's safe to assume that the 'wayward husband' who has a fling and then retreats from the consequences of it exactly fits the picture the government is keen to create.

However, Margaret is quite as sure about her way of thinking as Peter Lilley and his colleagues are about theirs: she wants the man who merely made her pregnant to have no claim on her and no contact with this son whom he has never seen. Until now she has been free to make that choice without the threat of a reduction in her money. Now that's no longer the case. Her own feelings in the matter, her own resourcefulness and determination to bring her child up without this man's help carry no weight against the government's determination to off-load their responsibility for those they categorise as an unacceptable burden on the state.

"Whatever way you look at it, it comes back to money - the main pressure on lone parents like us is that we're strapped for cash all the time." Maureen goes on, "It's very sad."

"That's it exactly," Margaret confirms "the children get no treats like other children get. They don't get to the swimming, they don't get to the pictures. Their treat is a game of cards in the evening with me if I feel up to it. We have to spend £6 just to get into town on the bus before we do anything once we're there so we don't go."

Even schools seem to show little insight into how it is for a parent on a low income, offering outings to children which parents are expected to be able to fund at short notice and with no additional help. "You're torn between wanting to keep up appearances for your children's sake and wanting to go up to the school and give them a piece of your mind for giving you all this extra worry on top of the worries you have all the time."

Any little thing can suddenly expose a family living so close to the edge - a torn jacket, a lost schoolbag, a pair of trainers gone missing. There is no slack in the budget to replace essential items unexpectedly. All of the mothers can quote instances of helping out friends with outgrown clothes for smaller children, of letters sent from school about the children "not being

adequately clad".

"It makes you feel totally inadequate. I hate the constant shame of it - the feeling of never being on top of things for the children. Since my marriage broke up my kids have had to get used to the idea that they don't get what other kids take for granted. Even birthdays are used to buy necessities. The constant lack of money sets up terrible strains between you and your children at times. You can be shouting at them because they seem so careless one minute and the next you're feeling awful because you know they're holding back because they realise that things are difficult. I want to scream because they shouldn't have to worry for me like that. They're entitled to be protected from that kind of pressure."

With the Child Support Agency looking likely to increase those feelings of anxiety and hardship, how do these women think families will manage in the future? "I can see a lot more children going into care because of the changes," says Margaret, "I can see parents who're really short of money for food getting accused of neglecting their children. As it is you'll find that people like us can't afford to buy fresh fruit and butcher meat in the way we're told we ought to but that's nothing compared to what you could see after April."

The picture is bleak indeed: single women all over Britain are struggling against the odds to bring up healthy, happy children.

Thousands of them are making an excellent job of that task. They are creating and maintaining networks of support at the local and family level. Now with the Child Support Act, they are faced with yet another attack on their own and their children's wellbeing. This time these small-scale support systems, for all their strength, may not be enough to keep at least some of them - possibly even a great number - from reaching a point where they finally feel they can no longer cope.

Women have always been at the forefront of community politics - in the front line of rent strikes and backing their men when their jobs are under threat. Where's the equivalent support now for single mothers from among the ranks of the men - married or unmarried, employed or out-of-work? The sad truth is that it's not there. The campaigning that's been done against the Act has come either from professional groups like One Plus who've made genuine efforts to influence from within - but so far to no effect - or otherwise from women themselves, marching and petitioning and trying to raise public awareness. If ever proof was needed of how little value is really placed in Britain on the lives of all children, you need look no further than this iniquitous piece of legislation and the shameful way in which unsupported women have been left to fight it on their own. ■

**One Plus** is based at 39 Hope Street Glasgow G2 6AE. Tel: 041-221 7150



# Techno Prisoners

Adults are quick to condemn computer games, but for many kids it's their main opportunity to have fun. **Shiel Yule** assesses the current craze and looks to the future.

Nowadays almost everybody old and young watches T.V. It's the main form of recreation we have in the west and has crept into more than 85% of all British homes. The T.V. drug is always available creating a 24-hour buzz from breakfast time in the kitchen to last thing at night in the bedroom - substituting 'Tee-Vee life' for our own, until **Brookside** is more real to us than the Six o'Clock news.

The invasion of television and its various spawnings- video, satellite, and computer games

has already taken place, to the joy of almost every child. Video consoles and games were top of the Christmas list for 1992 with **Nintendo** outselling car giants **Toyota**. Nowadays, Mario, Nintendo's little Italian plumber from Brooklyn, is bigger than Mickey Mouse with new games and accessories appearing monthly.

Plug in these toys and your television screen becomes anything from a shooting alley to a space ship. Kids throughout our society are virtually unanimous..."If you ain't got one

already you want one." So what is it that kids have found so appealing?

Open a video game and you will discover a computer that has been optimised for fun. It includes special chips for zippy graphics and rich sound guaranteed to blast the senses. The stories are adventurous and you, the player, are the one who makes the moves and takes all the decisions.

Nonetheless, are computer games-makers evil geniuses responsible for creating a

# Many would argue that this recreation craze is quickly turning the children of today into couch potatoes with frying brains, bloodshot eyes and blistered thumbs.

generation of high-tech zombies sitting slumped in front of the impending dawn of the technopolis? Many would argue that this recreation craze is quickly turning the children of today into couch potatoes with frying brains, bloodshot eyes and blistered thumbs.

The truth is that children still tend to be healthy while adults are not. Adults think of any activity that requires a bit of energy as "staying healthy" and "exercising the body" whereas to children this is simply play and they do it naturally given half the chance. If it snows, who rushes out and makes the snowmen? Who is that is sledging, skateboarding, swimming and skating? New sports like mountain-biking and snowboarding all catch on because of children and their enormous appetite for burning up energy.

Energetic play allows children to gain control of their bodies and develop co-ordination. Sadly, there are increasingly few open spaces for children to play safely in and playing outdoors often means dicing with death. British towns and cities are not child-friendly, they are car-friendly. Such spaces that are not dominated by traffic tend to be strewn with dog turds.

There is constant danger not just from the threat of accidents but also increasingly from the more hidden effects of pollution. Beaches have the hazards of untreated sewage, oil spills and nuclear waste. Toxic pollution from factories and farming seeps into streams and wastegrounds. Even just playing in a park in the open air leaves children wide open to airborne pollution and burning due to the deterioration in the ozone layer. As the situation shows every sign of worsening, the prospect is that our grandchildren could be living encased in the carapaces of the house and car for most of their childhoods.

Just as the playing environment has deteriorated so video technology has advanced. Since Alexander Graham Bell invented his first telephone, the communications industry has been developing increasingly refined and seductive technology. The technological revolution has turned electronic circuits into digital microprocessors, translating text, pictures and sound into a form which computers can read and manipulate.

In Japan **Nintendo** has already trapped computer power within its games boxes. Adult video games players can also use their consoles to bank at home, go shopping, trade stocks, and gamble in lotteries and horse races. In America half of all homes regardless of whether they have children own a video console. Mario merchandising has swept into food, clothes, and now the epic **Mario - the Movie** starring Bob Hoskins is about to hit cinema screens.

In the U.S. children are also now being taught everything from basic alphabet to trigonometry by computer. Computers have the advantage of

being infinitely patient and new software has increasingly allowed clear symbols and small diagrams to replace complicated machine codes. Falling prices and developing educational software means that the "infant-friendly" computer is just around the corner.

As the U.S. market becomes increasingly saturated, market leaders **Sega** and **Nintendo** are aiming their sights on Britain in 1993. Here video consoles are still purely recreational, aimed at children between the ages of 10 and 16 though increasingly reaching both a younger and an older age group. Already half of British homes with children currently own a video game console. In the wake of this sudden and meteoric rise in popularity it is not surprising that adults are tending to panic and allowing these video consoles to become the focus of their health concern for their children.

The primary concern expressed is the addictive nature of the games and the amount of time children spend playing them. Evidence showing that children sit and play on the games for upwards of 15 hours per week is certainly alarming. The games which have over 40 playing levels with between 4 and 7 stages for each level are designed to be not just as enjoyable but also as addictive as possible. They are also designed to be quickly mastered and replaced. After a brief initial learning period there is little benefit mentally or physically to children from playing video games.

However in spite of this there is, as of yet, no clear evidence that there is any serious detrimental effect to children's health from playing the games either. Sixteen British children are recorded as having had epileptic convulsions

whilst playing, although these could equally have been brought on by prolonged television viewing. Any parent comparing this figure to road accident statistics will quite justifiably feel that playing at home with a computer game is a safer option.

A new digital world order at the beginning of the 21st century has huge prospects. Children growing up today are undoubtedly the forefathers of the technopolis. But the question facing adults right now is - will we go on surrendering our social spaces and culture to the demands of technology? At present we need not go out to the theatre, a meeting or the cinema because we have a video or a T.V. but does tomorrow's technology mean that we may never be able to go out at all?

The environmental and technological choices that are made in the next decade are much broader than those encompassed by forbidding or allowing our children to play with computer toys. As a society we have the power and the technical know-how to liberate recreation or to create a generation of children who are the paralytic prisoners of television and take their only exercise through the medium of virtual reality machines.

Already in Australia school-children are being kept out of the sun at certain times of the day to avoid skin cancers related to the deterioration of the ozone layer. Meanwhile in February 1993 the ozone layer over Scotland was recorded in some places as up to 23% below normal. Whatever the long-term outcomes the manifestations of the technological revolution are already popping up for adults as well as children faster than the monsters in a video game. ■



Shiel Yule

# Bang The Dr

Kaitie Lorimer describes her work at Pilton Arts with local children.



# um

Many of the most creative and rewarding projects I've run at Pilton Arts have been with children and young people from eight to sixteen years old. I don't set out to turn people into artists, although if an individual shows potential and a wish to develop in that direction they'll get lots of help from Pilton Arts, but what I do try to do is to open the arts up to people and let them see how art can actually expand their horizons, open up a whole new world.

If people start doing art, it usually means they learn new skills of one sort or another. Getting a new skill gives people increased self-confidence, a feeling of greater autonomy, more self-reliance. Suddenly they can find themselves really believing they do have more choices than they thought. The skills they acquire may be something quite unexpected - for instance their dexterity may improve; they may develop more flexible ways of thinking about problems; they may become more observant, less bound by their preconceived ideas not just about art but much wider issues. Sometimes they create something lasting and visible like a painting, a mosaic or a sculpture and sometimes it's learning a new process which is important, like making prints or welding.

Children in Pilton are no different from children anywhere; they have the same wants and needs. Like all children, they are special, with the same range of potential as any people at any time in our human history. It is increasingly evident that these universal needs and potential are often neither being served nor realised. The children are most aware of this. They receive constant messages that they have little future.

Many of the kids I work with have long experience of the hardships of life at the edge.

Some have been categorised as educationally hopeless, unemployable and 'nothing but trouble'. These same kids often articulate to me something very different. Almost without exception they express their frustration at there being nothing for them to do, apart from hanging out on the street corner in their spare time. They express their fear that, in the absence of something constructive to do, they will get into trouble or they may 'end up as junkies'. Most say they are bored. When they participate in one of the arts projects they ask if there will be more of the same sort of activity for them to get involved with next - or when the next art project will be. They always turn up too, unlike some of the adult groups where there are inherent difficulties with attendance.

One project, a spin-off from the Pilton Arts garden project, got primary school children from St David's School busy making mosaic panels. We had to begin by grading the mosaic pieces from a mixed bag of off-cuts into colours. As it emerged, there were approximately eighty different categories of colour and tone, all to be separated, a job which was intensely hard on the eye. It was noticeable that the children, not having experienced such an exercise before, were for the first time being made aware of the finer points of colour variation. To start with it was obvious that several of them had difficulty distinguishing between colours and tones but as time went on, their skill and observation increased.

The next task was to make drawings on which the mosaics would be based. Through discussion with the group it was agreed that our theme would be to do with the sea. We gathered a collection of fish, mermaids, waves, an octopus and a skull and cross bones as our reference



Katlie Lorimer

**So often I am told that the Ninja Turtle empire is 'popular culture'. Popular it may be, culture I'm not so sure.**

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material. We looked at pictures of Roman and Byzantine mosaics so that the kids could have a sense of the history and application of this process. Many opportunities for learning new things occur in the course of such a project. The making of the mosaics demanded such manual and visual dexterity that to a certain extent, as the artist overseeing the work, I had to act as technician for the children from time to time, re-making or refining some of the work.

At a later stage when the mosaic motifs were ready to be incorporated with other materials into concrete panels, two sculptors were brought in. They further acted as technicians for the kids, by showing them how to make casts from concrete which were used alongside the mosaics; they then made up the final panels which were to be installed on the walls of the Schoolhouse.

I have found that bringing in other artists is not only useful to me on a technical basis but it also provides added stimulation and interest to the kids. They become aware of the fact that there are many different disciplines and ways of working in the visual arts. This gives them a glimpse into a wider world of creative possibilities.

The kids who take part in Pilton Arts activities are encouraged to move away from ideas which replicate commercial images. So often I am told that the Ninja Turtle empire is 'popular culture'. Popular it may be, culture I'm not so sure. Whatever it is, it's a hard-sell, colonising, global product which makes vast quantities of money for its perpetrators. It's a product moreover which, in my opinion, can seriously stultify the development of the child's imagination and creativity. My reason for mentioning this is that all too often I discover that the child's range of visual ideas and images is confined within the current commercial trend. When I ask the kids to get their imaginations working outside the straitjacket of such images, they start to find they can come up with all sorts of ideas which they've never valued at all against the dominant cultural images they see on television, in comics and so on.

At present Pilton Arts, in collaboration with Scottish Chamber Orchestra is involved in a rather different initiative, the Gamelan Recycling Project. It's already achieved one of the

main objectives, namely to create an orchestra of percussion instruments made from recycled junk, scrap and other rubbish. In the drama studio made available to us by Craigroyston High School, under the unique creative direction of theatre designer, Paul Ambrose Wright, many local kids from Pilton and Muirhouse have invented and built a series of extraordinary instruments, including the craziest drum you ever saw, made from a VW Beetle. The environmental issue of the usefulness of recycling has suddenly become a tangible reality to the children and we've discussed it at length.

The Gamelan Project has brought together a 'territorial' mix of kids working in varying numbers and groupings. This has not by any means been all plain-sailing. However,

difficulties such as those of bringing kids from across local territorial boundaries are relatively easy to resolve once you convince them that they have to find common ground in the project itself, leaving at the door, so to speak, their local rivalries and differences. It's amazing how easy it is to convince them of the worth of that and how they get on with it, often so much better than an equivalent mixed adult group.

Other difficulties can arise when there are issues of dual management in the same piece of work. In the Gamelan Project for example, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra is coming in from outside the community and is likely to be viewed with suspicion by the local people as a 'middle-class interloper'. It's a relatively easy matter for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra to add fuel to this suspicion if it pursues its own aims singlemindedly - to get a series of musical compositions ready for a concert. If the supporting professionals either choose not to see or fail to see the value and significance of the

educational process as it unfolds for the children, or if they underestimate what the children's expectations and investments are, they can quickly lose the children - in the most literal sense. Children sense that they are getting caught up adults' conflicting ideas about what is needed and they flee from the confusion and the adults' apparent lack of interest in them for themselves.

However it's important and fruitful to encourage liaisons between the arts from the wider world and the people of local communities because it is a valuable two-way educational process, often with very rewarding outcomes. Local arts do not have to be parochial, nor do the 'high' arts have to be elitist.

There is no end to the demand for such activity from our young people and it is so

## Almost without exception the children express their frustration at there being nothing for them to do, apart from hanging out on the street corner in their spare time.

obviously a means of healthy alternative education which can provide genuinely useful tools for living. In these times, despite wholly inadequate government funding, it offers one way of making up for some of the deficits in our systems of education and training.

**Editor's note:** On 19th February the Scottish Arts Council announced that they were cutting their entire grant - already pathetically small - to Pilton Arts. They informed the management committee of Pilton Arts that, owing to a reduction in their own grant from the government, they were having to make cuts in their funding of certain projects. The Scottish Arts Council says it intends to target the cuts at local arts organisations in order to protect the funding of regional and national organisations. So much for the Charter for the Arts in Scotland and the Scottish Arts Council's professed aim of increasing access to the arts for all the people of Scotland. ■





# Young, Scottish and Black

Just how racist are we in Scotland? **Alison Bell** spent an afternoon with some young black Glaswegians and came away with a disturbing picture of racial abuse.

I had arranged to meet a group of young black men and women who are currently attending a further education college on the southside of Glasgow. I was told they would be easy to find, "because the black students have a spot where they tend to sit together." I found myself wondering if that was about safety in numbers. I think I got my answer because Iqqi started to speak even before I managed to switch the tape on:

"If you won't accept us, our attitude has to be 'fuck you'. We'll take care of our own people. If you go to any college you'll see that black people stick together. White people have isolated us. But we have so much fun within ourselves that we don't need you."

Shban immediately take up the point, "You'll notice that the black people at the college here all hang about together. With a few rare

exceptions Asian people about here don't really have many white friends. They don't have much in common with white folk to talk about. A white person will say 'I'm going dancing or out to the pub tonight.' We can't always say we'll be joining them." Her friend Rosina adds, "If you talk about your family it's always 'You have got a big family haven't you', or worse, if they don't like you they say 'Pakis breed like rats'."

She continues - "In a school or college there's such a mixture of people from all backgrounds that it can be hard to see racism clearly. But once you go out to where there isn't such a mix you'll find it easily." Iqqi agrees with her. "Supposing I was to go and live in Possil, I wouldn't have a cat in hell's chance you know."

I ask the others if that's their feeling too and

Shban confirms she knows families in that kind of situation in Govanhill - "Every day something is happening there. On top of that there's the graffiti 'Pakis Out' on the streets everywhere you go."

"It's worse than that," adds Iqqi, "because nowadays they don't just call you a black bastard and walk away - they call you Buddah Buddah or they say something like, 'here come the Ayatollahs'. Before it was just 'you Paki or you black' but now they make funny prayer gestures. The more they get to know of us the wider the issues of racism are going - belittling your culture and making it feel more personally directed."

That makes me wonder if religion is the real focus of racism? Rafat doesn't think so. "Colour itself makes a big difference. You often don't

# Black people are taught to see themselves as second best. Always throw them just enough to keep them coming back begging for more.

get a chance to show people your customs or your culture or your religion. They decide they don't want to know you simply because you're black."

"We are seen as not sociable," Rosina explains. "The way we are brought up is very different from the British. Even if we were 'sociable', would we be accepted? I really doubt it. I have the feeling that we're only accepted as long as we are happy to play second fiddle."

Shban nods, "Our parents came over here - slogged their guts out for twenty-five years. Eventually they managed to buy these corner shops. At first people appreciated the long hours the shops were open because they were so convenient. Now we're criticised for it and they say we're greedy."

This is a very depressing picture, are there no signs of change at all? "Yes there are, but not perhaps in the way you mean. We're fighting back more." Fighting back more? I ask. "Yes," says Iqqi, "Let me tell you about my dad."

"If anyone says to him 'Oi Paki' he laughs and says 'they're just an idiot'. But for me, it's like someone chucked a spade through my heart. I feel terrible, helpless. My dad just shrugs and walks on. He can't see it through my eyes and can't feel it the way I do. But I think, why should my dad put up with that? He's not a second-rate person, he's a fucking human being. He shouldn't have to take this shit. Because of the amount of abuse he's had to tolerate all his life he is so used to it that it doesn't matter to him. It's been drummed into him that black people are secondary, these white guys are the ones who know what they are doing. I sit down with my dad and he says 'These white people, they are too clever'. I reply 'They're not too clever dad, they've just brainwashed you'."

"Black people are taught to see themselves as second best. Always throw them just enough to keep them coming back begging for more. That's what America is doing now on a global level to India and Pakistan. As individuals all the shit has made us stronger and more determined but on the global scale black people are not doing well. We are so poor within our countries. When you really look into the history of your own people, realise some of the things they have suffered and are still suffering... then you say to yourself that they're probably going to go on suffering for another hundred years just because of what they are and what they believe. It angers a person."

There's no sign of hope then that children are better educated nowadays in other cultures,

their beliefs and customs? The group shake their heads and Shban voices their pessimism, "The children of Govan don't seem to have changed. They are still growing up with 'the black bastard' in their heads." Amirud agrees with her. "When my brother had a shop, kids as young as two or three would yell in the door at them 'You black bastards'. The parents are to blame. If we can't educate the grown-ups as well as the kids through the schools things'll not change."

"But actually the worst thing," he goes on, "is that when the law comes into it as well they are worse. Police, judges - all of them. I can give you an example of my own. I got attacked just for being black coming along Sauchiehall Street late at night. The guy had a knife and I had to defend myself. I ended up in the jail. Two policemen took me into the cells and really battered me with their truncheons. Eventually I went up to court. Eight witnesses said I reacted in self-defence but the two policemen testified against me and said I had laid into the guy. And I got charged with assault with a deadly weapon. That was me just walking back from work and the guy came at me... It was totally unjustified what happened to me."

There is broad general agreement from the group before Iqqi sums it up, "Racism is not a priority with the law, although they might have posters up in every cop shop asking for black people to join the police force. But do you think any black person wants to join a police force that's got no respect for his own kind?"

Are the women in the group experiencing the same levels of racist abuse as the men? "Just as frequently as men," says Rosina, "They say to me 'Are you wearing your mammy's curtains?' They don't see it might be pure silk or whatever. All they see is curtains, because of the way it's draped around you."

"As a woman you do get comments about your outfits and the gold jewellery you wear. There have been a lot of attacks on women, their fingers chopped off for the rings and earrings pulled out of ears. But not all women wearing jewellery are rich. Just because a woman has six bangles on her arm or a couple of rings, it doesn't mean that she is minted. It could be her wedding stuff. I know a woman who lives in one of the bigger houses. In the early hours of the morning she answered the door and found a gun at her head. They ransacked that house and they took everything."

Iqqi is quick to pick up on that though, "That's not what I'm talking about when I say racism. A criminal goes where the money is. Nine times out of ten thieves are on drugs. I

know a lot of junkies and they'll steal anything. It has nothing to do with racism. A criminal will look for the easiest prey he can get. He will attack a black woman because she is an easy target not because of her race or creed. I've known blacks who've robbed black too and drugs is the main motivation."

But Amirud's not so sure, "Well, what about the time I had a house in Knightswood. I came home at 2 o'clock in the morning to find my house broken into. The house was ransacked and all over the walls was 'get out you black bastard'."

Iqqi concedes the point "Now that was racist. You were alone living in a white area. Did you have any protection? You had nothing, so you were more vulnerable than everybody else around you. Scotland does not have a lot of black people. I come originally from near Bradford in England where there are all-black areas where white people can't go. They'd be beaten up. But it all stemmed from attacks, petrol bombings, the National Front and the 'Pakis Out' graffiti."

So what about retaliation up here? "In Scotland if you do any retaliating it's blown up out of all proportion," says Rosina, "I saw the billboards for The **Daily Record** on the trouble at Shawlands Academy last year. They said 'Asians attack Scottish Youths'. I thought - Who did they ask? I don't think it was many black people. I had to sit on the bus that morning and the wee grannies at the front of the bus were talking loudly about 'What all these wee Pakis are getting up to....that poor laddie attacked by vanloads of racist thugs.' What it actually was was a group of school kids. Both me and Shban went to Shawlands Academy. I was suspended twice for fighting with other pupils because of racism. I wouldn't just sit there and take it. The teachers just see it as children messing about. A lot of adults too will say 'that's just school and kids do fight'. Teachers don't bother because they think there's not a lot they can do."

Iqqi moves the discussion on to take in a wider perspective, "You've got the rise of fascism in Germany. You can see fascism spreading throughout Europe. It's a very real concern but it's not being highlighted. In Glasgow fifteen kids in Shawlands was highlighted more by the **Daily Record** than all the fascist activity."

Rafat goes on, "You hear about knife attacks all the time but they don't get into the papers and then suddenly it's everywhere because some blacks do it too and somebody attacked a white boy."

Amirud takes it up - "When I was at school I

## Confronting Racism

Throughout Scotland you'll find black people who are trained pharmacists, doctors, accountants, lawyers. You'll meet them in the shops and restaurants where they work because they haven't been able to gain entry to the profession they trained for or haven't been able to rise up that profession. Many of us who are black and don't work in our own businesses tend to work in the race relations field - anti-racism, welfare issues, black women's refuges. That gives you some idea the level of racism there is. You are effectively ghettoised into the race relations industry or self employment in Scotland.

The majority of black families living in Scotland originally settled in England - they headed further north hoping to find work more easily or set up businesses. Many of them also hoped to get away from the violence and racism they had experienced. Unfortunately when they got here they often encountered exactly the same attitudes. These days we hear a lot about equal employment opportunity policies, anti-racist policies, race-relations policies, everything. But few black people are convinced that those are effective at present and not just a public relations exercise. We haven't yet seen the results of those policies in increased employment or promotional opportunities. It's not enough just to have the 'right' quota of black people in an organisation, if they're all on the bottom rungs of that organisation.

The recent record of Strathclyde Police is a good example of the extremely mixed messages that are around from public services. The Chief Constable Leslie Sharp was able to make an offensive racist joke characterising black people as criminals at a cricket club dinner and get away with it. Apart from saying "sorry" he was never disciplined for this. What message is that really sending to black people in the Strathclyde area? Running an advertising campaign for black people in the police is not in itself going to increase the black community's trust or respect, when the organisation itself doesn't challenge racism internally.

The Asylum and Immigrations Appeals Bill which is going through parliament at present, says in effect that Britain needs to reduce or even stop altogether the number of black people (which is effectively what they mean when they say 'asylum seeker') coming in to this country. It is a very simplistic and hideously distorted argument: stop them coming in because there already aren't enough jobs, houses, hospital beds and there's ill feeling against blacks who are already here. The fact that immigration was initiated by the British in the days of colonialism because Britain needed cheap labour is neatly avoided. Black people are used as scapegoats nowadays, in much the same way as Jews were in the earlier part of this century. From the British government itself a clear message is being sent to black people 'You are not welcome here. You are the ones who are the problem.

You are the ones who are causing fascism, causing racism.'

We are told that refugees want to come here because they are 'economic' refugees, or because they're fleeing 'despotic' regimes. It's rarely mentioned that those regimes are typically being upheld by America, Britain and France.

Through the policies of multi-national companies, the IMF, the World Bank loans the first world has exploited and decimated the resources of the poorest countries, to the extent that in many places the rural agricultural base has

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### Some thoughts from a black woman working in anti-racist education.

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been completely destroyed as the land is turned over to cash crops to meet debt repayments. More and more you have to take a global perspective on racism or you can't begin to make sense of it in this country or others.

Globally it is a bleak picture but there are pockets of resistance being developed locally, nationally and on an international level. While racism and fascism are on the increase so are demonstrations of anti-racism and anti-fascism. Young black people are aware of the growing threat and have developed defence mechanisms to take care of themselves and keep their friends from harm. They are very angry just now. Just as anger and frustration reached a boiling point in Brixton in 1981 we could see the same things happening now. You sense a lot of energy and also pride in their own identity as black Scots among the younger generation. There's a greater sense of a black identity now than there was ten years ago when families tended to be more isolated from each other and scattered. People are coming to the realisation that this is not just happening to them as individuals, it's a concerted campaign against all black people.

So, we are seeing more community groups standing up against racism, more anti-racist organisations. The increase of racism is leading to the politicisation of not just young black people, but young white people as well. For example in 1991 in Muirhouse, a large estate on the north side of Edinburgh, the BNP tried to organise and recruit within the local community, which is 99.5% white. Local people decided to form the Muirhouse Anti-Racist Campaign. Now they are looking to set up a much longer programme of anti-racist activity and education in the community. And there are many other groups doing similar things all over Scotland - Lothian Campaign against Racism and Fascism, Scottish Asian Action Committee. In Glasgow there is West End Against Racism and a Govan Anti-Racist Group. There is even a group called SCARF - Supporters Campaign Against Racism in Football.

Anti-racist education starts from the

premise that we live in a racist society. It doesn't locate that racism within the individual, it looks at it from the structural perspective. It has a non-Eurocentric perspective, a perspective which values all people's contributions to the progress of the human race. It locates racism firmly within its historical context of slavery, of colonialism and the pseudo-scientific racism that was used to justify that, of imperialism and capitalism itself.

There are a lot of things that are done in the name of anti-racist education which aren't really that at all. Anti-racist education has at its heart a value for all people and their contribution to the progress of the human race. It could be part of any and every subject that is taught. Within an anti-racist framework it would be easy to locate multi-culturalism as a sub-set or a component of anti-racism. You might teach about cultures, about religious festivals, ways of dressing, types of food, There is nothing wrong with teaching about people's cultural identity - as long as it doesn't in any way label it as odd, exotic, or something which is intrinsically inferior to white or Christian customs. Multi-culturalism alone is inadequate because it does not recognise or tackle racism on any level.

It's interesting that the nearest equivalent we have in Scotland to the National Curriculum: the draft 5 - 14 Document on Personal and Social Development, gave a list of things which "might impinge on a child's self-esteem". One of those it suggested was ethnic origin. Ethnic origin does not impinge on a child's self-esteem. It is racism that impinges on self esteem. Locating the problem within the child, the black individual, rather than the society is a classic example of the semi-hidden racism in such policy documents.

Education workers in Scotland are always being told that racism isn't a major problem because 'there aren't so many black people up here'. This view is based on the widespread fallacy that racism is a problem of black people. Working in predominately white schools I find it quite common to hear at first, 'it's nothing to do with us because we don't have any black kids', but slowly as you begin to explore the issues together and to examine the effects of racism not just on black kids but also on white kids, an awareness grows that racism is there and it's detrimental to everybody because it creates a false view of what is going on around us.

People then become much more willing to take on board anti-racist education. There are pockets of good practice everywhere. One school in Edinburgh produced in consultation with its students leaflets on "Racism and Sexism - Your Rights and Responsibilities" and all students at the school have copies of this. They also run equal opportunities events and days.

The first priority when confronting a racist incident at a school for example, is to give support to the black person

against whom the comment or attack has been directed. This often doesn't happen. People will calmly tell you that names such as 'Paki' and 'black bastard' don't mean anything because 'everybody uses them'. On the other hand, nowadays lots of schools and education authorities including Lothian and Strathclyde do produce lengthy guidelines on dealing with racist incidents. These usually say, 'If any person who witnesses the incident, the individual affected, or anyone to whom it is reported, perceives it to have been racist then it should be treated as such and investigated as such until it proves to be otherwise.'

One of the main issues around is whether there's proper training to accompany any of these statements. Training is the only way to make sure that anti-racist guidelines do get implemented and are not just another document to be looked at then put to one side as irrelevant. Organisations do not change just because of paper policies alone.

When a racist incident occurs there is often panic and also a feeling of helplessness, 'Oh my God, this is happening. What can I do? Who can I call to advise me on this?' The schools that don't get into this reaction usually have a procedure which has been planned and implemented with at least one designated individual you can speak to if there is a racist incident. If there's a black pupil being harassed who wants to report it but because of reprisal doesn't want action taken what do you do as a teacher? What action do you take with the perpetrator? Is suspending or excluding somebody from school an adequate solution? How does that begin to challenge their behaviour? It might be more appropriate to introduce a generally increased anti-racist programme of education but not actually single out the individual.

Most recent work in anti-racist education stresses the importance in an establishment such as a school, of having a well thought out policy. A policy that has been widely consulted on and explained to all staff, students, and parents so that everybody feels they understand what actions the school is taking and why. This information might then be contained in the school handbook or circulated in a newsletter. If that happens people are less likely to respond antagonistically if they get a letter telling them their eight year-old child has been involved in a racist incident which is the school's policy to log, and could they please come in to discuss this.

Having pieces of paper and a few training sessions may make a local authority look good and may make your school look good, but it depends how you measure it. You have to actually check out how it is affecting the kids in your school. Are the white kids beginning to learn more about racism and how detrimental it is? Are the black kids now suffering significantly less abuse and violence in the schools? If this isn't happening then what you're doing just isn't working. It's as simple as that.

got attacked by ten guys. That wasn't in the paper. I grew up in Anderston and I got everything thrown at me. I mean that - it wasn't names, it was real sticks and stones that they'd be throwing at you. You go to school and you are trying to do your work. All you get is 'you black bastard' flung at you. What are you meant to do? Just sit there? Well I didn't. I retaliated and then I'd get sent off to the headmaster and I'd get punished for it.

"Once I left Glasgow we moved to Bridge of Weir. We were the only blacks out of two or three villages all around. Houston, Kilmalcolm, Johnstone. Before I went to the local school I was terrified, really shitting myself. I was at the school a while and I was sitting in the canteen. About fifty guys came up round me and a guy took my chips. The way I saw it whether there were fifty guys or a hundred guys I had to retaliate. So I challenged the guy to a fight outside at 4 o'clock. I did the guy in. I had to get myself a reputation in that place to prove that I wasn't there to be messed about. Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing is open to question. That's just how it was."

Quite a few of them had already told me that they were catching up on modules and highers that they had missed doing at school. Were they hoping these would lead on to a job? How did they see racism affecting them as far as jobs go?

"You don't notice black unemployment so much up here because so many people work within family businesses but many black people down south just can't get a job. Thirty years ago you could find people standing outside Heathrow Airport waiting for immigrants so they could get hold of them and get them to work for them. Anybody who had a suitcase and was looking lost they'd offer them a job. But nowadays they say 'you've come over here to take my job, to take this, to get that'. Well what we say is 'you brought all of us over when you needed us and now that you don't need us you would like to send us all back just as easily'."

Rosina continues "If you are unemployed people make out that it's because you've not tried to get jobs, but actually you have tried umpteen times and been knocked back. You think, I'll never get a job because there is always going to be a white person out there ahead of me even if we have the same qualifications."

Amirud agrees with her "Black people get jobs created by their own communities. I can think of guys who have PhD's and they are working as waiters." But it's more than that, he continues "Like a lot of black people I work in a restaurant. We have to take a lot of flak. You'll be walking past a table and someone will shout, 'Sambo light my candle up'. Quite often too, if there's a lot left over someone will say 'It's OK you can finish it'. They assume you will eat their left-overs!"

But surely, I said, you can't believe that all white people think like that? Iqqi replies, "Even though you sympathise, there are ways which every white person unconsciously assumes a black person is lower class or a lesser kind of person. It's so in-built into the whole world. I'm not talking about individuals. You automatically look at us as third world people. You might think we had to come over to your country to get educated. You forget that black countries have their own ideas and culture."

"Even asking the question 'is there racism?' is racist, if you stop to think about it. But of course that's only obvious to people who're

willing to see it."

Rosina nods her head. She's sure that for every white person - however much they accept black people now - there will have been at least one time in their life when they'll have looked at an Asian and thought 'Paki'. "It's not Paki, it's Pakistani. It's not nigger or negro it's African. It's not up to us to do anything because we're not the people with the problem. Racism is a problem with white people."

So is there any message for people who have given black people support and campaigned against racism, albeit with limited success?

"I do feel sympathy for white people who try. I have good white friends as well. Nonetheless even if you accept me, in your circle of white friends or neighbours there are bound to be two or three who won't accept me. Whether you're aware of it or not, they have an influence over you."

I ask Amirud if he thinks anti-racist education could do something to help with the situation.

"Education is what it boils down to. I think it should start from nursery or primary school at the latest and continue straight through into higher education. You have to start with children but to be able to start with the children, you have to teach the teachers."

Rosina goes further, "It has to be real education. It has to be regular and it has to take into account different cultures. At first it might seem like force-feeding but why couldn't a class spend a whole month intensively exploring a different culture? Trying foods and thinking about a totally different environment, going deeper in?"

"And that doesn't just apply to Pakistanis, it could be Chinese 'Chinkies' or Italians, 'Greaseballs-Mafia' or Japanese, 'Japs'. As for Catholics and Protestants, you know what they say 'I'd rather be a Paki than a Proddy' or vice versa. They always bring someone else in who they can agree is lower than them. It's not about integration. It's acceptance that will bring down the barriers. Until acceptance is achieved other things are pointless."

"Black countries have been walked all over," Amirud concludes, "everything that we had has been taken off us. They came and they took the jute, the tea and the cotton from India and Pakistan and they still have it now. White people's philosophy has always been put a penny in and then take a pound out. In 1993 you'll hear it said that apartheid has been abolished in South Africa. But don't you believe it - apartheid is still very much a part of South Africa."

And Iqqi has the final word. "You know the film *Malcolm X* is out just now. If you read his autobiography you can see that the guy was an angry person. He was sick of the oppression of black people. But if you talk about Malcolm X, people say he was a black extremist. Rubbish! He wasn't an extremist, what he reacted to were white extremists, white supremacists, if you want to use the word. But people don't see it like that ...even people who are in many ways sympathetic."

"If we all went out and said what we are saying here in a high profile way, you must be aware the controversy we'd cause. We want a peaceful life. Anyway, a lot of people wouldn't even hear us out. What we're talking about is abuse and I for one am not proud of being abused because of what I am. I find it embarrassing talking about stuff like this. But I've chosen to go ahead with it because it's the truth." ■

# Guten Tag Ferguslie Park!

**Rosemary Milne** has been looking into Strathclyde's policy on teaching European languages in primary schools and **Stephen Naysmith** checked out what the children and teachers think about it.



We went to speak to Sandy Wilson first of all - Strathclyde's Adviser on European Education - to hear his views on the Scottish Office's latest announcement of special funding for the teaching of European languages in selected primary schools. The EIS, the teachers' union, has poured cold water on the plan, pointing out that the amount of money the government says it will make available for this new initiative - £1.35 million is the figure named so far - is nothing like enough to give primary teachers the additional training they will need to give pupils a proper start in a foreign language.

Wilson thinks that scepticism on the part of teachers is not surprising in view of the previous unsuccessful attempts in the sixties to get children learning to speak a foreign language while still in primary school. The experiment was a failure and was quietly abandoned in most schools after only a few years. So what about the latest scheme and the EIS fears that it's more about painting the government in Euro-sympatico colours than about a serious commitment to teaching foreign languages? It seems that Strathclyde, with its own well-developed pilot scheme, is well ahead of the game but the Region is giving the government's move a cautious welcome. As Sandy Wilson says, "Since 1989 when I first got involved in overseeing the development of foreign language learning in some of the Strathclyde primaries I've seen the evidence, and there's now a lot - reports, evaluations, anecdotal accounts - which shows that a coherent strategy for teaching foreign languages pays off handsomely in all sorts of ways."

The model that Strathclyde has chosen for teaching European languages in the primary schools has been to employ additional secondary teachers so as to free up language teachers from the secondary schools to go into their linked primaries to act as an expert resource for the primary teachers.

In these days of cuts and cutbacks this is breath-taking stuff - two teachers for one class, playing a complementary teaching role, and coincidentally giving the children a message that they already have connections with something more grown-up, beyond their primary school.

Wilson confirms that Strathclyde won't be keeping this model going indefinitely though - "We have to change how we do it for three main reasons. The first is that, even allowing for the numbers of unemployed teachers around, we don't have the three hundred extra modern language teachers we would need in the Region to continue the 'twinning' model. Also, if we believe that it makes sense for primary teachers to do this language teaching themselves, we have to start now training them to a standard where they are competent in the language of their choice."

The third reason, it becomes plain, is the same as the first but expressed in terms of cost: to continue with joint teaching in the primary classroom would cost Strathclyde Region £6 million every year - "for ever and ever", as Wilson puts it.

If therefore there is consensus between Strathclyde and the government on the plan to train primary teachers, what problems are left to resolve? Or, despite EIS reservations, is this

one project which will take off without any acrimony between local and central government?

"The big question in everyone's minds is how much will the government actually put up for the training? They say £1.35 million is only a start and they've promised substantial additional sums. We have some idea in Strathclyde of the cost of doing this properly - we've been ploughing huge resources into it for several years now. Unless the government provides the money, the scheme will fail, much as it did last time. If there weren't enough trained language teachers it would undermine the ethos of the primary school because you would have a situation where a class teacher with a foreign language qualification was constantly being called away from her own class to give language teaching to other classes. If that happened I'm in no doubt that the effects of the constant disruption would show in the children very quickly and it would become unworkable."

The memories of the sixties and seventies experiment are still vivid enough to make people shudder - "the 'two-days in-service and a tape-recorder' model of training was totally inadequate and the result was predictable: teachers who already had a good grounding in a language gave their children an excellent start but the rest, and that meant the majority, weren't competent enough. We go down that road again at our peril."

So, what does count as 'adequate training', given that people often take years to acquire a competence in a foreign language? What sort of standard can be expected of primary teachers who go on a crash course to gain basic skills - however cleverly that course is devised? Even supposing the courses this time are better and longer, isn't there still a grave danger that schools will end up with teachers who have no more really than a 'phrase-book' understanding of a foreign language?

"Our first training course was sixty hours. We knew at the outset that even the teachers with a relatively high level of previous experience in the language wouldn't reach the required standard of training. But we wanted to pilot a type of training with teachers from across a wide spectrum of ability. On the test we administered at the end of those sixty hours we found that none of them 'passed' to a sufficient level to allow us to let them loose on the class as language teachers. Now they're coming back for a further session of a hundred and twenty hours which we anticipate will take most of them to a standard to be able to teach in the primary class."

Sandy Wilson plans to keep some link-up between the primary school and the secondary language support teacher over the first year of this new arrangement but ultimately the primary schools will be on their own again. This seems a great pity, since much more than just the shared language teaching will be lost by dissolving the primary-secondary link.

"We have to make sure that the training is such that we don't get the build-up of mistrust from the secondary schools about the quality of the teaching in primary. That was a key element in the failure of the last attempt. The secondary schools felt that the grounding was so poor that

they had to take the kids through the same material again. Result: bored children and frustrated teachers."

The feedback to the Strathclyde policy-makers seems to be that the children are enjoying the language classes. It maybe because the style of teaching allows them to have fun. It's demanding but because of the way it's taught the hard work is concealed in activities and play. Children who are on the brink of moving up to secondary school, facing a good many challenges in their core subjects, seem to get comfort from reverting to a playful approach to learning, more like the style of teaching in primaries two and three than primary six or seven.

Anyone who's ever tried as an adult to learn a new language will be familiar with the de-skilling effect of not being able to say what you want to say: the hesitant stumbling along, not getting your tongue round the unfamiliar syllables, having to be helped all the time by a teacher. It does indeed take you back to infancy. No wonder adults go for language courses which promise you fluency in three weeks and no messing about. But it's the playful, 'have-a-go' approach which perhaps gives one good clue as to why the Strathclyde programme is having such success, opening new doors for children who haven't yet come to equate learning through play with 'making a fool of yourself'.

So, having heard the 'official' view of the pilot scheme, we decided to find out more from the children and teachers themselves - at Ferguslie Primary, one of Strathclyde's own pilot primaries, which has language classes in German.

It was a promising start in the primary seven class we talked to: "German's brilliant!" says Robert, "you can talk a different language instead of Scottish. You could go to Germany and you'd be able to know your way about." Denise has a similar view of it, confirming that some children do have a sense of the future benefits of learning a foreign language, "We've been learning about what to do if you go into a cafe, how to ask for things in a shop and what the names of clothes are in German."

And on the fun front? "The games are good," thinks Kathleen for one, "there's one we play like a sort of competition to help you remember colours and numbers."

Ferguslie Primary is like all the other schools in the present Strathclyde pilot scheme, the foreign language teaching is shared between five primary teachers who are supported by a colleague from Merksworth High School. In addition the classes have regular, if only short visits from Mark, a student from Essen. It's not just the children who enjoy his company, the teachers are appreciative of what the input from a young native speaker can bring: "He can answer all their questions about life in Germany. What colour his local football team plays in and how they're doing in the league. He'll describe the sort of food they'd be having for dinner and what children their age will be doing in Germany in a way that brings it to life for them."

Jennifer Purves, one of the five primary teachers involved in the pilot scheme at Ferguslie is right behind the project but she's also aware that not all primary teachers are as confident:

"I'm fortunate in that I can speak German.

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## **“It’s very exciting for the children to speak to a German person and find that the person does understand what they’re saying, speaks back to them and they understand what’s being said.”**

I’ve at least got a higher in it. That means I can continue the work of the specialist, support teacher in the classroom, whereas I’d say a lot of the teachers aren’t in that position.”

What about the training aspect so far, since at headquarters they seem to be putting such emphasis on getting that right? - “Very, very little - you only get a day. Teachers don’t get the confidence to speak German to classes but I can speak German and some Spanish, so I love to put forward languages to the class.”

This sounds less than ideal - there’s perhaps a hint of the sixties here after all. Does it mean that primary teachers are generally less keen than she is on language teaching?

“A lot of them feel self-conscious about it. If you’re facing a primary seven class and the kids question you on things that you’re not really sure about it can be very difficult. It’s hard to put new knowledge across if you’re uncertain about your own competence. And a lot of people just feel plain self-conscious about speaking a foreign language so they shy away from it.”

Is there a problem then, in extending the scheme much wider? “No, on the contrary I think it’d be great, but they would need to give more in-service training to primary teachers or have more time with the specialist teachers. If the training was there I think many more teachers would be keen to get into it. It does require a lot of resources - flash cards, pictures and so on. To have the time to make teaching aids of that kind, teachers need to be given some help.”

She has unstinting praise for the support language teacher from Merksworth High School. “She’s very helpful and great with the children. I can use her suggestions or initiate my own work - either way her back-up is excellent. We

do mainly oral work more than written but if we’ve got pictures on the wall I do tend to put German headings up too. It helps to get them used to seeing written German. The main emphasis of my work is on spoken communication though.”

There are all sorts of advantages to starting language teaching early, as Jennifer points out: “In primary school they’ve got one primary teacher and a visiting German teacher from their future secondary school who the children are secure with. They pick up a language very well at this age. I’d say it definitely gives them a head start. I think another undoubted bonus is that all the learning is topic-based at primary school which makes it easy to drop in little snippets of language from time to time in the midst of doing something else - little reminders about words they’ve already heard.”

If this isn’t quite ‘total immersion’ in the foreign language, it nevertheless goes well beyond the traditional, compartmentalised way of teaching it. Children who will as happily count the raised hands in a class in German as in English, who talk about rot, blau und gelb as easily as red, blue and yellow, are beginning to have a feel of being at ease with the language.

There is another unexpected advantage in Jennifer’s view. “I’ve noticed that you can’t predict who’s going to shine at this new skill. It’s far from being the ones you automatically think will do well and it’s wonderful to see how some of the children who are slower in the basic subjects can apparently pick up German quicker than any of the others.

“With there being not a lot of written work it gives people who struggle in putting things down on paper the chance to be just as good as

anybody else. I can think of several in the class who’re shining at German yet struggling a lot with other language and maths work.

“Once a year we have a ‘German evening’ for the parents of the kids in primaries six and seven who are doing the German and for the primary fives who are about to start. They sing German songs, and lay on a cafe where the parents can go and order in the German language. The parents enjoy it and the children love it because they can teach the parents to ask for things in German.

“We have had some German visitors in as well, and for the children to feel the success of speaking to a German person and finding they do actually understand what you are saying and can speak back - they are amazed at that. It shows them how well they are doing and their parents are very, very proud of them.”

There’s a real buzz of enthusiasm in the class, confirmation of the soundness of the policy Strathclyde is pursuing. But there are some warning notes as well, being struck by the teachers who have to translate the vision into practice. Training is an issue, as is having time to prepare properly. Clearly too there are questions about how well the scheme will maintain itself once the direct link with the secondary language department is lost or cut back:

Nevertheless, seeing the pleasure of the children at what they’re learning and what it tells them about other, wider horizons beyond the scheme they’re living on, beyond Strathclyde, beyond Scotland, it makes you feel that, whatever the myriad problems of Fortress Europe, here are some children for whom it’s certainly working well. ■



**new voices,  
new writing**

# *Dorothy Clark*

has dedicated these poems to **Doreen**, founder member of the Maryhill Writers' Group, who died on 27th February 1993

## **Clarification**

Yes, I'm a feminist, but that does not mean that all women are my sisters. No chance!

I mean, how could I voluntarily claim to be the sister of Margaret Thatcher, Lady Olga Maitland, Golda Meir, Violetta Chamorro, Nancy Reagan - for fuck's sake, not to mention Esther Rantzen and Barbara Cartland.

And I will not waste time and money attending seminars starring some born-again, new-age, space cadet from California who tells us less gifted women how to divorce spouse, parents, children and anyone else who happens to be about at the time - found a commune where the veggies grow as big as footballs - cure terminal illnesses with chanting and mantras and Creative Visualisation - dine at the White House - make a million - books, tapes and videos on sale at the door in case you're too thick to digest the Magic Message at one sitting. Hello suckers!

Nor do I want my consciousness raised if that entails group sessions where the leaders go on and on about the need to be ASSERTIVE and DEMAND YOUR OWN SPACE and RECLAIM YOUR RIGHTS AS A BEAUTIFUL HUMAN BEING.

Just try being assertive and asking the beautiful human beings in charge for your money back and see how successful the reclamation theory is in practise.

As for going to one of these all-female camping weekends to find myself at one with nature. Niente! Nada!

I'd really hate to be packed into a badly improvised sweat-lodge under the guidance of Skywoman - she's the one in the ethnic semmit who nips your head calling up the spirit of Mother Earth

- that's before they dish out the macro-biotic skilly - that's before the silent group meditation on Sister Moon.

I'd prefer having a couple of pints with Essex man who doesn't give a bugger about nurturing his Inner Child.

And I've some doubts about all these self-styled Healers who have appeared. Notice how many of them suffer from migraine and PMT?

Mind you, in them it's due to sensitivity to incoming stress from others and environmental pollution, if you have it it's self-inflicted, therefore entirely your own fault.

Natural Childbirth is great - if you can hack it. But how come the proselytisers do not also demand NATURAL DENTISTRY. Root canal work without the intrusion of synthetic drugs which prevent joyous participation in this Important Life Event.

That'll be bloody right.

I do wish the white witches and the soi-disant feminists who hark back to a mythical golden age when the Goddess was supreme and women were the keepers of the ancient wisdoms would wise up and take a look at what is happening now - to all humankind.

And men had better beware or they will find themselves enrolled by Iron John in drumming sessions where it is obligatory to greet and bond with other guys and pay through the nose for the privilege.

Gender is immaterial in manipulators, chancers and exploiters, the system is sexless.

## Citizen's Charter

### The Good Baby

swallows food every four hours  
at other times it sleeps  
smiles  
passes well-formed stools  
looks healthy and bonny  
is a credit to its parents  
the good baby does not cry...  
NEVER TELL A SINGER WHAT TO SING.

### The Good School Child

pays attention in class  
does its homework timeously  
wins prizes  
loves its parents  
accepts authority  
does not question  
does not smoke or drink or buzz or blaw  
does not get pregnant or get other people pregnant  
does not spray paint walls with the words...  
NEVER TELL A PAINTER WHAT TO PAINT

### The Good Woman

guards her virginity  
works hard  
saves money  
diets  
marries  
cooks cleans washes irons knits sews goes messages  
services her husband and children  
diets  
does not let herself go  
does not selfishly put herself first  
believes in and obeys  
men in general and her husband in particular  
the government  
the church  
horoscopes and aerobics  
the good woman would not dream of saying...  
NEVER TELL A WRITER WHAT TO WRITE.

### The Good Man

gets his sexual experience with bad woman  
marries a virgin who cannot compare him to other men  
therefore if she is inorgasmic it is nothing to do with him  
supports his wife and children and ford fiesta  
pays the mortgage  
pays the poll tax  
pays the insurance  
pays his taxes  
wishes he'd never left his mammy but puts a brave face on it  
believes in and obeys  
his boss  
the government  
market forces  
rangers - maybe... celtic - maybe... partick thistle - no chance  
the good man would report to the proper authorities anyone who  
said aloud...  
NEVER TELL A SINGER WHAT TO SING  
NEVER TELL A PAINTER WHAT TO PAINT  
NEVER TELL A WRITER WHAT TO WRITE.



## False Modesty

What's your reaction to women who say...

"I'm terrible so I am, I just cannot relax in the evening unless the house is absolutely spotless... everyone says that I don't need to spring-clean but I do, twice a year at least... that's just me... I'm terrible so I am."

Simper. Simper. Wee smug smile.

"... and I'm terrible for washing, too, I must have everybody clean on from the skin out every morning in life... and if I didn't change the beds once a week at the very least... I'd be ill... that's me all over..."

The lower lip is bitten in self-deprecation.

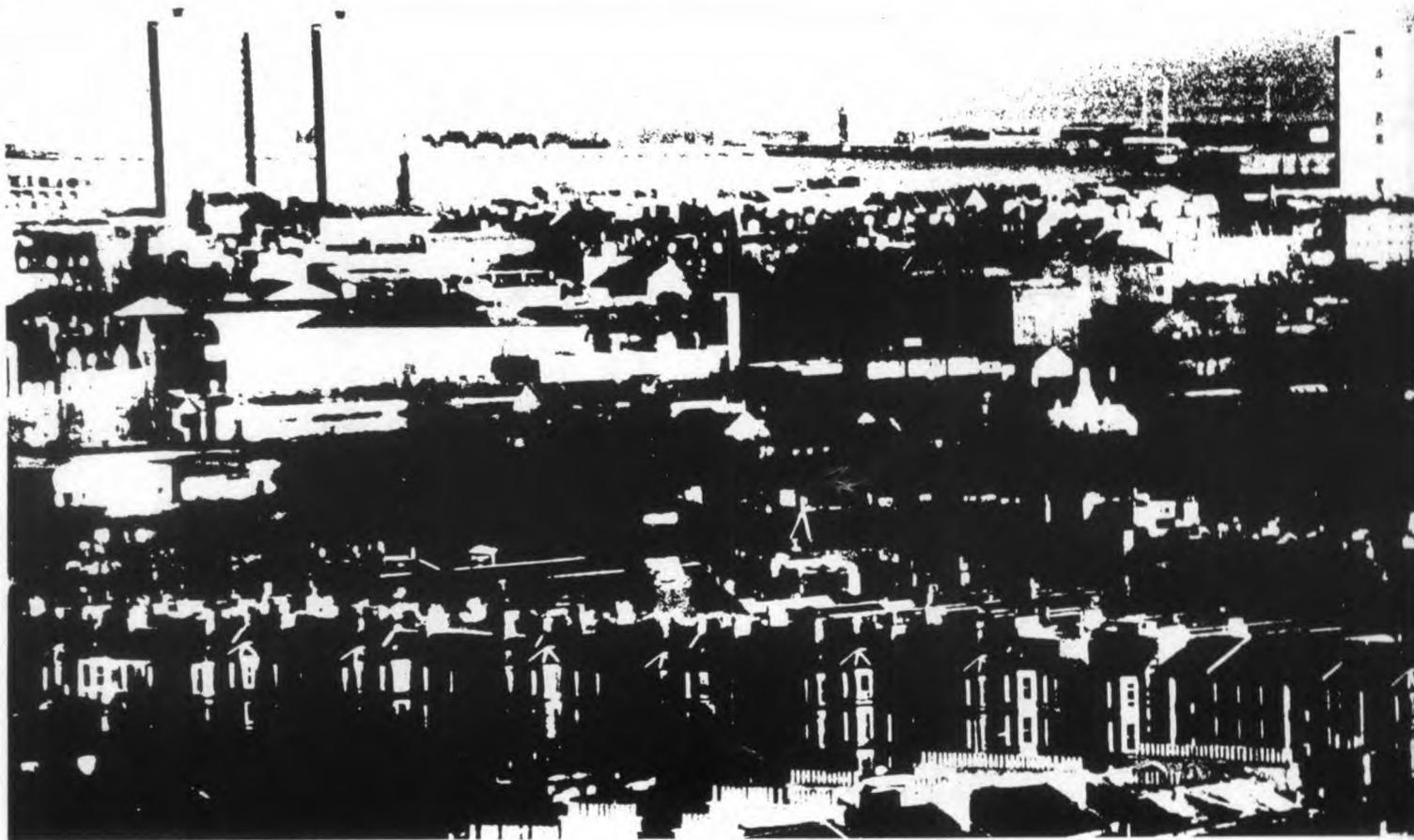
"... and when it comes to proper food... well, just you ask my lot what I'm like about home-made soups and stews and cakes... they wouldn't eat anything else... it's my own fault... I'm terrible so I am..."

A forefinger is held to the bitten lip to enhance the Princess Di look.

I feel like saying...

"I know, I know, I'm just the same."

If my weans hadn't had a really good grip of the Theory of Relativity before they went into Primary One I think I would have topped myself... and if I haven't perfected nuclear fusion before I make the dinner - I'm pure gutted... and I'll have to run, that Stephen Hawkings has asked me to run him through the Big Bang - again! You know what he's like, not the brightest and I'll just have to make time to help Anthony Burgess with his 'A' Level Serbo-Croat, och, he can't help it, he's getting on a bit... never a minute... that's just me... I'm terrible so I am."



## Back on the Streets

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**THE LIGHTS BELOW**  
Carl MacDougall  
Secker & Warburg  
£7.99

---

**Barry Graham**

---

The Great Scottish Novel has now been written - almost.

Carl MacDougall, arguably Scotland's best living prose-writer, has for a long while also been the most neglected. While Kelman and Co have picked up plaudits for their repetitive, dole queue existentialism, MacDougall has been consistently brilliant and consistently ignored.

The start of his career is the stuff of legend: having penned the classic folk song Cod Liver Oil in the Orange Juice (which when recorded by Hamish Imlach, sold more copies than any Beatles single but still didn't earn its author a penny in royalties), he still didn't regard himself as a writer...

Until one day, working as a copy typist for a Glasgow newspaper he happened to look out of the window. Girls were in their summer dresses, walking to the parks to read their books in the sun. As MacDougall tells it, "I just looked around me and thought 'is that it, Carl?' And I got up and walked out."

He decided to try his hand at writing, wrote some short stories and had them accepted by a publisher almost immediately. With characteristic modesty, MacDougall says, "All

of a sudden I was a professional writer. So I decided I'd better learn how to do it - which was why it was about ten years before my next book came out."

The next book was another collection of stories, **Elvis is Dead**. Although patchy, the book testified that the years he'd spent honing and refining his tools hadn't been wasted; the stories affectionately presented a rag-bag of grotesque characters to rival those of Beckett.

Never a prolific writer, it took him a while longer to complete his first novel, **Stone Over Water**. When it finally appeared in 1989, it was so widely acclaimed that no-one would have guessed that MacDougall would soon disappear from the news and not be heard of again - aside from the odd TV appearance on **Scottish Books** - for four years.

It's to be hoped that he'll finally receive the stature he deserves. **The Lights Below** is a flawed masterpiece.

It has something in common with the first novel in dealing with the business of being Scottish, while remaining as far from being a 'Scottish novel' as it's possible to be. The style of the prose is somehow American in tone, with the grim humour of Stephen King or Madison Smartt Bell.

Like its predecessor, this book reflects its author's obsession with orphanage - the protagonist's father was murdered, then his mother married the murderer.

But **Stone Over Water** was a bleak book, although it tried hard not to be. In it, MacDougall suggested that Scots adapt to the hardship of living in an exploited country in the same way as we adapt to the brutal weather - "So many are cauld, but few are frozen." But he couldn't

justify the book's early optimism, and it concludes with the narrator, damaged by his childhood alienation, alone and wondering where to go from here.

The **Lights Below** has none of this negativity. Like the victim in **Stone Over Water**, the protagonist, Andy, is damaged. Fixated by the unanswered questions of his childhood, he lives in the past and is unable to understand the present. The book does not turn a blind eye to the cruelty of life in Scotland. There are some scenes that are funny at the same time as being truly horrific - like Andy's grandmother tiptoeing round her blind husband, making buzzing sounds like an insect as she jabs him with a pin.

Andy has just got out of prison, after serving two years. Back home in Glasgow, he tries to put his life back together. His wife doesn't want to know him. Neither does his sister, though her husband is still his friend.

We follow Andy as he finds a room - a miserable and overpriced bedsit in the West End - and visits the DSS, tries clumsily to meet women and visits an old friend in Possil.

The plot sounds slight, and it is. But the book is far from slight. MacDougall uses the plot as a device to take a look at the state we're in at this point in our sad history. There is a lengthy description of the deterioration of Possil, and by implication all Glasgow communities:

"People watched television advertising things they could not afford, things they did not know they wanted. From the streets, the solution appeared, standing at the corner like a memory. You go up and ask, leave your name and address. You make an agreement, borrow a fiver and pay back six a week from today. And so it goes with



## Flat Irn-Bru

### IRN-BRU POP VIDEO EXHIBITION The Arches, Glasgow

Stephen Naysmith

the threat of more threats hanging around. They come to tell you what will happen and already you know what happened to others, either you do it or they will. A lot of people jumped out the window.

"The community began to fray at the edges, noticeable now it was going. Shops closed, changed hands and function. The butcher sold cheaper cuts of meat, hamburgers and frozen chickens. Betting shops opened and the co-op closed. Off-licences sold cheap drink, strong wines and lager. Women come round the doors, asking if anyone would like to join their wee menage...

"And always there were those trying to survive, trying not to deal with it, listening to politicians who spoke of issues so remote they seemed of little or no concern."

Andy is one of those trying to survive, trying to deal with it. And he does. MacDougall finds hope not in the bleak scenario, but in the people living out their lives against it.

Unlike the currently fashionable clique of Glaswegian 'dirty realists', this is a writer of real warmth and tough-minded sensitivity, who cares for the people he writes about and therefore writes *for* them. Sadly it is this warmth that makes the book a *flawed* masterpiece. When the author gets angry on behalf of his characters, he tends to get on a soap-box and forgets that he's supposed to be writing a narrative. Much of the dialogue reads like a manifesto, and is hard to imagine coming out of the mouth of anyone but a politician.

As flaws go, this one is serious. But it doesn't stop this being a profoundly beautiful book and the best Scottish publication since Alan Spence's *Its Colours They are Fine*.

How do you exhibit a video? - that's the problem faced by **The Irn-Bru Video Exhibition**, imported to Glasgow until June 6th, after showing in London's Museum of the Moving Image. It's a problem they should be used to facing: the very notion of a Museum of the Moving Image contradicts the idea most of us have of museums - halls of stuffed animals or motionless objets d'art.

But this exhibition seems unable to make up its mind whether it is a travelling Madame Tussaud's or a serious analysis of the pop video as culture.

In theory you can read the history of video at the start of the exhibition and then relive it on the screens next door, but even when I was in, when the Arches were nearly empty, there was a half-hour wait for your selection to come round.

The rooms are also padded out with an apparently random selection of memorabilia - the 'Madame Tussaud' section - as if the organisers know that the other exhibits aren't quite enough: The giant boots worn by Elton John in 'Tommy', the 'Diva' dress worn by Annie Lennox in her recent video and a string puppet of singer Steve Strange from a Visage video, are examples.

The exhibition really focuses on MTV as representing the pinnacle of current achievement in the pop video world - that's another of its

weaknesses. The music channel may have reached its 10th anniversary in America but it is still watched by relatively few people in Britain.

Another part of the exhibition contains sci-fi style booths in which you can watch videos on set themes. Much of their source material is also from MTV, which doesn't help the aim of seriously analysing the medium of pop video.

The 'directors' booth sums up the problem. The interviews, all provided from MTV's archives, are about as deep as a leaky paddling pool. Talking about making the Sledgehammer video, the director raves about how even after days of filming, Peter Gabriel was "just fantastic" to work with. The MTV interviewer goes on to ask: "How many vegetables did you use in the video?"

Although the MTV booth is embarrassingly bad in this respect, paradoxically it's also the one exhibit which comes closest to capturing the essence of pop video. It consists of two clips, both self-referential and self-indulgent.

One is a video love-letter from Madonna to MTV, purportedly charting the highs and lows of her ten-year relationship with the station. It has no music in it but is visually quite striking. The other is a five-minute video compilation put together to celebrate MTV's 10th anniversary. This is a harlequin sprint through videos past and present, a montage of snatches of music seamlessly linked to equally brief excerpts from videos. An onslaught on the senses, it sweeps from pop to rock to rap subtitled with the occasional message: "Endless images", "Countless memories".

It comes to no conclusions, will be out of date by next year and already, just a few days after I saw the exhibition I have forgotten most of what was in it. Pure pop video!

#### Among the Contributors in this issue:

**Oliver Brookes** is a member of the Edinburgh Stockbridge and Newtown Solidarity Network. **Dorothy Clarke** is a state pensioner living in Glasgow. **Joan Cradden** is a trainee solicitor and a member of Scottish Child's editorial group. **Barry Graham** is a novelist and performance poet who has given readings and performances in Britain and America. He lives with his wife in Edinburgh. **John Higgins** was a self-employed musician for four years, and finds it a full-time job dealing with the problems arising from that. **Kaitie Lorimer** is arts worker for Pilton Arts in Edinburgh. **Alan Miller** is Regional Reporter for Dumfries and Galloway Children's Panel. **Lucy Turnbull** is a student and a single parent. **Shiel Yule** is a regular contributor and illustrator for Scottish Child



Kate George

## The Place of the Child In Mediation

Dear Editor,

I write to comment on Stephen Naysmith's article "Preparing to Part", (*Scottish Child* February/March 1993). In particular, I should like to amplify Mr Naysmith's comments on the groups for children of divorced/separated parents which we run here in Lothian.

The groups comprise six sessions of one hour each. They are preceded and followed by individual meetings with the child(ren) and their parents. The meetings prior to the group are primarily to determine what the individual children want from it and to reassure the group workers that the motivation for attending comes from the children themselves and not their parents. The individual meetings afterwards are to provide feedback to the parents from the children of their experience.

Many parents are themselves using the Mediation Service and have commented favourably on how their child(ren) have been 'freed up' to express their feelings by attending.

The groups go some way to enabling children to be heard by their parents, who are ultimately responsible for the decisions as to their future parenting.

Yours sincerely

**Ted Cleland,**  
Co-ordinator,  
Lothian Family Mediation Service.

Dear Editor,

Since any publicity is good publicity, it may seem churlish to complain about Stephen Naysmith's article in the February/March issue of *Scottish Child*. There is much to be applauded in it. The article presents however, to borrow a phrase, a game of two halves. In the first half a relatively accurate

picture of the work of family mediation and conciliation is provided. It is his treatment of the role of children in mediation which, for a number of reasons, creates the greatest disquiet. Not only does Stephen Naysmith's article reduce a very complex issue to one simple problem, capable of one simple solution - an attractive proposition in itself but illusory nevertheless, he criticises current mediation services for allegedly ignoring or not recognising the child's need to be heard, an objective which of course, in itself, will be universally accepted.

He promotes direct involvement of children in the mediation process and dismisses as 'feeble' the cautionary arguments put to him by experienced mediators. He fails to recognise that children's needs and rights are numerous, varied and sometimes contain elements of contradiction. The overall impression of mediation and its apparent failure to meet in Naysmith's view the needs of children in divorce demands a response - not as a knee-jerk defensive reaction but rather produced by a desire to clarify what family mediation services can really offer to children when their parents separate or divorce, bearing in mind that the majority of children whose parents use mediation are under eleven years old.

The starting point for any consideration of the needs of children when their parents' partnership has broken down has to be that "it is exclusively the parents' business to make decisions about the break-up". Whatever Naysmith's opinion about this state of affairs, there is no doubt that, however the decisions are arrived at, whoever is consulted in the process, it is the parents who will be responsible for making the decisions work in practice; it is

they who will ultimately be responsible in law if the practice breaks down. This is not to suggest that the child in this situation does not have the right to be heard. Responsible, caring parents will intend to dissolve their partnership in a way which takes some account of their children's wishes and feelings.

Mediation has as its primary aim the facilitation of agreement between separating and divorcing parents on issues concerning their children. This is achieved by techniques which diffuse the emotional pressures in favour of concentrating on *practical solutions* to the problems surrounding the children. To propose direct involvement of children at every stage in this process has far-reaching consequences which are not confronted in the original article.

It is true that mediators may be diffident about their capacity to listen to children, realising that there are special techniques involved in communicating with children in situations of heightened emotional stress. This is not a reflection of any implicit acceptance that children are less reliable than adults in this situation or potentially more manipulative. It only reflects the realisation that different levels of cognitive, psychological and emotional development require different methods of communication. Indeed to deny or minimise these differences is an absurd denial of the state of childhood.

Within the mediation process, with its emphasis on the management of conflict and the provision of practical solutions, the main focus should not be a detailed, thorough exploration of feelings. If this becomes the focus in a mediation session, it is the role of the mediator to divert attention

away from the emotional dilemmas to the practical ones - obviously at the same time directing the parties, if appropriate, to other sources of assistance. This is acceptable in the context of mature adults with the cognitive and psychological development necessary to cope with the emotional consequences of such a delay. How could it be an acceptable way to deal with children, to encourage them to explore and present their feelings on the question of their parents' separation, and then to curtail that process while other more appropriate agencies are sought to provide the necessary support?

Undoubtedly many children do need a 'safe arena' within which to explore these feelings. But this is essentially a therapeutic activity. Naysmith is mistaken in suggesting that the mediation process can provide such an arena. However, it is not inappropriate to expect family mediation services to help meet this aim. A number of them do through the complementary provision of children's counsellors and children's groups, where resources for such initiatives have been found.

Children deserve to have their views heard, as they deserve our care and attention. What they do not deserve is to be put into a position where they feel that they have made a choice between one parent and another. The aim of the mediation process is surely intrinsically the empowerment of adults to regain some control in lives which have been disrupted by the grief broken relationships usually bring. If it does that it restores to children the most basic right of all - the right to be children.

**Maureen Lynch,**  
Education Liaison Officer,  
Family Mediation Scotland.

## Shetland - Clean-up or Cover-up?

Dear Editor,  
As a concerned parent I want to draw other readers' attention to what's happening to my community on Shetland after the Braer oil spill. At the moment we are in the process of fighting the authorities: they are insisting that the oil has gone away and it is blatantly obvious that it hasn't. Take our beach for instance. Since the tanker went down we have all noticed that the sand is a much darker colour. Closer inspection reveals it to be sticky

and gooey with dark splash marks on the dunes. Never in the 70 years of our neighbour has this been observed. Initially a sign was put up by Environmental Health saying that the beach was heavily contaminated and advising against its use. One week later it was removed and a 'spokesman' said that the sign was intended for the peerie voe - the wee inlet next to the beach. Furthermore they said that sampling had shown no contamination. They suspect the

discolouration is due to hornblende which they say is an annual phenomenon caused by a mineral coming out of the rocks yet they are doing no further sampling to verify this. Crofter friends phoned the agricultural college to enquire if it was safe to use the sand to topdress the grazing parks (fields). They were told no. They asked for it in writing two days later and were informed that a directive from the Scottish Office said that the sand was safe to use! I'm fright-

ened but who will believe us? We're not news anymore, everyone thinks we're back to normal. One encouraging thing is that European TV are still interested and do not believe all the oil has gone away. Hopefully they will ask enough embarrassing questions to draw attention to the government cover-up.

Jane Murdoch,  
Scousburgh,  
Shetland

## Research on Leaving Care

Dear Editor,  
I have been very impressed with your magazine with its discussions of current issues about children. It is too infrequent in our society that children and young people are appreciated and respected rather than ignored or exploited.

I am a student trying to get together a sample of young women who have left local authority residential child care to interview

towards the completion of my dissertation for an MSc in Social Work. I believe that young women face many difficulties on leaving care which could be avoided or lessened if they got enough preparation and support from residential and field social workers.

If any of your readers have recently left residential care and share my views and are willing to

participate in my study, I would be very grateful to hear from them. The interviews would not take longer than an hour and any information would be kept confidential.

Yours sincerely,

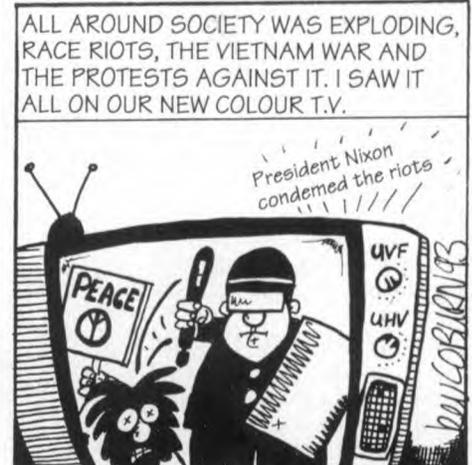
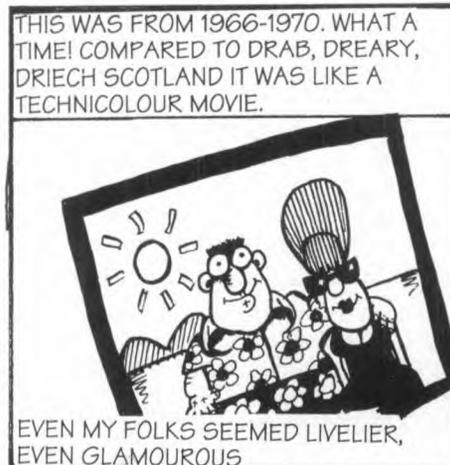
Jane Maxwell  
Social Work Department,  
Stirling University

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We sometimes have to cut letters for length.

## We Spend All Our Adult Lives Trying To Recreate Our Childhood

Coburn & Naughton



The guitar case must be fifteen years old by now. The finish is brown check material that's been rubbed bare in patches against the ground, showing the plywood underneath, and the inside lining is taped on where it's come loose. The hinges are gone, so the lid lifts right off. I tie it up with a long leather belt, a piece of horse harness from a friend's stall in the market where I used to play. The handle's gone too, replaced by a canvas strap tied on, which hurts your hand because the case is so heavy. The top and bottom of the case are parting from the sides, so the edges are carefully reinforced with gaffa tape. I like to think of the whole thing as unpretentious and, you know, functional.

The folding stool is modern design, tubular steel, canvas seat and shoulder strap. The stool is essential since I play for anything from four to eight hours on a good day. It goes over my left shoulder, along with a canvas backpack which holds a flask of coffee, sandwiches, biscuits (years of learning went into this careful organisation!), a paperback book, and a notebook, to record, at one end, how much I made on each date, and, at the other end, a diary of each day's work - people I met, work done, ideas, and profound thoughts about the meaning of life and so on.

I also pack a large yellow cotton change bag and several small polythene bags for coins, the kind that hold £1.00 worth of bronze or £5.00 of silver. It's not that good an idea to leave all your money lying in the case over a long day, so I count and bag the coins as I work, and stow them away. At the end of the day I usually go up the road to the pizza shop or to the pub and they take the silver and change it for notes - the perfect end to a perfect day.

In a leather pouch my wife gave me as a birthday present, I carry plastic thumbpicks, a set of metal fingerpicks, plectrums, a capo, a chrome steel tube which is slipped over one of the left hand fingers, for playing slide guitar, and nail clippers. I play finger-style steel-string acoustic guitar - rags, blues, my own tunes, Irish harp tunes,



## The Busker

John Higgins talks about his life as a street musician

and standards learnt from written arrangements, like Gershwin or Stevie Wonder. All these various kinds of music are popular and road-tested. I try to make it dance, and sometimes it does; sometimes it goes off by itself, the best times. But let us never forget the long, cold, hard days and nights when nothing was happening except the rain, the cold the dirt and the noise: burglar alarms and car alarms, lorries making deliveries, pneumatic drills breaking concrete, helicopters, pile-drivers, brass bands and bagpipers - you name it, they did it, just up the road from where I was playing.

It's fourteen years since I first played in the street. I've always been fascinated by public space and the way we use it. The city streets can be bleak alienating places, and I thought that music in the street could have a civilising,

convivial influence - not dominating or colonising the space, but opening it up and making it safer, no longer empty, a true public space that people could live in for a while, instead of always just passing through. I felt music could give people something to gather round, and I set out to try to play music in the street for that reason. A crusade it wasn't - but I had a belief in it and a rationale that was based on more than making money.

Some people see busking as begging (and they don't hesitate to tell you so). I saw myself as a street musician, trying to build up a self-employed income from playing music. It took me about two years to get my earnings up to National Insurance level; I was so proud to be buying stamps for my own card, I didn't want to part with the card when the time came to return it at the end of the year (I didn't quite

get up to taxable level but I was almost there) and just don't start me talking about the difficulties you can get into when you try to be above-board about the money you earn, which I did.

I have a photograph of myself in early days, playing in torn denims and an old jersey, but now that looks like carelessness to me. You're presenting yourself to a public. Later I dressed more carefully, in jacket and cords, polished my shoes, combed my hair, and tried to turn myself out in such a way as to reflect what I saw as being a worthwhile and honest way of earning a living.

Quite a lot of people could tell what I was in it for, and I'm grateful for that. Glasgow's full of philosophers, as you know, and I think I met them all. One such, a lady of mature years, asked me: "Are you in it for the money or the music?" When I told her, she thought it over and said: "Aye, but you need the money to keep the music going." Perfectly put, and I'll stand by that.

In all of this, there's an element of busking that I haven't mentioned, because it's an element that resists being written down or talked about. If I can't describe what I mean, I can at least tell you where it's located. It happens between the person who's playing and the people who are passing by. It wouldn't be the whole truth if I didn't say that, in the time I spent playing in the streets, I met many people who said the kindest, warmest, friendliest things to me and who let me know in hundreds of small, subtle ways (and some not so subtle!) that they liked the music I was trying to play. Something you've done has reached them and they give it right back to you. It's one of the best feelings I know.

When I think in this way about the few years I was busking, there's one more thing I can say about it. One recoils from the cliché as it looms up ahead, but the best way to say it is the way it's always been said: It was a pleasure and a privilege.

And there's a few good years left in the guitar case yet, by the way!

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**On the dole in Scotland's boom town? We hear from the long-term unemployed in Aberdeen plus Who's all going on a Summer Holiday?**

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WORKING FOR ZERO TOLERANCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**